

Masculinity and the Highly Wrought Style in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Sarah Elizabeth Boyd

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Approved by

Eliza Richards

Michelle Robinson

Philip Gura

Tim Marr

Jane Thrailkill

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ABSTRACT

Sarah Boyd: Masculinity and the Highly Wrought Style in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
(Under the direction of Eliza Richards)

This dissertation calls attention to how male authors' use of the highly wrought style, a literary aesthetic traditionally associated with women's fiction, to explore heterodox masculine desire and imagination in 19th century America. It explores the gendered concerns of men's highly fiction in nineteenth-century American literature, examining the dense constellation of themes and tropes governing men's florid fiction, which cleaves to insistent revelations of the fantastic in the ordinary (as well as the ordinary in the fantastic) and coalesce around corollary, sometimes conflicting interests in feminine forms and heterodox masculine desires. The texts in this study circulate around two key mythologies from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—Pygmalion and Hermaphroditus—about transformation and transgression and that concern gender, desire, and the masculine imagination. The four chapters in this study examine the work of four very different authors—Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Fitz-James O'Brien, and Henry James—to map out a broader picture of the masculine politics of the florid style that bisect genres and movements in nineteenth-century American literature. The authors and their stories, importantly, represent just four small points in a larger constellation of male writers and texts who use the style to address their own hopes and anxieties about transforming understandings of masculine gender and sexuality as an aesthetic expression of heterodox desires over the course of the nineteenth-century.

DEDICATION

To my father, whose memory still drives that “urge and urge and urge,” my mother, whose presence always reminds me the importance of “a squeeze of the hand,” and to all my public school teachers, especially the great ones. And for my grandfather, who only ever read one book—*Cheaper by the Dozen*—but liked it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Queer Masculine Poetics of Men's Highly Wrought Fiction

Sometimes in the morning, and oftener in the afternoon, when the sun has withdrawn from that part of the mansion, a young woman appears on the piazza with some mysterious Penelope web of embroidery in her hand, or a book. There is a hammock over there, --of pineapple fibre, it looks from here. A hammock is very becoming when one is eighteen, and has gold hair, and dark eyes, and a blue illusion dress looped up after the fashion of a Dresden china shepherdess, and is chaussée like a belle in the time of Louis Quatorze. All this splendor goes into that hammock, and sways there like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon. The window of my bedroom looks down on that piazza,--and so do I.¹

~ Thomas Bailey Aldrich "Marjorie Daw" (1873)

She swept out from between the rainbow-curtains of the cloud-trees into the broad sea of light that lay beyond. Her motions were those of some graceful naiad, cleaving, by a mere effort of her will, the clear, unruffled waters that fill the chambers of the sea. She floated forth with the serene grace of a frail bubble ascending through the still atmosphere of a June day. The perfect roundness of her limbs formed suave and enchanting curves. It was like listening to the most spiritual symphony of Beethoven the divine, to watch the harmonious flow of lines. This, indeed, was a pleasure cheaply purchased at any price. What cared I, if I had waded to the portal of this wonder through another's blood? I would have given my own to enjoy one such moment of intoxication and delight.²

~Fitz-James O'Brien, "The Diamond Lens" (1858)

I

This dissertation explores the production and reception of men's "highly wrought" fiction and its contested place in the American literary tradition over the second half of the nineteenth century, charting the gender and sexual politics surrounding the aesthetic pleasures of masculine

¹ Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. "Marjorie Daw." *The Atlantic Monthly*. (April 1873): 407-418.

² O'Brien, Fitz-James. "The Diamond Lens." *The Atlantic Monthly*. (January 1858): 354-367.

creativity and desire in the florid literary style often associated with nineteenth-century women's fiction.³ The two examples above typify the thematic and rhetorical function of the style in nineteenth-century men's fiction, revealing the tensions between gender and fantasy in its representation of feminine beauty and masculine desire. Written from the perspective of young bourgeois bachelors living out the heady days of their bachelorhood in and around New York City, the two passages reconstruct formerly mundane landscapes—like O'Brien's drop of water—into exotic and erotic landscapes inhabited by women of exceptional beauty and charm, women who represent impossible feminine ideals, hyperbolized still further by their unreal existence. Fitz-James O'Brien's microscopic nymph—if believed—is not only invisible to the naked eye, she can only be rendered visible by the aid of a diamond-lensed microscope powerful enough to glimpse into an atom. If not believed, the tiny sylph shares the fate of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's hammock-swinging heroine, who is eventually exposed as a fiction, a figment of the dreamy bachelor-narrator's highly wrought imagination. Taken together, the vignettes elaborate a dense constellation of themes governing men's highly wrought fiction, which cleaves to insistent revelations of the fantastic in the ordinary (as well as the ordinary in the fantastic) and coalesce around corollary, sometimes conflicting interests in feminized forms and heterodox

³ A number of critics and scholars have linked the "feminine" style to women's fiction. Henry James, perhaps, established the association most famously in his 1865 critique of Harriet Prescott [Spofford]'s "Azarian School." And in the twentieth century, Fred Lewis Pattee located the style in the "gorgeous period of American literature," which occurred between 1849 and 1860: "It was characterized chiefly by an orgy of feminine sentimentalism and emotionalism, a half-savage rioting of color and superlatives and fantastic fantasies, an outburst of wild desires to reform all abuses and to bring the world swiftly to a golden age of love and beauty and feminine dreams" (161). Following Pattee, Nina Baym—who suggests the "genre" emerged out of "female ignorance (knowing little of life, women produced these improbabilities) and susceptibilities (out of the same ignorance, women, enjoyed them)"—cast the style as a "feverish, florid, improbably, melodramatic, exciting genre" (199). Paula Bennett and Dori Beam likewise consider it a feminine style, but they assess its value differently than Pattee, Baym, or James; both suggest the style expresses radical feminine alterity and heterodox gender and sexual desire. Baym, Nina. *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*. Cornell University Press, 1984. Beam, Dori. *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2010. Bennett, Paula. "'Pomegranate Flowers': The Phantasmic Productions of Late-Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Women Poets" by Paula Bennett from *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical Literary and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*. Ed. Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario. New York: Routledge, 1995: 189-213. Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey*. New York: Biblio & Tannen Press, 1923.

masculine desires.

Though formed of feminized rhetoric and often focused, ostensibly, on female subjects, the ornate plots of these stories center on the figure of the male artist and his romantic longing for the (feminine) ideal, structured around two key mythologies from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Pygmalion and Hermaphroditus.⁴ These myths are about transition, transformation, and ultimately, *recreation*; they are generative myths about masculine creativity and desire to possess or become the feminine other. They are thus centered on masculine fear of and desire for a feminized other and/or masculine alterity. The Pygmalion myth tells the story of a gifted sculptor who falls hopelessly in love with one of his creations, an ivory statue of a beautiful woman—given the name Galatea in later iterations of the myth—and brought to life by Aphrodite. The myth reads as a typical heterosexual wish fulfillment on its surface, but it is also “capable of various interpretations,” according to W.R. Johnson, who notes the “sour misogyny ironically prettified” below “its soft erotic shimmer.”⁵ But the myth contains not just “sour misogyny,” but also ripe philandry and heterodox masculine desires, particularly as it manifests itself in men's florid fiction. The myth of Hermaphroditus relates the story a handsome youth—the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, the gods of male and female sexuality—who attracts the attention of the nymph Salmacis; her wish to be united with the beautiful boy is granted by the gods who merge their two forms into one body with both male and female features. The myth of Hermaphroditus—along with Narcissus, Medea, Scylla, Byblis, Iphis, and Myrrha—forms part of a collection of love plots in *Metamorphoses* that feature lovers falling victim to internal and

⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2010.

⁵ Johnson, W.R. Introduction. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2010. xii-xxxix. xxxii.

external forces beyond their control.⁶ Together the myths express both the masculine desire to possess or be possessed by feminine forms coupled with a tacit fear of being overwhelmed by such possession.

All of the authors in this study address one or both of these myths, in different ways, in the structure of their plots and in the characterizations of their quixotic bachelor-protagonists, but with an important difference: the stories not only celebrate man's search to possess or be possessed by the feminine ideal, they also rehearse his failures and memorialize his loss in the tragicomic resolutions that punctuate each narrative. These "modern" Pygmalions and Hermaphrodituses fall hopelessly in love with an ideal that is never rendered truly attainable. Instead, these impossible feminine phantoms remain figments, disappearing into the recesses of the masculine imagination from whence they came as they are each, in turn, revealed to be fiction in one way or another.

This undoing of myth and the marriage plot dramatizes the crisis of masculinity haunting these texts, the plots of which frequently betray an uncertainty about men's roles as artists and creators and disclose broader concerns about modern manhood. Structured around bachelor-protagonists, the narratives are embedded in bachelor and sporting cultures that reveal a host of insecurities about how men's homosocial networks constitute and shape gender and sexuality. Indeed, many of the narratives have already been linked to men's romantic friendship fiction, which exposes a longstanding cultural anxiety about bachelors and intimacy between men.⁷ In these contexts, the gorgeous rhetoric of this fiction points to a new interest in and suspicion of experimenting with alternative models of masculinity and structures of desire to produce a *queer*

⁶ Johnson, *ibid.* xxxiii.

⁷ Nissen, Axel. *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

masculine poetics that inscribes the feminine form within the masculine imagination through style—in its attention to a textual excess that threatens to blur gender, sexual, social, cultural boundaries—and through narrative and theme—in the representations of masculine desire, imagination and depictions of gender. These textual experiments in excess articulate a *hermaphroditic literary aesthetic* that opens a space for masculine and sexual alterity while reprivileging the masculine over the feminine, reappropriating the style and its generative powers.⁸

Accordingly, the concerns of men's highly wrought fiction, in some ways, closely align with the florid writing produced by women in this same period, as Dorri Beam establishes in her study of the ornate literary production that proliferated during the nineteenth-century.⁹ In uncovering the “feminist politics and aesthetic pleasures” of women's highly wrought fiction, Beam demonstrates how the style functions as both figure and theme for female writers who use textual ornament to create a space to express transgressive desires, to imagine alternative ontologies of gender, and to challenge the supremacy of masculinity over femininity (1).¹⁰ “Through the style,” Beam writes, “they reformulate residual and unaccommodated feminine

⁸ The figure of the hermaphrodite had cultural resonance for nineteenth-century Americans. By the nineteenth-century, medical sciences understood “intersexed” individuals—then called hermaphrodites—as a people who exhibit both sexes to a greater or lesser degree, though “true” or “perfect” hermaphrodite was believed to be only a myth (Dreger 33-4). In the literary, arts, though, the hermaphrodite appears as part of a number of non-normative gender categories, along with other queer genders and sexualities. Julia Ward Howe's unpublished manuscript “Laurence”—pieced together by Gary Williams—appears to represent a narrative about an intersexed protagonist. Christopher Looby, for example, argues that a preoccupation with queer identity is at the heart of the American short story, suggesting still further that there may be something inherently “queer” about the American short story as a form or genre (Looby viii). Dreger, Alice Domurat. *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Looby, Christopher. Introduction. “*The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman*” and *Other Queer Nineteenth-Century Short Stories*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. vii-xxiv. Howe, Julia Ward. *The Hermaphrodite*. Ed by Gary Williams. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Lincoln, 2004.

⁹ Beam, Dorri. *Gender, Style, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writings*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 2010. Print. See Beam's chapter on Harriet Prescott Spofford, 131-163.

¹⁰ Beam, *ibid.* 1.

doubt, ambition, anger, longing, and pleasure as essential, substantial, and palpable”; their florid writing thus “emerges as the seat of expression” and also “stages the central dramas of the texts.”¹¹ Men’s highly wrought fiction, importantly, is not a separate one according to Beam: She also points to Herman Melville’s *Pierre* (1852) as an example of “a coalescing concern with formlessness, florid language, and reform that reveals the nature of the shared project with women’s highly wrought writing.”¹² Beam argues that Melville, much like his female counterparts, “wrestles with the limits of language, enticed by its potential as a transformative medium and he engages in a like examination of gender, desire, and social literary reform.”¹³ In other words, Melville uses style as a transformative space for reconceiving social relations and family through utopian philosophy, but he ultimately withdraws from its transformative possibilities. For Beam, the novel “anatomizes the follies of enthusiasm, of asserting desire against the forms and conventions of social and literary realms,” even as it recognizes “the necessity of and the sense in such folly”: “the furious mass of words he leaves behind as *Pierre*,” Beam concludes, “commemorates the folly and sense in the effort.”¹⁴

II

Beam’s reading of *Pierre* as a failed—though necessary—utopian experiment neatly aligns the novel with women’s florid writing in its concern for social reform and feminist experiment but only partially accounts for Melville’s larger purpose in writing the novel, giving insufficient attention to the masculine concerns of (particularly men’s) florid writing. Beam’s overwhelming attention to feminist themes and reform in *Pierre* elides the more important focus

¹¹ Beam, *ibid.* 5.

¹² Beam, *ibid.* 2; 22.

¹³ Beam, *ibid.* 22.

¹⁴ Beam, *ibid.* 25-6.

of the narrative, which concerns the plight of the attenuated male artist, Pierre Glendinning, who rejects the easy comfort of his ancestral home to pursue the literary arts and participate in radical utopian experiments in New York City. Needless to say, Pierre finds both these worlds challenging and ultimately unsustainable, but not before he falls into a disturbing pseudo-polygamist, semi-incestuous relationship with the classically foiled dark/light heroines, Lucy, his former fiancé, and Isabel, his racially ambiguous alleged half-sister. Both taboo and melodramatic, the novel attends to the cluster of dramas surrounding Pierre's development as a young man, a utopian reformer, and an artist struggling to articulate his own masculine style in the booming publishing scene of 1850s New York City, which Melville portrays as an increasingly feminized and faddish literary marketplace more invested in popular trends than artistic merit.

But the novel was also written under the strain of the simultaneously burgeoning and waning friendship between Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Their intimacy, which Melville actively cultivated during their roughly two year's intimacy—between 1850 and 1851—when the two lived in close proximity (just six miles) from each other in the Berkshires. Their friendship ebbed in the wake of Hawthorne's removal from the area in late 1851 around the same time he began writing *Pierre*.¹⁵ The failures of this relationship, Monika Mueller contends, is reflected in both Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and Melville's *Pierre*, both of which read as “stories of male friendship doomed to fail because one of the two men involved could not tolerate the possibility of an erotic dimension in a male friendship.”¹⁶ Mueller, though,

¹⁵ Milder, Robert. “The Ugly Socrates.” *Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship*. Ed. Jana L. Argersinger and Leland S. Person. 85. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. 71-113. 85.

¹⁶ For Mueller, Hawthorne felt confused by the homoerotic dimensions of Melville's interest in him (14-15). Mueller reads in *Blithedale*, Hawthorne's homophobic response to Melville's advances in a key moment in the novel when Coverdale feels vulnerable to Hollingsworth's penetrative “philanthropic idea” (22). Conversely, Mueller reads in *Pierre* Melville's dramatization of Hawthorne's rejection in his portrayal of the failed male friendship—or

is not alone in ascribing homoeroticism to *Pierre*. F.O. Matthiessen also notes the “latent homosexuality” in the same sex-relationship between Pierre and Glen Stanley.¹⁷ John Seelye, moreover, reads in the incestuous relationship between Pierre and Isabel, an analogous representation of Melville’s transgressive desire for Hawthorne, with one taboo sexual interest—incest—place-holding for another—homoeroticism.¹⁸ Melville’s closeted passion for Hawthorne, however, might additionally be manifested in his relationship with his fiancé, Lucy Tartan, which “perpetuates itself in the yearning ache of deferred sexual intimacy.”¹⁹ Melville’s relationship with Hawthorne, after all, resonates with a similar yearning ache of deferred sexual intimacy with it ending unresolved and unresolvable not long after Hawthorne’s removal. The crisis of masculinity haunting Melville’s *Pierre* thus materializes in both the crushing breakdown of the homosocial networks in the literary marketplace—which provoked Melville’s satire of the publishing world in the novel—as well as the uncomfortable dissolution of Pierre’s more intimate “homosocial” relationships (with Glen Stanley as well as Isabel and Lucy as Hawthorne proxies). His characterization and treatment of Pierre as the ideal male artist struggling to navigate both these homosocial networks indicates a more explicit interest in exploring the masculine imagination and homosocial desire at the center of his highly wrought project.

Readers can most readily see Melville’s satirical attack on the homosocial brotherhood of the publishing world in the last-minute additions—over 150 pages—that expand upon Pierre’s

“boy-loved”—between Pierre and Glen Stanley (44). Mueller, Monika. “*This Infinite Fraternity of Feeling*”: Gender, Genre, and Homoerotic Crisis in Hawthorne’s ‘*The Blithedale Romance*’ and Melville’s *Pierre*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996.

¹⁷ Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. 1941. Barnes & Nobel, 2009. 480.

¹⁸ Seelye, John. “‘Ungraspable Phantom’: Reflections of Hawthorne in *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man*.” *Studies in the Novel*. 1.4 (1969): 436-443. 438.

¹⁹ Temple, Gale. “‘Ineffable Socialities’: Melville, Hawthorne, and Masculine Ambivalence in the Antebellum Marketplace.” *Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship*. Ed. Jana L. Argersinger and Leland S. Person. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008: 113-132. 125-6.

development as a young author and disillusionment with the publishing establishment in Books XV, XVII, XVIII, XI, and XXII. His longest addition appears in Book XVII, “Young America in Literature,” which thoroughly parodies the publishing industry from its authors and editors to its readers and critics. These additions, Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker suggest, were prompted by Melville’s frustrations with publishers and his disgust at the mixed reviews of *Moby-Dick*, which were appearing in print just as he was finishing the manuscript for *Pierre*.²⁰ Melville’s target in this critique of antebellum culture remains a question of continued debate by scholars, however, who alternately perceive the novel as a pastiche of the increasingly feminized discourse of the commercial publishing world or a caricature of particular literary coterie dominating its landscape. According to David Reynolds, Melville focuses his satirical lens on a particular sector of the antebellum publishing world, reading *Pierre* as a direct satire of the democratic, nationalistic coterie that dominated the New York City literary scene around mid-century, the Young America group.²¹ The group of authors and artists—which included Hawthorne, George Bancroft, Evert Duyckinck, William Cullen Bryant, and Hudson River School artists like Asher B. Durand and Thomas Cole (among others)—sought to create a uniquely democratic American tradition of literature to rival Western European traditions of arts and literature. Although Melville was among the associates of this group in the 1840s, he later broke with them. It was this break, Reynolds argues, that prompted his mocking characterization of “their effete literary goals” in the “Young America in Literature” section of *Pierre*.²² Here Melville paints a picture of Pierre’s glittering literary debut where he is warmly embraced by a

²⁰ Higgins, Brian and Hershel Parker. Introduction. Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. xviii-xix.

²¹ Reynolds, David. Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988. 292.

²² Reynolds, *ibid.* 292.

publishing world that is invested in the aesthetic values of the Young America group, according to Reynolds.²³ And indeed the publishing world that embraces Pierre applauds the “genteelness,” “smoothness,” and overall chasteness of his style—qualities of increasing value to this literary cohort. Pierre’s subsequent disenchantment with and rejection of the corrupt practices of this publishing world, for Reynolds, mirrors Melville’s own “disillusionment with the Young America group, which had failed to comprehend his efforts to forge a powerful national literature out of raw, violent American materials.”²⁴

Melville’s descriptions of Pierre’s authorial sensibilities, however, do not entirely align him with the “smoothness” and “genteelness” of this particular literary coterie. Rather, Melville’s descriptions of the “gemmed little sketches of thought and fancy,” the “euphonious constructions of sentences,” and most pointedly, in the title of his much-praised debut love-sonnet, “The Tropical Summer,” aligns his rhetoric with his Polynesian fiction, Typee, Omoo, and especially with the “highly wrought mind.”²⁵ As such, Melville’s critique of the publishing world may not be so narrowly focused on the Young America set, but instead elaborates on his own conflicted relationship with a literary aesthetic he frequently reproduced in his own writing, to an increasingly mixed critical reception. These characterizations of Pierre’s highly wrought struggles, then, particularize his broader criticism of the/an antebellum literary culture too easily swayed by fads and unable to recognize the violence of its commercial or aesthetic practices. Melville draws attention to the material intensity in the episodes describing the young author’s encounters with the two tailors-turned-editors who wish to publish his collected works even

²³ Reynolds, *ibid.* 292.

²⁴ Reynolds, *Op. Cit.* 292.

²⁵ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; Or the Ambiguities*. 1852. Ed. William C. Spengemann. New York: Penguin, 1996. 245. All in-text citations refer to this edition. Most scholars tend to link this title—The Tropical Summer—to Melville’s South Sea fictions, reading Pierre semi-autobiographically. See Douglas, *op. cit.* *Feminization of American Culture*. 295.

though Pierre has not written enough to substantiate a monograph publication. In their letter courting Pierre, Wonder & Wen reveal their shallow understanding of the literary arts, constantly confounding the language of the publishing market with sartorial rhetoric. Confusing tailors with librarians, pantaloons with productions, and seamstresses with printers, they appear to offer the same wholesale treatment to the production of literature that they previously used in the manufacture of women's fashion, caring little for the violence it inflicts on the literary arts. Their absurd offer, moreover, requires Pierre to pay for this publication from his own dwindling finances, adding to the irony of the homonymous pun inflected in their quizzical name—"wonder when?"—which proffers fantasy and speculation over reality and assurance. But the stark consequences of his glittering literary reputation proves most troubling for Pierre when he comes to realize that authorship has transformed him into "public property," yet another tenderable item.²⁶

This passage has, historically, been read as a gendered satire of a feminized (and corrupt) literary marketplace along the lines of Ann Douglas's characterization of the novel as a dramatic exposé on the "effeminate, juvenile, hypocritical, and essentially mercenary nature" of the "feminine market."²⁷ Pierre's subsequent rejection of the literary world, for Douglas, represents Melville's attempt to create a masculine "resistance to sentimentalism."²⁸ And Douglas is not alone in coming to such conclusions. Gillian Brown likewise reads Pierre's rejection of the domestic world of Saddle Meadows—"supervised by sentimental motherhood"—and later, his rejection of the feminized, commercial literary marketplace—"popularized by sentimental

²⁶ Melville, Op. Cit. Pierre is approached by an editor acquaintance from the "Captain Kidd Monthly" to have his daguerreotype taken and engraved for mass marketing.

²⁷ Douglas, Ann. *Feminization of American Culture*. 1977. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1998. 295.

²⁸ Douglas, *ibid.* 294.

literature”—as Melville’s interest in establishing “a standard of masculine individualism” that is resistant to sentimentalism through authorship.²⁹ These readings, however, only reinforce the gender binaries that Melville attempts to deconstruct with *Pierre*, obscuring the more nuanced gender critique of the novel. For even if Pierre’s escape to New York City reckons as a rejection of the feminine domestic sphere of Saddle Meadows, it does not represent a rejection of the feminine altogether since Pierre flees the domestic realm of “mother” with not one but two women, the sister-wives, Isabel and Lucy, who assist him in his authorial efforts.

However, in fleeing the Saddle Meadows, Pierre also flees his homosocial friendship with (and potentially homosexual passion for) his cousin, Glen Stanley, whom Pierre later kills with a bullet wrapped in the paper remnants of a letter from Glen to Pierre. With this suggestive use of textual violence (with an equally violent material impact in the death of a character), Gillian Silverman notes, Melville establishes a critical link between bodies and texts, crafting the novel as a “fantasy of intercorporeity and mutual ensoulment”: “letters serve to universalize sentiments in hypercorporealized ways. Characters do not simply communicate through the medium of the epistle; rather, letters become material extensions of the bodies that write them, aggressively able to transform other subjects into reflections of the composer.”³⁰ These aggressive textual transformations (or performative “script” acts), importantly, are also reflected in Pierre’s own development as a mature male author, which portrays authorship as having a dual material/spiritual impact.³¹ For example, while recognizing that aspects of this narrative

²⁹ Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 135.

³⁰ Silverman, Gillian. *Bodies and Books: Reading and the Fantasy of Communion in Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 102.

³¹ Performative script acts is a play on J.L. Austen’s concept of performative speech acts, which are acts of speaking that perform things or have material impacts, such as a minister “pronouncing” a couple “husband and wife” (or wife and wife) in a performative speech at that represents a legally binding marriage contract. Austen, J.L. *How to*

“indicate Melville’s discomfort for female authorship,” Samuel Otter suggests that Melville “figures neither popular writers and readers nor sentimental violence exclusively as female,” instead reading *Pierre* as a broader critique of “the fraternally corrupt and commoditized New York literary world”; but it is the crippling nature of Pierre’s “own mature male authorship,” for Otter, that dramatizes writing as a problematically “parasitic activity.”³² The passage that Otter references in coming to this conclusion appears in Book XXII, another of Melville’s late additions, subtitled “The flower-curtain lifted from before a tropical author, with some remarks on the transcendental flesh-brush philosophy” (299). As the subtitle suggests, the chapter distills the tensions between Pierre’s “flowery” assumption of authorship—which embraces the feminine and sentimental rhetoric of the highly wrought “tropical” author—and what Melville calls “transcendental flesh-brush philosophy” of authorship, a satirical take water cure treatments intended to keep the body healthy by stimulating the circulatory system through vigorous rubbing of the body’s surface with a brush to excite action through friction. The satirical portrayal of this “flesh-brush philosophy of authorship,” however, has suggestively masturbatory qualities in its insistence on bodily stimulation to provoke physical and spiritual wellness. These bodily ablutions, though appearing to perfect his art, only succeed in wasting his body, exposing the dual concern with the material requirements for creating a masculine art through onanistic physical stimulation of the body, a sort of textual masturbation.

In Melville’s words, the act of authoring a work of literature produces “the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, has upheaved and upgushed in his soul,” resulting in the creation of not one, but two books: “The Larger book, and

Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. 2nd Edition. Ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

³² Otter, Samuel. *Melville’s Anatomies*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. 248-50.

the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul" (304). Pierre's blood-and-ink struggles echo the meta/physical self-mutilation of Hawthorne's tragic hero Arthur Dimmesdale, who falls victim to the "operation of his spirit upon his body" with the scarlet letter "gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly."³³ Imagining writing as both a physical and metaphysical activity in *Pierre*, Melville draws on Hawthorne's more acute anxiety about the commodification of authorship in *The Scarlet Letter*. For Dimmesdale's internalization of the scarlet letter "A" (for author) and inevitable death on the scaffold, according to Michael Gilmore, premises the "death of the author" as "a direct consequence of the necessity to speak in the public marketplace."³⁴ It also curiously figures authorship as spiritual sin with material consequences and Dimmesdale as a victim of the sinful impulse to authorship. Pierre, like Dimmesdale, appears as a victim ensnared in the evils of the commercial marketplace, the sentimental domestic sphere, and his own heterodox desires. Just as the twinned specters of female adultery/authorship haunt Dimmesdale in the forms of Hester and Pearl, the sister-wives (or sister-husbands if we read them as character analogues for Hawthorne)—Isabel and Lucy—haunt Pierre, who learns, perhaps too late, the high costs of the "flesh-brush" work of authorship.

On one level, the rhetorical excess of this "parasitic" metaphor of authorship makes the metaphysical self-mutilation of authorship more legible, calling attention to the male artist's struggle to maintain his humanity in a literary marketplace more interested in making commodities of books and men. Accordingly, Melville's purpose in delineating Pierre's

³³ Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850.

³⁴ Gilmore, Michael. *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1985. 95.

struggles in this “flesh-brush” theory of authorship may actually point to his broader interest in distinguishing between competing masculinities. According to Tara Penry, the novel dramatizes the tensions between sentimental masculinity—“a matter of handholding and eye-gazing and glorying in the ‘grand old heart’”—and “the merely rhetorical” sentimental masculinity, which functions more as a cover for the “narcissistic, self-serving fantasies” of Pierre and his publishers than as a genuine expression it.³⁵ But to these two competing masculinities, we might append additional masculine concerns for the homoerotic and autoerotic impulses of Pierre’s flesh-brush authorship. The “primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff,” which “upheaved and upgushed” in Pierre’s soul, then, takes on a seminal quality of an ejaculatory instinct.

On another level, the rhetorical excess of this “flesh-brush” theory of authorship may also be an expression of the feminine excess required to generate his literary art if we read “the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff” that “upheaved and upgushed” in Pierre’s soul as a manifestation of his feminine literary imagination, with the two books—designated as “two leeches” later in this same passage—corresponding to the two women, Lucy and Isabel, absorbing Pierre’s world but also feeding his aesthetic imagination in a Galatea-like play on the Pygmalion myth. The configuration of the flesh-brush work of authorship, then, oscillates between the parasitic and the symbiotic, resolving into a hyperbolic demonstration of the *hermaphroditic literary aesthetic* of men’s highly wrought fiction. Pierre’s struggles with authorship thus articulate his masculine longing for absorption into the feminine coupled with masculine horror of being overwhelmed by it, an assertion which Melville reinforces with his use of the Enceladus theme to signify Pierre’s fate at the end of the book. Comparing Pierre with

³⁵ Penry, Tara. “Sentimental and Romantic Masculinities in Moby-Dick and Pierre.” *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. 226-243. 235.

“that leaden Titan, wherewith the art of Marsy and the broad-flung pride of Bourbon enriched the enchanted gardens of Versailles,” Melville designates his ill-fated hero as an “American Enceladus,” half buried under the volcanic rubble of Mount Etna, overcome by the raw power of a (feminine) nature.³⁶ “Marsy gave arms to the eternally defenseless,” Melville explains, “but Nature, more truthful, performed an amputation, and left the impotent Titan without one serviceable ball-and-socket above the thigh.”³⁷ Though highly evocative of castration, this dramatic image of the “impotent” Titan’s “amputation” should not be read as such, Sacvan Bercovitch cautions, noting that the metaphor serves as “a daring variation on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a giant impotent phallus in the act of masturbation.”³⁸ His masturbatory impotency, Bercovitch insists, “is not sexual incapacity, but its grotesque inversion: eroticism perpetuated into the ordeal of Sisyphus; sexuality incapable of fulfillment because turned entirely in upon itself.”³⁹ The metaphor, in other words, confirms Melville’s uneasy relationship with his own *queer masculine poetics* that uses non-generative bodily stimulation—masturbation—to produce art.

The insistent doubling of material and spiritual realms in this “flesh-brush” metaphor of authorship, moreover, marks an important point of departure from the shared project with women’s high-wrought fiction, which, according to Beam, figures aesthetic experience as transcendent of the material and its gender-norms. If, as Beam suggests, women used the style to imagine other modes of womanhood and expressions of feminine desire, Melville, as well as the other male authors in this study, should maintain a similar investment in the style for imagining

³⁶ Melville, *Pierre*. Op. cit. 346.

³⁷ Melville, *Pierre*. Ibid. 346.

³⁸ Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Rights of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America*. London: Routledge, 1993. 259.

³⁹ Bercovitch. *ibid.* 259.

alternative modes of manhood as transcendent of the material. However, even as Melville explores alternative ontologies of manhood and masculinity throughout *Pierre*, his conception of aesthetic experience never quite achieves transcendence of the material, but instead is always rooted in the masculine body, tattooed by the flesh-brush work of authorship in a violent, nearly crippling manner evocative of masturbatory impotence. At the same time, Melville's graphic anatomies of struggling male authorship and masculinity indicate his discomfort with the hermaphroditic male imagination and its uneasy absorption of the feminine form as the substance of artistic creation. It suggests, rather, that symbiosis is difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain, always threatening to devolve into the parasitic, always threatening tattoo body and soul. If even if we accept writing as a parasitic—rather than a symbiotic—activity, Pierre's own parasitic existence in the dregs of antebellum society coupled with his interdependent relationships with Lucy and Isabel illustrates Melville's commentary on the opportunistic nature of male authorship—even in its purest expression of queer masculine poetics—as problematically reliant on the creative passions of feminine forms and of the male-dominated publishing world that unabashedly traffics in feminine discourse.

But the real problem with the flesh-brush philosophy, for Melville, is in the manner in which it appears to erase difference. As Cindy Weinstein notes, Melville's language in *Pierre* cannot distinguish difference—it is a novel that “thrives on disintegration of boundaries”—which is constituted thematically in the incestuous relationship with Pierre forms with his supposed half-sister, Isabel.⁴⁰ The doubling of material and spiritual in this flesh-brush philosophy calls attention to the consistent blurring of difference and disintegration of (sexual, social, gender) boundaries. The all-consuming act of authorship threatens Pierre's destruction by

⁴⁰ Weinstein, Cindy. *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 179.

erasing difference, whether its between men and women, masculine and feminine, night and day, life and death: “When in the meridian flush of the day, we recall the black apex of night; then night seems impossible; this sun can never go down. Oh that the memory of the uttermost gloom as an already tasted thing to the dregs, should no security against its return” (304). This passage reflects what Melville cautions Hawthorne in an 1851 letter describing his day to day activities as he is consumed with finishing revisions with *Moby-Dick*, after which he begins *Pierre*. Describing the “truth” and pleasure of “that ‘all’ feeling,” which overcomes the body when “lying on the grass on a warm summer’s day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head.”⁴¹ “But what plays the mischief with the truth,” Melville concludes, “is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.”⁴² Losing these distinctions, Melville worries—though temporarily freeing—may ultimately be just as productive of destruction as creation: it represents the quintessence of the myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis that requires the destruction of two bodies in the creation of the one to unite them both. The sentiment represents a radical departure from women writers who find in the style’s erasure of boundaries and blurring of gender-lines more liberating than threatening.

The significance of this point of departure in the shared project comes into clearer focus in light of the critical reception of *Pierre*. Melville’s reviewers, who often described his language conflictingly as “vivid,” “poetical,” “metaphysical,” “graphic,” “morbid,” and “overwrought,” remained divided on whether Melville is exceedingly eloquent or exceedingly insane

⁴¹ [Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne]. June 1851. *Correspondence*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993: 190-194.

⁴² [Letter to Hawthorne]. June 1851. *Ibid.* 194.

(and possibly sexually deviant), particularly after the publication of *Pierre*.⁴³ Even Fitz-James O'Brien—one of Melville's most admiring critics and a fellow florid writer—singles out *Pierre* as his only failure, “wild, inflated, repulsive as that is.”⁴⁴ Still, O'Brien is alone in recognizing Melville's critique of the violence of the commercial literary marketplace and the nature of male authorship as potentially parasitic or problematically symbiotic. O'Brien's criticism of the novel's “antipodal” style calls into question its “drunken and reeling” language, its “bad” moral, citing Pierre's incestuous marriage to Isabel among his many sins, and most strikingly, its general viciousness.⁴⁵ “Everybody is vicious in some way or other,” O'Brien writes,

The mother is vicious with pride. Isabel has a cancer of morbid, vicious, Minerva press-romance, eating into her heart. Lucy Tartan is viciously humble, and licks the dust beneath Pierre's feet viciously. Delly Ulver is humanly vicious and in the rest of the book, whatever of vice is wanting in the remaining characters, is made up by superabundant viciousities of style.⁴⁶

O'Brien is perhaps the only critic to pinpoint Melville's critique of the violence of antebellum literary culture writ large: the vicious doubling of style and sentiment he latches onto comprises the core critique of the novel. Even so, O'Brien also seems incapable of recognizing Pierre's “viciocities” of style and sentiment. *Pierre* satirizes the antebellum literary culture for failing to recognize the violence of its commercial publishing practices as much as for the violence of its

⁴³ [Review of *Pierre*]. Boston Post. (4 August 1852). *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*. Ed. Brian Higgins & Hershel Parker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 419. [Review of *Pierre*]. NY Lansingburgh Gazette. (3 August 1852). *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*. Ed. Brian Higgins & Hershel Parker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 419.

⁴⁴ [O'Brien, Fitz-James] “Our Young Authors: Melville and Curtis.” *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art*. I.II. (February 1853): 155-164. 156.

⁴⁵ [O'Brien,] “Our Young Authors.” *ibid.* 156.

⁴⁶ [O'Brien,] “Our Young Authors.” *ibid.* 156.

feminine discourse and masculine conceit, like the Minerva-press novel eating into Isabel's heart, or the flesh-brush work of authorship tattooing Pierre's body and soul.

O'Brien's final critique of *Pierre*, however, rests not simply on the viciousness of his stylistic or moral choices, but that of his satirical purpose. Rather than "create" and "see," like the visionary literary genius he ought to be, O'Brien laments, Melville chooses to "anatomize" and "speculate."⁴⁷ The fault resides in the grubbier purpose of his graphic post-mortem of the social evils of antebellum culture and the literary marketplace. The language of O'Brien's critique draws a compelling intersection between men's highly wrought fiction, romanticism, and the realism that further illuminates the mushy terms of Melville's (and other male authors) presumed intersections or departures from the shared project. Though he fails as a romantic "visionary" author, his speculative approach to fiction aligns well with the late nineteenth-century realist imperative to "anatomize" and "dissect" individual actions and social relationships, according to Michael Fried, who draws a connection between realism and medical inquiry in the overlapping representations of surgery and writing practices in Stephan Crane's fiction and Thomas Eakins' paintings.⁴⁸ Even the French author and theorist Émile Zola—much admired by like-minded American "realists" like Henry James—uses medical analogies and scientific rhetoric to describe his realist theory and practice in his 1880 essay, "The Experimental Novel."⁴⁹ Such analogies, Lawrence Rothfield argues, were used to justify realist fiction as a

⁴⁷ [O'Brien,] "Our Young Authors." *ibid.* 156.

⁴⁸ Fried, Michael. *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephan Crane*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

⁴⁹ Zola, Emile. "The Experimental Novel." (1880). *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*. Trans. Belle M. Sherman. New York: Haskell House, 1964.

kind of pathological study of the social body or the individual psyche.⁵⁰ By the end of the nineteenth-century, this rhetoric begins to illustrate the “realist imperative of making everything, including interior states, visible, legible, and governable,” in Mark Seltzer’s words.⁵¹ This realist imperative of legibility and governability in particular, emerges most explicitly with detective fiction, according to D. A. Miller, who suggests that control or “discipline” provides nineteenth-century realism with its “essential ‘content.’”⁵²

Herein lies the crux of the crucial difference in the shared literary and social project: for all its excesses, men’s florid writing *is seen to be* compulsively seeking legibility, governability in a fashion akin to the realist disciplinary impulse, which may explain why so many contemporary reviewers were willing to categorize many of the male writers in this study as some species of “realist” rather than romantic, or sentimental, or highly wrought. No one who has read the elaborate opening of Harriet Prescott Spofford’s “The Amber Gods,” which features Giorgione Willoughby’s flitting and fanciful account of her family’s old point-lace and precious amber necklace, would deny its anatomization of female desire. Beam, however, locates the effectiveness of women’s highly wrought fiction “in its nature as an essence” that cannot be categorized or controlled and confounds binary oppositions.⁵³ The women in Beam’s study use the style to mock masculine epistemologies reliant on the visibility and legibility of forms or bodies (or gender-identities) and narration to escape from the body and male control. In contrast, Melville and the other male authors under scrutiny here, use the style to make desire and imagination not just legible but also governable and containable, often within the confines of the

⁵⁰ Rothfield, Lawrence. *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. 127.

⁵¹ Seltzer, Mark. *Bodies and Machines*. New York: Routledge, 1992. 95-6.

⁵² Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. 18.

⁵³ Beam, op. cit. 98.

(messy, sexually deviant) male body. Form is only fleetingly linked to reform as the textual excess of the style constantly threatens to *deform* if left unregulated (though fleeting transformations seem possible too). As a result, an anti-reformist impulse circulates and surges throughout men's florid writing delineating the tension between excess and containment at its core. It is this anti-reformist impulse—reflective of the conservatism of the genteel tradition—that most readily accounts for the sense of loss that aches at the center of *Pierre*, which may be less concerned with reform than with anatomizing its failures and mourning its “always already” loss.

III

Ultimately, *Pierre* is much more than a commemorative work. It is also remedial. It is a parable about crippling excess, dramatizing a recurring strategy of men's highly wrought fiction that longs to embrace the radical potential of a queer masculine poetics but struggles to contain it. The authors in this study share in this strategy. Their various approaches to the style exhibit similar concerns with form and formlessness, gender and desire, and social reform and its anti-thesis typical of genteel conservatism. Like women's highly wrought fiction, the narratives in this study coalesce around competing representations of gender and sexuality, but they exhibit as much—if not more—concern for masculinity as femininity. The authors and texts in this study share in their interest in exploring available (and taboo) expressions of “modern” manhood, particularly as it arises in the modern bachelor, whose liminal status made him the object of intense cultural interest and anxiety as a “threshold figures” able to cross boundaries between the male homosocial world of bachelor and sporting culture and the domestic world of woman without being lassoed to its social constraints through marriage.⁵⁴ Because bachelors maintained

⁵⁴ Snyder, Katherine V. *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

an “ambiguous proximity” to the domestic world, they were equally reckoned as its antithesis and its epitome and thus occupied a “vexed cultural position” due to their perceived threat to bourgeoisie marriage.⁵⁵ Correspondingly, the authors in this study turn to the florid style to give expression to the “vexed cultural position” of the bachelor, delineating his attempts to navigate various boundary crossings and explore alternative masculinities and structures of desire.

The purpose of this study, then, is to expand on Beam’s interpretive framework in order to better understand how men convene in *and* depart from what she has identified as the “shared project” of highly wrought fiction by attending to the evolving understanding of manhood, masculinity, and desire in men’s florid writing. Its aim is to resist the binaries that persist in American literary criticism—which Beam, at times, reproduces—in order to develop a more flexible understanding of the gorgeous rhetoric by calling attention to the fluidity and plasticity of gender and style. For example, when describing the style, Beam tends to overemphasize its feminine associations, often glossing over the meanings of its historic associations. Though sometimes associated with the “embroidered” texts of women writers, the style is never exclusively gendered female. Many of the terms used to describe its lofty language and gemmy rhetoric—“high-wrought,” “gorgeous,” “chromatic,” “flosculent,” “colourific,” “florid,” and “purple”—are neutral in their historic origins and may in fact have stronger associations with the ornate poetry and prose of Renaissance, and later Romantic, male authors. One of the first recorded uses of the term “colourific,” for example, appears in a description of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “odoriferous, colorific, and daisy-enamoured style” in *Adonais*.⁵⁶ A cursory search for these terms in the nineteenth-century American periodicals *Harper’s*, *Putnam’s*, *Vanity Fair*, and

⁵⁵ Snyder, *ibid.* 19.

⁵⁶ “colourific, adj.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web. 7 July 2016.

The Atlantic Monthly, moreover, reveals their equal application to male and female writers; they appear as often in reviews of Shelley, Bryon, Dickens, Hawthorne, and Melville, as Stowe, Spofford, Fuller, Hopkins, and the other female authors Beam examines in her book.⁵⁷

Even so, gender persistently informs and complicates its usage in nineteenth century criticism as much as in current scholarship in telling ways. Explicitly gendered synonyms for highly wrought fiction crop up in periodical literature in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, as the term took on both negative and positive connotations, becoming somewhat synonymous with “over-wrought” around mid-century.⁵⁸ For example, in an 1872 *Atlantic Monthly* column, Oliver Wendell Holmes used the term “squirt” to describe the verbal diarrhea of the male college masters who indulge in the attenuated style.⁵⁹ In contrast to Holmes’s moniker for men’s gorgeous rhetoric, an 1860 *Vanity Fair* parody of women’s fine writing labels the style, “tall writing.”⁶⁰ These distinctions serve to highlight how gendered terminology complicates the style’s critical reception. The *Vanity Fair* designation of “tall writing” suggests a twinned moral and aesthetic judgment of women’s highly wrought fiction as not just over-wrought but dishonest or artificial in its overelaboration, a common theme according to Beam, who notes how women’s highly wrought fiction, in particular, was sometimes used to rebuke women’s emotional excess and tendency to luxury.⁶¹ In contrast, Holmes’s doubling of aesthetic and

⁵⁷ I limited this search to the period 1850-1880 recognizing that these descriptors—high or highly wrought and fine writing—continue to appear before 1850 and after 1880.

⁵⁸ “high-wrought, adj.” Ibid. According to the OED, “In later use sometimes with implication of over-elaboration. Cf. overwrought adj. 2.” Web. 7 July 2016. “over-wrought, adj.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web. 20 July 2016. Beam, however, stresses how “‘Highly wrought’ is not synonymous with ‘overwrought,’” but she maintains its status as an “ambiguous judgment.” Beam, op. cit. 1-2.

⁵⁹ Holmes, O. W. “The Poet at the Breakfast Table” *The Atlantic Monthly*. 30.179 (September 1872): 352-364. 359.

⁶⁰ “Tall Writing.” *Vanity Fair*. 10 November (1860): 233.

⁶¹ Beam, op. cit. 2.

bodily failings with the term “squirt” carries the implication of sickness and physical perversion—or an infertile ejaculation—a deeply troubling association if men’s highly wrought fiction functions as a stylistic argument for exploring alternative masculinities and sexualities.⁶² The term points to (certain) men’s discomfort with the queer masculine poetics that merges the feminine form with the masculine body.

However, these terms did not always carry such negative undertones; they could and sometimes did function as praise, though again the gendered differences remain striking. When used as praise, Beam notes, reviewers point to the “fertile” imagination of women writers.⁶³ Similarly, when reviewers praise men’s use of the style, they also emphasize their “fertile” or “rich” imaginations but with an interesting twist: periodically—and paradoxically—the designations are used to stress the “authenticity,” or “verisimilitude” of their fiction.⁶⁴ The differences underscore the critical distinctions in the reception of men’s and women’s highly wrought fiction as realist or romantic and call into question how reviewers’ attitudes about gender complicate their aesthetic judgment, contradicting our assumptions about the supposed verisimilitude of realism and the alleged artifice of romanticism. Just as male writers of highly wrought fiction used the style to idealize, police, and absorb feminine forms and feminine subjects, male reviewers of highly wrought fiction found ways of incorporating the style into a masculine tradition of American Realism that embraced men’s highly wrought fiction for its perceived “verisimilitude,” while rejecting women’s highly wrought fiction for its perceived

⁶² In coming to this conclusion, I consulted reviews of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Henry James, Fitz-James O’Brien, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and George William Curtis in a variety of publications—including many of the so-called “Atlantic group” periodicals—*Putnam’s*, *Harper’s*, *Atlantic*, *North American Review*, *Galaxy*, *Scribner’s*—as well as several “bohemian” publications—*Saturday Press*, *Vanity Fair*, and *NY Leader*.

⁶³ Beam, *ibid.* 2-3.

⁶⁴ The quoted material is from an 1880 review of Aldrich’s fiction: Howells, W.D. “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. XLVI. (November 1880): 695-698.

“artifice.” The differences thus broadcast a telling need to redeem (certain) men’s florid writing as more “authentic,” “realistic,” or “scientific” in order to recover the authors as votaries of American realism and expose how a style derived from the aesthetic claims of romanticism contributed to the development of the realist tradition that came to define post-Civil War American literature.

These differences, then, add to the complicated narrative of the development of “high realism”—a style of writing that, according to Nancy Glazener, was born of an unconscious collaboration between an elite set of (mostly male) New England writers and editors who wished to define high literary culture—the “Atlantic group”—and the obliging bourgeois public who wished to legitimize their own authority by consuming the standards of taste established by this group.⁶⁵ This collaboration established realism as more of a “reading formation than a body of texts or textual features,” Glazener concludes, noting how its evolving constructions are always relational, defined in contrast to some other less desirable category of literature like the romantic, sensational, or sentimental novel, often to the detriment of women writers.⁶⁶ Glazener’s conclusions, however, tell only part of the story, and from the perspective of realism, the conquering genre of nineteenth-century American literary history. As a means of reassessing the supremacy of realism in American literature, I have reverse-engineered aspects of Glazener’s study of American realism by reexamining the more florid writing culture of the Atlantic group. Instead of *Reading for Realism*, I am *reading against realism* in an effort to further deconstruct the opposition between realism and sentimentalism in nineteenth-century American literature. In turning to men’s highly wrought fiction, this study is designed to explore the role that this florid,

⁶⁵ Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a US Literary Institution, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

⁶⁶ Glazener, *ibid.* 14.

ostensibly “feminine” style had in the formation of the market strategies and reading practices set forth by the Atlantic group and its bourgeois collaborators; to understand how gender complicates the perception of this style as realist or romantic; and to examine how the Atlantic group contributed to these gendered perceptions given the close ties between authors in this study and many of the periodicals of the Atlantic group, most notably, *The Atlantic Monthly*, which published and warmly reviewed almost all the works under consideration here.⁶⁷

This dissertation also represents an effort to recognize the gendered nuances of an ostensibly feminine style in a similar fashion to Jennifer Fleissner’s work of literary naturalism, which reveals how feminist claims helped to shape the supposedly “masculine” concerns of the naturalistic novel through its most defining feature: compulsivity.⁶⁸ Much like Fleissner’s study, the thrust of this dissertation is to explore how masculine claims formed and transformed the feminine style through a central attribute: excess. Its rhetorical and thematic approach makes its argument through excess and in response to the material excess surging in the American metropolis and beyond, from the vastness of the ever-expanding U.S. geography, and the richness of the nation’s agriculture, to its growing industries and booming native and immigrant populations. The style registers—perhaps for the first time—the “capitalist ideology of abundance” that would come to dominate early twentieth century American culture, according to William Leach, who discerns its presence in the rich descriptions, vivid imagery—filled with commercial iconography—and “no worry” mind-cure ethos in turn-of-the-century works like

⁶⁷ Only Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s *The Monarch of Dreams* was not published in *The Atlantic*. Higginson published the manuscript at his own expense after failing to find a publisher according to Caleb Crain. Crain, Caleb. “The Monarch of Dreams.” *The New Republic*. 224 (28 May 2001): 41-8. 41.

⁶⁸ Fleissner, Jennifer. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900).⁶⁹ It also registers the growing awareness of abundance beyond the visible material excesses of the modern metropolis and its consumer-oriented culture. This excess appears in the scientific abstractions of vast universes then being discovered in microscopy and telescropy and other scientific investigations uncovering new species, climates, and landscapes beginning with historic precedents like Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and *Origin of the Species* (1859) or Alexander Von Humboldt's multivolume work, *Cosmos* (1845-1862).

These textual appropriations of style and theme, in fact, appear within and against other literary networks that develop over the last part of the nineteenth-century. It is reflected and refracted in the literature of the Young America group, which included Hawthorne, Melville (briefly), Emerson, George Bancroft, Evert Duyckinck, and Cornelius Matthews (among others) earlier in the century; the florid style is also reflected in the classical framework typical of what George Santayana calls the "genteel tradition" of American literature, a strain of aesthetic idealism and cultural conservatism that butted up against realism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century.⁷⁰ This tradition, according to Santayna appears as one side of a binary American mindset "symbolized in American architecture": the colonial mansion and the skyscraper. "The American Will inhabits the skyscraper; the American intellect inhabits the

⁶⁹ Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. 259.

⁷⁰ Santayana, George. *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States*. Ed. James Seaton. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Other scholars commenting on the genteel tradition include: Brooks, Van Wyck, *American's Coming-of-Age*. New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1915. Parrington, V.L. *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in American*. New York: Hartcourt, Brace, 1930. Lewisohn, Ludwig. *Expression in America*. New York: Harper, 1932. Cowley, Malcolm. *After the Genteel Tradition*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1937. Jones, Howard Mumford. *The Age of Energy: Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915*. New York: Viking, 1971.

colonial mansion [...] The one is all aggressive enterprise; the other is all genteel tradition.”⁷¹

Santayana uses this category to identify writers ascribing to the “radically empirical and radically romantic” writers of idealism from realist, romantic, or transcendental authors like Poe, Hawthorne, and Emerson, who were too “independent” to ascribe to such aesthetic and social conservatism.⁷² The most significant figures of the “Genteel Tradition” derive from what is known as the “Harvard School” of authorship and include Richard Henry Stoddard, Bayard Taylor, Edmund Clarence Stedman, George William Curtis, Richard Watson Gilder, Charles Eliot Norton, as well as Thomas Bailey Aldrich, one of the male authors who makes an appearance in this study.

But the style is not limited to the chasteness of the “Genteel Tradition,” the “smoothness” of the Young America set, or the photographic fidelity of realism, appearing in the gothic fiction of Poe as well as short-lived radical artistic movements like the American Bohemians famous for gathering at Pfaff’s beer cellar on Broadway in New York City in the 1850s and 1860s. Their members included Henry Clapp, Walt Whitman, Ada Clare, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, Adah Isaacs Menken, George Arnold, as well as Fitz-James O’Brien (and William North), who are the subjects of the first chapter in this study. But importantly, the boundaries between these groups, though loosely collected in “coteries,” blur considerably throughout the century. Many of the “genteel” authors and artists who gathered in the home of Richard and Elizabeth Stoddard also frequented Pfaffs with some regularity. Emerson and William Dean Howells, too, briefly visited Pfaff’s, though they did identified with the radical politics of the literary coterie. As unique (and anecdotal) specimens of male authors engaging with in the highly wrought style, the four key authors in this study overlap with one or more of these diverse literary coteries, demonstrating

⁷¹ Santayana, *Ibid.* 4.

⁷² Santayana, *ibid.* 6.

the expansive appeal of the florid style in men's writing over the course of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, this study should (and will) expand to include authors like Bancroft, Stedman, RH Stoddard, Taylor, and Arnold.

V

Importantly, this cultural preoccupation with excess is not limited to literature. American authors were not alone in creating works of art in response to this very material (and sometimes metaphysical) excess. American painters, for example, also register this excess in their landscape and still life paintings beginning in the 1840s, but coming into its full heights in the 1850s and 1860s. The landscape paintings of Hudson River School painters like Asher B. Durand and Frederic Edwin Church, for instance, celebrate American's natural abundance and wealth in their lavish depictions of the native beauties and natural wonders of the U.S. But American still life paintings, in particular, register this excess in sumptuous displays of fruits and flowers that revel in the nation's perceived natural bounty as well as its powers of consumer capitalism. The sumptuous still life paintings of African American artist Robert Duncanson, for example, not only commemorate the natural bounty of the United States, but also exhibit the prosperity of the wealthy merchants of Cincinnati who commissioned them.⁷³ Many of these still life paintings feature gorgeous displays of fruits and flowers that do not naturally appear together in a single climate or season; the painting thus proclaims the nation's ability to cultivate an overabundance of fruit and flowers and import more exotic fruits to complete the cornucopia of the American table.

These paintings, though, represent much more than American prosperity. Many of the fruit still lifes—particularly those featuring provocative combinations of “native” and “foreign”

⁷³ Klein, Shana. “Cultivating Fruit and Equality.” *American Art*. 29.2 (Summer 2015): 64-85.

fruits—represent a “cultural national effort to establish a positive, indigenous model of American taste,” according to Wendy Katz, that moves beyond the stereotypical depictions of the unrefined wild abundance of its geography, people, and products.⁷⁴ American still life painters “accordingly endowed expensive foreign fruits with a healthy republican character, or arranged them in a fashion that offers a balance between the effete and aristocratic, the plain and plentiful.”⁷⁵ Interestingly, a number of the (male) still life painters register similar concerns for gender and desire as the authors in this study, according to Brandon K. Ruud, who notes the unsettling “tensions between aestheticism and science, masculinity and femininity, and exoticism and nativism” churning beneath the surface of the still life genre.⁷⁶ These tensions appear, for example, in the ostensibly “feminine” fruit and flower still life paintings of Severin Roesen, whose compositions dramatize the tensions between the artificial and the real, as well as order and excess. His gorgeous displays of fruit and flowers exhibit these tensions between feminine excess and masculine control in his insistent use of cold marble slabs to anchor these displays, his strict adherence to the Linnaean principles of botany, as well as his use of “hermetic, nearly suffocating” interiors—evocative of the hothouse industry—that fiercely govern, order, and contain these verdant displays.⁷⁷ As with men’s florid writing, men’s florid painting betrays a similar need to balance its excess with some controlling force—to make legible, governable, and containable—perhaps in response to the threats (and potential violence) of excess and superabundance, of too many people and consumer goods, of too many choices, or of too much

⁷⁴ Katz, Wendy J. “The Republic of Fruit: Nationalism and Still-Life Painting.” *Poetical Fire: Three Centuries of Still Lives*. Sheldon Museum of Art Catalogues and Publications. Sheldon Museum of Art (2011): 11-19. 15.

⁷⁵ Katz, *ibid.* 15.

⁷⁶ Ruud, Brandon K. “Truth to Nature: Still Life, Exoticism, and Gender.” *Poetical Fire: Three Centuries of Still Lives*. Sheldon Museum of Art Catalogues and Publications. Sheldon Museum of Art. (2011): 20-7. 21.

⁷⁷ Ruud, *ibid.* 21.

passion. This may explain why so many of the texts in this study exhibit anti-reformist, xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments in their simultaneous attraction to and revulsion for the exotic and erotic dimensions of the sensual culture they seek to delineate in their texts. In this respect, the writers in this study again align themselves with the effete conservatism of the genteel school, which was, after all, a tradition that died out, perhaps due its infertile, non-generative nature.

IV

Although the four authors in this study—Fitz-James O’Brien, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Henry James Jr., and Thomas Wentworth Higginson—come from a diverse set of backgrounds and literary traditions, they share a number of striking connections. Foremost, they are connected not just aesthetically—in their use of the florid style—but rhetorically—in their concern for excess—and thematically—in their preoccupation with the attenuated figure of the male artist and his obsession with the feminine ideal. Accordingly, the Pygmalion-Galatea and Hermaphroditus-Salmacis mythologies loom large in the stories and expose the authors’ shared interest in masculine and sexual alterity of the male artist, revealing their shared anxiety about the perception of their own masculinity and sexuality as male artists and authors who embrace a florid, feminine style. The four authors are also connected somewhat geographically: most lived and worked in cosmopolitan cities in northeastern United States like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, with the exceptions of the Irish-born O’Brien, who only spent the last ten years of his life in New York City, and the globetrotting James, who lived and wrote in Europe for a significant proportion of his life (though he also lived and wrote in Boston and New York at differing points in his career). In most of the narratives, New York City also appears as an important geographic epicenter for the events of the story or the social world of the characters.

And finally, the authors all share the distinction of being published—some with considerable frequency—in the *Atlantic Monthly*, particularly with James and Aldrich, and Higginson (though his highly wrought novella, *The Monarch of Dreams*, the *Atlantic* ultimately passed on publishing). Although some of the men in this study have been largely forgotten, each of these men enjoyed a certain amount of success as authors, or even some literary celebrity, at some point in their writing careers.

Over the course of the following chapters, I investigate the persistent themes in their florid writing, which link their aesthetic, gendered, sexual, and social project, at least in part, to the women in Beam's study, but also connect to issues of masculinity and conceptions of modern "manhood" as represented by the figure of the bachelor. The chapters expand on a rich body of scholarship on nineteenth-century American literature in order to reconstruct the development of literary movements with greater attention to how issues of gender and style complicate our traditional conceptions of categories like "realism," "romanticism," or "sentimentalism." Each touches on how these men respond to the "shared project" of women's highly wrought fiction, which Beam identifies as an investment in aesthetic experience as transcendence of the material world and its gender conventions. But the real work of each chapter is to explore how men used the style to express heterodox masculine imagination and desire. Although all highly wrought authors share in this investment, the men in this study foreclose on its radical possibilities by insistently grounding their characters in the real and the material. Such grounding could explain some of their appeal to the proponents of realism, but it also elaborates the social constraints that limited their expression of non-normative masculine desire accompanying the genteel tradition. But these complicated gender politics in these narratives distills men's departure from the shared project in their appropriation the feminine aesthetic to imagine alternative structures of male

desire and alternative masculinities.

Although all four authors engage with the highly wrought style, each writer manifests a slightly different queer masculine poetics and emphasizes one of the key mythologies from Ovid—Hermaphroditus and Pygmalion (though many feature both). The two chapters that bookend the project—featuring O’Brien and Higginson, respectively, engage most directly with the myth of Hermaphroditus and stress the fantastic in the mundane. The middle two chapters—which consider the fiction of Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Henry James—feature Pygmalion as their central mythos and emphasize the mundane in the fantastic, often with a winking nod to the metafictional quality of their works. James and Aldrich are also the two authors most readily and popularly associated with realism, although they both have complicated relationships with the realist tradition. Other male authors, however, persistently haunt the authors and texts in all four chapters—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, and William North—and figure, importantly, as antecedents of the highly wrought style. Their aesthetic ideals and expressions of manhood function as sounding boards upon which Aldrich, James, O’Brien, and Higginson address their own concerns about masculine creativity and modern manhood. Ultimately, all four chapters bear witness to each author’s complicated relationship to the excesses of the highly wrought style.

Chapter 1 concerns Fitz-James O’Brien’s short story, “The Diamond Lens” (1858), and the literary scandal that accompanied its publication in the third issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The tone and substance of the story highlight persistent themes in men’s highly wrought fiction in its dark exploration of the masculine pleasures of the imagination. The story follows the aesthetic and scientific development of a young microscope enthusiast and his poetic search for ideal beauty. O’Brien’s satirical characterization of the plight of the poet-scientist, however, parodies his aesthetic longing for escape into microscopic universes. The young microscopist’s

desire for transcendence is marked, finally, not by the noble impulse for prophetic sight, but by onanism and conflicted autoerotic and homoerotic desires in a story that ultimately parodies Poe's poetic principle. The literary controversy embroiling the story's publication, moreover, betrays a similar preoccupation with the aesthetic, economic, and moral aims of the highly wrought male artist. Reconstructing the discourse surrounding "The Diamond Lens Controversy" reveals a late-antebellum literary culture anxious about masculinity, sexuality, and the male artist.

Chapter 2 follows the work of one of O'Brien's contemporaries, Thomas Baily Aldrich, who is best remembered as an editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1881-1890. Drawing on the work of Axel Nissen and Paula Bennett, the chapter examines how Aldrich's short stories—"Marjorie Daw" and "Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski" in particular—awkwardly straddle the homoerotic worlds of men's romantic fiction and women's highly wrought poetry.⁷⁸ The stories explore the more radical gender and sexual heterodoxies of his bachelor protagonists. Their highly wrought imaginations and discourse create an ambiguous space for imagining and exploring alternative masculinities and sexualities through a queer masculine poetics of textual excess. The stories, however, ultimately limit the breadth and depth of these queer spaces of homoerotic passion, exposing Aldrich's reservations and restrictions on heterodox masculine desires.

Chapter 3 examines florid roots of Henry James's realist fiction, identifying the highly wrought rhetoric of *Roderick Hudson* (1875) to examine how he used the style to formulate his own brand of psychological realism—a *highly wrought introspective discourse*—within and against the women's highly wrought fiction he purported to dislike. With *Roderick Hudson*,

⁷⁸ Nissen, Op. cit. Bennett, Paula. "Pomegranate Flowers': The Phantasmic Productions of Late-Nineteen-Century Anglo-American Women Poets." *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical Literary and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*. Ed. Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario. (New York: Routledge, 1995): 189-213. 118. Note. 14. 199.

James explores the perils of men's romantic friendship in his depiction of the latent homoerotic desire blossoming between his two male protagonists, the genteel but deviant bohemian artist, Roderick Hudson, and his model-of-Victorian-manhood patron, Rowland Mallet, entangling the two men in a fantastic love quadrangle that calls into question the real and the ideal in both cross- and same-sex relationships. But the novel finally explores James's conflicted relationship to the "fatal fluency" and "fleshly element" of the highly wrought style—which both fascinated and terrified the authors—and its fluid discourse allowing for such transformative border-crossings.

Chapter 4 attends to Thomas Wentworth Higginson's longstanding interest in the feminine style in his early horticulture essays and later fiction. Drawing on the work of Christopher Looby and Caleb Crain, this chapter makes connections between his persistent use of the feminine style to his interest in exploring racial, sexual, and gender alterity through a hermaphroditic literary aesthetic of textual excess. Like the other men in this study, Higginson remains cautious about the radical potential of the romantic experiment of highly wrought fiction—wary of the destructive potential of its radical idealism—and finally uses the florid writing not to explore its radical potential for racial, sexual, and gender alterity but to construct an immaculate white heterosexual manhood that comes close to but never fully realizes a complete hermaphroditism. He explores the dangerous potential of the highly wrought masculine imagination in his late-life literary fantasy, *The Monarch Of Dreams* (1886), a morbid reverie about the pleasures and pitfalls of men's florid imagination.

Collectively, these four chapters serve to map out a broader picture of the masculine politics of the florid style in nineteenth-century American literature. The authors and their stories, however, represent just four small points in a larger constellation of male writers and

texts who use the style to address their own hopes and anxieties about transforming understandings of masculine gender and sexuality as an aesthetic expression of heterodox desires over the course of the nineteenth-century.

Chapter 1: Fitz-James O'Brien's Queer Philosophy of Composition: Masculinity, Authorship, and the Highly Wrought Style in "The Diamond Lens" and its Controversy

This study begins with Irish émigré turned U.S. patriot and bohemian author, Fitz-James O'Brien (1828-1862), not because he is the first male author to embrace the highly wrought style—Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe all engage with its rhetoric well before O'Brien immigrates to the States to pursue a career as a professional writer—but because he is the first to announce the style in the third issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* with his gemmy short story, "The Diamond Lens" (1858).¹ "The Diamond Lens" tells the story of the scientific and aesthetic development of a young microscopist, Mr. Linley, and his poetic search for ideal beauty in the microscopic worlds he discovers after inventing a powerful diamond-lensed microscope. Singled out in early reviews as "a very remarkable story, reminding one of some of the best of Poe," the celebrated tale quickly became embroiled in a plagiarism scandal that challenged O'Brien's authenticity and authorship.² Anonymous reports—published with zeal in several newspapers—alleged that O'Brien stole the *idea* for the story from William North, a fellow bohemian author whose 1854 suicide figures importantly in the development of bohemianism in America.³ The accusation provoked a brief editorial frenzy as O'Brien and his accusers aired their cases in print over the

¹ [Fitz-James, O'Brien]. "The Diamond Lens." *Atlantic Monthly*. 1.3 (January 1858): 354-386. All in-text citations refer to this publication.

² "Literary Notices." *The Congregationalist*. Issue 2. (January 8, 1858): 8. When William Winter republishes the story along with a number of O'Brien's works, one reviewer from *The Critic* argues that O'Brien "possessed a more fertile fancy than Poe." See, "Mystery Fiction and Real Life." *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts*. 5 (January 2 1886): 105.

³ Parry, Albert. *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America*. 1933. New York: Cosimo, 2005.

first six months of 1858, the results of which left the bohemian author's reputation largely intact since the *Atlantic Monthly* opted to publish another of O'Brien's story—"The Wondersmith"—the following year.⁴ Today, the story and its scandal have been largely forgotten. The incident, when remembered, typically serves as a humorous anecdote about the petty rivalries of America's first bohemians.⁵ A careful reexamination of O'Brien, the story, and its scandal, however, uncovers the nascent anxiety surrounding masculinity, autoerotic and homoerotic desire, and authorship at the center of men's highly wrought fiction.

The tone and substance of the story—as much as the plagiarism scandal surrounding its publication in the *Atlantic*—highlight persistent themes in men's highly wrought fiction in its dark exploration of the masculine pleasures of the imagination entertained by the story's protagonist, Mr. Linley, whose search for poetic vision and ideal feminine beauty ends in tragedy. His character recalls, in some ways, the classic male archetype identified by Poe in "The Philosophy of Composition," whose poetic response to "the death [...of the] beautiful woman"

⁴ Although some inveterate haters, like Thomas Gunn—a British author who lived in New York City in the 1850s & 1860s and kept an extensive diary—privately relished the thought that O'Brien may have borrowed the idea from North, most people seemed to have accepted his authorship as a matter of fact. Whether or not he borrowed the idea from another author, the text of "The Diamond Lens" is accepted as O'Brien's writing. Gunn's relish, however, may be personal more than professional. Gunn also grumbled over rumors that both O'Brien and Charles C.B. Seymour—one of O'Brien's accusers—"industriously lied" about his [Gunn's] stories being "translated, adapted, stolen from the french [sic]," an accusation leveled at many authors in this decade. See Gunn, Thomas. *The Diaries of Thomas Gunn*. Vols. 1-22. (Vol. 9): 634. Retrieved from Lehigh University's *The Vaults at Pfaff's*, http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp_viewer2.php?ptr=183&col=gunn&search. However, Russian literature scholar Neil Cornwell has uncovered suggestive evidence O'Brien stole the idea not from North but from Vladimir Odoevsky's "Sil'fida" ("The Sylph"), a story about a man who finds a beautiful sylph living in a glass jar, which was translated into French in 1855 (O'Brien was fluent in French according to Francis Walle). O'Brien's diamond-lens embellishments mark a departure from Odoevsky's story, among other significant changes, but the core idea is the same. But whether or not O'Brien borrowed from Odoevsky for "The Diamond Lens" he definitely stole another story from Odoevsky. His short story "Seeing the World" (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1 Sept. 1856: 542-546), is a direct translation of Odoevsky's "The Improvisor," with all the same character names. Incidentally, although Cornwell does not investigate North's works for fraud, a number of his stories also have similarities to Odoevsky's works. For instance, North's best known story, "The Living Corpse" is very similar to Odoevsky's "The Live Corpse." North could have easily come across German translations of Odoevsky while at Bonn University in the 1840s. Cornwell, Neil. "Piracy and Higher Realism: The Strange Case of Fitz-James O'Brien and Vladimir Odoevsky." *Vladimir Odoevsky and Romantic Poetics: Collected Essays*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1998. 157-67.

⁵ Parry, Albert. Op. cit.

marks “the most poetical topic.”⁶ O’Brien, however, recasts the death of the beautiful woman satirically as “the death of the beautiful microscopic organism,” exiling the beautiful woman from Poe’s poetic equation to form a new equation of the self-inseminating male spirit as the material of art.⁷ The resulting queer “Philosophy of Composition” posits a hermaphroditic literary aesthetic of textual excess that burlesques the gender and sexual heterodoxy of the highly wrought male artist. O’Brien’s queer “Philosophy,” however, does more than just reformulate Poe’s poetic archetype. His tragicomic artist also presents a curious amalgamation of the genteel sensibilities of the Bourgeois artist and the radical politics of his Bohemian counterpart, oscillating between the idealized figure of the genteel visionary dreamer and his dark alterity, the degenerate (and murdering) hack thief. The resulting portrayal of queer masculine poetics calls into question the aesthetic, economic, moral aims of the highly wrought male artist and his dubious masculinity and sexuality.

The literary controversy embroiling the story’s publication, importantly, betrays a similar preoccupation with the aesthetic, economic, and moral aims of O’Brien as a Bohemian author attempting to break into the ranks of the Bourgeois literati. The attacks on O’Brien’s authorship challenge his literary genius in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and moral character in their characterization of the “Hibernian” author as a liar and a hack thief whose literary theft robbed the real genius—North—of his purer artistic expression, defacing his art and defaming his character in the process. Embedded in their assaults on O’Brien is the underlining concern that his satirical portrait of Linley as the poet-scientist may also be an attack on North’s

⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846). Retrieved from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/composition.html>

⁷ In coming to this definition, I borrow from Dorri Beam’s characterization of the archetype: “woman is the material of art inseminated by male spirit” (132). Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

posthumous reputation as an artistic genius. North's belief in the powers of his own scientific and philosophical imagination made him the subject of praise and censure in the wake of his suicide and the coalescence of the Bohemian movement. The controversy thus distills the terms of the long-standing literary rivalry between North and O'Brien, which concerned their differing performances of the ideal male artist as the romantic genius or radical bohemian artist. "The Diamond Lens Controversy" finally concerns not the contested literary property but the contested manhood of the male artist.

Myopic-Prophetic Visions: Linley as the Poet-Scientist

O'Brien establishes the controlling focus of the story in the opening line, which announces Linley's "inclinations" for "microscopic investigation" that inaugurates his enduring obsession with improving upon the "imperfections" of the microscope (354). This obsession leads him from his rural New England home to New York City, where he continues to experiment with microscopy under the pretense of going to medical school. After failing to perfect his microscopic instruments, Linley seeks the assistance of a spirit medium. This "Madame Vulpes"—a thinly veiled allusion to the famous spirit mediums, the Fox Sisters—establishes contact with the Dutch microscopist Antonin Van Leeuwenhoek who provides him with detailed plans for designing a more powerful microscope using a 140-carat diamond, which Linley soon discovers in the possession of Jules Simon, a Franco-Jewish émigré who lives in his building and makes his living selling valuable antiques to members of "the enchanted circle of the Upper Ten" (357).⁸ After murdering Simon—and faking a suicide—Linley steals the

⁸ Vulpes is Latin for Fox. Additionally, Simon mistakenly calls her by the French word for Fox, Renard, further confirming the allusion. The fox sisters were active in New York City in the 1850s. Their movement has been linked

diamond, using it to construct his magnificent diamond-lensed microscope, which allows him to peer into “the last atom” of a “water-drop” (367). Upon examining this drop of “dew” Linley discover the feminine ideal in the shape of a beautiful microscopic being—an “animalcule”—which he names “Animula.” Immediately falling in love with the graceful animalcule, Linley begins his steady descent into madness with the recognition of the impossibility of their union. In a comic twist on the Pygmalion-myth, Linley discovers that Animula’s beauty and grace makes it impossible for him to desire any other (human) woman after witnessing such feminine perfection. The story ends in tragedy when Animula’s ecosphere evaporates, killing her and driving Linley insane in the process.

Part fantasy, part proto-science fiction, the substance of “The Diamond Lens” is bound within the cultural discourse of the “florid,” “fervid,” and “fertile” decade Fred Lewis Pattee labels the “feminine fifties.”⁹ It features two of the most prominent fads in the sciences and pseudo-sciences that gained popularity in the 1850s—microscopy and spiritualism—which both presumed other ways of knowing and “seeing” invisible worlds. Both practices grew in prominence in the late 1840s with the advent of spirit rapping in the U.S.—first popularized by the Fox sisters—and the perfection of the compound microscope by the American inventor Charles Spencer, who made the instrument more affordable and began marketing it to the expanding middle classes. The story additionally touches on issues of slavery—with a veiled allusion to the blood diamond trade in Brazil—as well as the increasingly visible bourgeois consumer culture that Linley’s almost vicious materialism and acquisitiveness brings to light.¹⁰

to women’s rights. Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. 57.

⁹ Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Feminine Fifties*. New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1940. 3.

¹⁰ Simon confesses the diamond came from a Brazilian diamond mine where he worked as an overseer until his theft of the diamond forces him to flee. Linley’s purchases from Simon have especial significance to the story. The two

In addition to his theft of the diamond—and his purchase of several valuable antiques (a Palissy vase, a Cellini Lamp and other knickknacks from Simon)—Linley’s excessively acquisitive nature reveals itself in his initial shopping spree at Benjamin Pike’s shop, where he purchased so many scientific instruments he suspected the famous optician believed him to be either “some scientific celebrity or a madman” (356).¹¹ But at its core the focus of the story is about the plight of the male genius—here figured as a poet-scientist—and his scientific and aesthetic longing for poetic perception.

Taking note of Linley’s attenuated longing for prophetic vision, critical readings of the story tend to interpret the narrative sincerely, stressing either the importance of Linley’s aesthetic sensibility or his scientific genius. H. Bruce Franklin, for example, connects Linley to the tradition of the “mad scientist” that originated with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. He describes the story as “a profound exploration of the diseased psychology of one of the main figures of his age, the would-be lone genius of scientific creation,” noting the several allusions to two key creation myths in O’Brien’s framing of Linley’s passion for microscopy and Animula.¹² For

named items that Linley acquires are a [Benvenuto] Cellini lamp and a green [Bernard] Palissy vase with lizards on it. O’Brien’s choice of these two art objects has significance to the story: Both Cellini and Palissy were sixteenth century artists, craftsmen, and lay-scientists. Cellini was an expert metallurgist whose famous casting of *Perseus* led to the myth that he had to ability to imbue his art with a soul, which relates to Linley’s belief in Animula’s personhood. Best known today for his rustic ceramic plates, Palissy made significant contributions to the earth sciences and the ceramic arts. Art Historians suggest his rustic plates—featuring lizards, snakes, turtles, frogs, insects, fossils, and other flora/fauna—visualize his scientific theories of evolution and the cyclicity of life, including the theory that all life derived from water (pond scum), which represents another connection to Linley’s discovering humanoid life in a drop of water. Both men’s works were popular commodities in the nineteenth-century, which spawned an elaborate market for fakes. Linley’s concerns that the objects are fraudulent have foundation. O’Brien’s inclusion of these potential frauds may be a winking suggestion that Linley’s microscopic discoveries are also fake or even an acknowledgement of his borrowing of the idea from Odoevksy (or North). Droth, Martina. *Bronze: The Power of Life and Death*. Leeds, England: Henry Moore Institute, 2005. 14. Shell, Hanna Rose. “Casting Life, Recasting Experience: Bernard Palissy’s Occupation between Maker and Nature.” *Configurations*. 12.1 (Winter 2004): 1-40.

¹¹ Looking at *Pike’s Illustrated Descriptive Catalogue of Optical, Mathematical, and Philosophical Instruments* (2 Volumes), I estimate that Linley spends upwards of \$500 on all the equipment he itemizes in the narrative.

¹² Franklin, H. Bruce. *Future Perfect: Science Fiction of the Nineteenth-Century—An Anthology*. 1966. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995. 327

Franklin, O'Brien's use of the Eden myth and the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphrodites position Linley as "the isolated, asexual, introverted, dehumanized, peeper-in at life, toying with objects in a narcissistic frenzy," who bears a striking resemblance to Nathaniel Hawthorne's Owen Warland in "The Artist of the Beautiful."¹³ Michael Wentworth, in contrast, argues that the story is undeniably Poe-inspired, and "finally concerned not, as a superficial reading would seem to suggest, with the ethical ramifications of an obsessive scientific interest, but rather, with the inevitable failure of man's longing for ideal beauty, a longing that, of course, informs and provides the narrative and philosophical basis for much of Poe's work."¹⁴ Due to this direct association with Poe's aesthetics of beauty, Wentworth concludes, the narrative resounds with "an impelling desire to escape, to transcend the inherent limitations of a finite existence."¹⁵ Despite the difference in interpretation, both readings of the text point to Linley as a representation of the romantic male artist.

Though somewhat contradictory, these readings also suggest how the underlining substance of Linley's scientific/aesthetic longing for poetic visions addresses many of the same transgressive and transcendent desires that define women's highly wrought fiction. For even as Linley's obsession with microscopy takes on, at different points in the narrative, the solipsistic narcissism rivaling the scientific geniuses populating Hawthorne's short stories and the aesthetic longing for poetic transcendence so closely associated with Poe, the stylistic and thematic imperatives of the story also tap into the verbose textual experiment that Dorri Beam examines in

¹³ According to Franklin, the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, which was used as an explanation for why certain waters made men effeminate, is linked in the story to "a primitive belief in a hermaphroditic god who created the universe out of itself." *ibid.* 237.

¹⁴ Wentworth, Michael. "A Matter of Taste: Fitz-James O'Brien's 'The Diamond Lens' and Poe's Aesthetics of Beauty." *ATQ* (December 1, 1988): 271-284. 272.

¹⁵ Wentworth, *ibid.* 272.

her study of women's highly wrought fiction.¹⁶ Defined by its excess and ornament, this style, according to Beam, opens a textual space for women writers to express alternative ontologies of gender and desire that challenged the supremacy of masculinity. Though equally concerned with transgression and transcendence, O'Brien's short story addresses the aesthetic and social concerns of masculine and queer—rather than feminine—desires in his representation of the ill-fated poet-scientist. Linley's obsession with microscopic worlds emphasizes his aesthetic longing to escape not the "inherent limitations of finite existence" as Wentworth suggests, but the very mundane heteronormative constraints of bourgeois culture. Instead of attaining any semblance of transcendence, O'Brien's satirical characterization of the plight of the poet-scientist parodies his aesthetic longing for escape into microscopic universes. Linley's desire for transcendence is marked, finally, not by the noble impulse for prophetic sight, but by onanism and conflicted autoerotic and homoerotic desires.

O'Brien's parody of the poet-scientist, moreover, represents an attack on a much broader cultural archetype circulating in the popular imagination at mid-century. His poet-scientist is not simply Poe- or Hawthorne-inspired; he is a figure of increasing visibility by mid-century with the popularization of the life and writings of Alexander Von Humboldt (1769-1859), the Prussian naturalist, geographer, and explorer. Indeed, O'Brien's distinctive portrayal of his poet-scientist relates to a number of contemporary male authors who—drawing inspiration from Humboldt—expressed a similar interest in merging scientific fact with the poetic imagination at various points in their careers and with varying degrees of success. According to Laura Dassow Walls, Humboldt influenced the writing, thinking, and art of a generation of American authors and artists, including Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Frederic Edwin

¹⁶ Beam, Dorri. Op. Cit.

Church, as well as Poe and Hawthorne (among others).¹⁷ Even O'Brien's literary rival, William North, was enamored with the figure of the poet-scientist, who appears as the protagonist of several of his short stories—including "Microcosmos"—as well as in his posthumously published semi-autobiographical novel, *The Slave of the Lamps* (1855).¹⁸

Importantly, several of these authors serve as targets for O'Brien's satire in their shared affinity for either feminine or effeminate aesthetics, which provides the author with much of the material for his burlesque of the gender and sexual alterity of Linley's aesthetic longing. According to Eliza Richards, Poe not only designated women "as the natural site of poetic utterance," he also suggested that "poetic 'truth' lies in a theatrical performance of the feminine," which has clear connections to how Linley designates the feminoid creature, Animula, as the crucial site of his aesthetic desire, although her microscopic existence effectively removes her from Poe's poetic equation, leaving Linley to formulate his own hermaphroditic poetic truth through his troubled onanistic impulses.¹⁹ While Hawthorne was often held out as the epitome of manly authorship—which O'Brien praises in an 1853 review of Ik Marvel's [Donald Grant Mitchell's] *Reveries of a Bachelor*—his texts are filled with peeping bachelor protagonists, like Coverale and Holgrave, whose "prying masculine eyes generate feminine interiorities in need of

¹⁷ Alexander Humboldt's writings were quite influential on Thoreau, Emerson, and Poe (who's sprawling prose poem, *Eureka* (1848) reflect the theories Humboldt outlined in his book on the *Cosmos*. Walls, Laura Dassow. *The Passage of the Cosmos: Alexander Von Humboldt and the Shaping of America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

¹⁸ Allan and Page Life give an excellent overview of his wide-spread interest in various scientific theories and its reflection in his fiction. Although they do not mention any explicit allusions to Humboldt, North very likely encountered his work while studying at Bonn University and in Berlin. Life, Allan and Page Life. "North Versus North: William North (1825-1854) in Light of New Documentation." *Victorian Newsletter*. 115 (Spring 2009): 55-94.

¹⁹ Richards, Eliza. *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 30.

‘private’ protective spheres.”²⁰ However, in place of Hawthorne’s bachelors’ prying masculine gazes, O’Brien’s poet-scientist takes on a more explicitly violating, “penetrative” masculine gaze: his intense, voyeuristic, visual surveillance of Animula generates not a feminine interiority but a queer interiority symbolic of his homoerotic and autoerotic desires.

Emerson and Thoreau also never fully embody a robustly masculine aesthetic. In his published writing, Emerson avowed the notion of genius as neither feminine nor masculine but androgynous, a doctrine that George Kateb identified as “hermaphroditic.”²¹ Emerson, of course, “reserves the highest privileges of hermaphroditism to men,” granting women the same privilege only in his journals.²² This privileging of men is a shared inclination with all the highly wrought authors in this study, O’Brien included, which becomes most evident in Linley’s morbid attachment to Animula that is punctuated by a “queer” desire to merge their identities. Thoreau’s project of celibate domesticity also positions him in closer proximity to the feminine sphere despite his rugged experiments of subsistence living, which also parallels Linley’s introverted isolation and performed celibacy.²³ Moreover, Thoreau’s well-documented enthusiasm for microscopy and his thematic use of microscopic sight in his published writings make him an

²⁰ Smith, Shawn Michelle. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. 12. O’Brien takes issues with Mitchell’s “very sweet, pathetic, and tender” prose and descriptions of his bachelor’s “slippered grief,” which has a “want of manly force,” preferring instead Hawthorne’s “analytic” treatment of sentiments: “here he would at once have thrown aside the scalpel and grasped the subject with nervous, quivering hand, and Milo-like, rent it asunder.” O’Brien, Fitz-James. “Our Young Authors—Mitchell.” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*. 1.1. (1853): 155-164.

²¹ Kateb, George. *Emerson and Self Reliance*. 1995. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. 120-121.

²² Kateb, George. *Ibid.* 123.

²³ Thoreau’s *Walden* “executes the antisocial, individualistic flight from the settlements featured in masculine wilderness romance.” His writing, according to Lawrence Buell, should be read against the tradition of his fellow women nature writers like Elizabeth Wright, Susan Cooper, and Mary Austen. Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995.

especially apt referent for Linley's onanistic impulses.²⁴ Even William North—the presumed primary target of O'Brien's parody of the poet-scientist—imputed an unusual mixture of effeminate masculinity to the protagonists in each of his four novels, as well as “Microcosmos,” the story he allegedly coopted to write “The Diamond Lens.”²⁵

In devising “The Diamond Lens” as a comic satire of the scientific, aesthetic, and moral aims—and questionable masculinity/sexuality—of his highly wrought artist, O'Brien draws from a number of these authors to characterize Linley's “scientific thirst” for microscopic worlds, which at first appears to be quite innocent. “It was no scientific thirst that at this time filled my mind,” Linley recalls in the opening section of the story, “It was the pure enjoyment of a poet to whom a world of wonders has been disclosed” (354). In the ensuing descriptions of microscopy, O'Brien foregrounds Linley's aesthetic pleasures over his “scientific thirst” using a series of metaphors and analogies that link his experience with microscopy to popular scientific literature that encouraged readers to view microscopic studies as genteel narrative entertainment. Linley equates his first encounter with “a Field's simple microscope,” for instance, with an “Arabian Nights Entertainment,” describing how the “dull veil of ordinary existence seemed suddenly to roll away, and to lay bare a land of enchantments” (354). Such effusive descriptions of microscopy reproduce the rhetoric of popular Victorian science literature, like Agnes Catlow's *Drops of Water* (1851), which depicted the imaginative exploration of enchanted or “fairy” landscapes found under the microscope as a practice of familiarizing Victorian audiences—both

²⁴ Emerson mentions Thoreau's enthusiasm for microscopy in his journals as well as in his 1862 eulogy. Thoreau's published writings are also rife with references to microscopy or microscopic vision, which he references directly in both *Walden* (1854) and “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers” (1849). After his death in 1862, Emerson famously characterized Thoreau as a man who “saw as with a microscope, heard as with ear-trumpet, and his memory was a photographic register of all he saw or heard.” Emerson, RW. “Thoreau.” *The Conduct of Life: Nature and Other Essays*. London: JM Dent & Sons. 1908. 67.

²⁵ Life and Life, op. cit. 75.

men and women—with new scientific theories on microscopy.²⁶ Using the rhetoric of popular visual spectacles like the panorama alongside the narrative framework of fiction, this little known genre of science writing flourished in the 1850s as microscopes became more accurate, less expensive, and began being marketed to the social and intellectual aspirations of the middling classes as genteel entertainment.²⁷ These popular scientific texts encouraged readers to see the cosmic in the commonplace, imagining microscopic worlds as magical lands of fairy enchantment in order to make the science of microscopy relatable, nonthreatening, chaste and—at times—even divine.²⁸

Linley's initial encounters with microscopic worlds reflect this divine sense of microscopic investigation, depicting his prophetic, poetic perception as more Emersonian in nature than Poe-inspired, as Wentworth suggests. Once rid of the “dull veil of ordinary existence,” Linley's microscopic vision becomes truly prophetic. “I felt towards my companions as the seer might feel towards the ordinary masses of men,” he explains, “I held conversations with Nature in a tongue which they could not understand” (354). In shaping his poet-scientist as both a “seer” and a “translator” of Nature, O'Brien conjures the Romantic archetype of the poet-

²⁶ Catlow, Agnes. *Drops of Water. Their Marvellous and Beautiful Inhabitants Displayed by the Microscope*. London: Reeve and Benham, 1851. There are a number of studies exploring this genre of popular Victorian science writing. See for example, *Victorian Science and Literature*. Vol. 1-8. Ed. Bernard V. Lightman. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011. Volumes 5, *New Audiences for Science: Women, Children, and Labourers*, and Volume 7, *Science as Romance*.

²⁷ Lightman, Bernard. “‘The Voices of Nature’: Popularizing of Victorian Science.” *Victorian Science in Context*. Ed. Bernard Lightman. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 187-211. 192. Lightman, Bernard. “The Microscopic World.” *Victorian Review*. 36.2 (Fall 2010): 46-9. 46-7. American Inventor and optician Charles A. Spencer merits credit for the microscope boom. His inexpensive compound microscopes corrected the chromatic aberrations plaguing European models.

²⁸ American painter Robert Walter Weirs captured this devotion to domestic microscopy education in his 1849 painting “The Microscope.” Weir represents the Bailey family in renaissance costume, evoking a historical period when science was more radically blended with alchemy and magic, emphasizing the cultural tendency to view microscopic research as magical, transforming natural science into the supernatural science. Weir, Robert Walter. “The Microscope.” 1849. Oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, John Hill Morgan, B.A., LL.B. M.A. (Hon.) 1929, and Olive Louise Dann Funds, (1964.15).

prophet, which Emerson describes in “The Poet” (1841) in similarly prophetic terms. Emerson’s poet is a “seer,” “sayer,” and “Namer” who is uniquely oriented to see the world differently.²⁹ Emerson compares the poet’s perceptual powers to the magic vision possessed by the mythical figure Lyncaeus (of Jason and the Argonauts fame), whose eyes “were said to see through the earth, so the poet turns world into glass” and “through that better perception, he stands one step nearer to things, and sees the flowing or metamorphosis,” a characterization Emerson used to describe Humboldt in an address to the 1869 Boston Centennial (which was organized by another man of science, Louis Agassiz).³⁰ Instead of turning the world into glass, O’Brien’s poet-scientist isolates it on a glass slide, discovering in a speck of mold, “a universe of being animated with all the passions common to physical life, and convulsing their minute sphere with struggles as fierce and protracted as those of men” (355). Following Emersonian logic, the description emphasizes the correspondence of microscopical and macroscopical worlds, which the poet, in all his poetic perceptive powers, can detect and translate. Linley’s inability to master this correspondence, as the tragicomic conclusion reveals, is the crux of his poetic failures.

O’Brien forecasts these poetic failures in his depiction of Linley’s deteriorating poetic vision. Linley’s poetic perception asserts an increasingly disturbing masculine “penetrative” gaze that becomes progressively more isolating, suggestively sexually deviant, voyeuristic—once he espies Animula under his diamond-lensed microscope—and finally, utterly myopic. Linley’s initial description of his penetrative microscopic gaze reveals a microscopic world where he maintains a god-like perspective “penetrat[ing] beyond the external portal of things” (354). As his passion is revealed to be an all-consuming activity, his obsession with microscopy

²⁹ Emerson “The Poet” *Essays: The Second Series*. (1844). *Emerson: Essays & Poems*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. 447-468. 449. Dassow, Lisa. *Passage*. Op. cit. 259. O’Brien, incidentally, also uses Lyncaeus in his short story, “Seeing the World,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, (1 Sept. 1856): 542-546.

³⁰ Emerson “The Poet,” op. cit. 456.

begins to take on the quality of an onanistic and homoerotic impulse. “I talked of my solitary pleasures to none,” Linley explains, “Alone with my microscope, I dimmed my sight, day after day and night after night poring over the marvels which it unfolded to me” (354-5). Although Linley “pores” rather than “pours” over the “marvels” revealed through his penetrating microscopic gaze, the onanistic undertones of these “solitary pleasures”—the euphemistic term Rousseau used to describe masturbation—clearly link microscopy and masturbation (and possibly “nightly emissions,” if we allow for some homonymous slippage in Linley’s poring/pouring over marvels).³¹ Linley’s “solitary pleasures,” moreover, appear to have the same disastrous consequences feared by the medical establishment in the nineteenth-century, who believed the practice of onanism might lead to any number of physical and mental ailments.³² Benjamin Rush’s 1812 *Medical Inquiries*, for example, cites “seminal weakness, impotence, dysury [painful urination], tabes dorsalis [syphilitic myelopathy], pulmonary consumption, dyspepsia [disturbed digestion], dimness of sight, vertigo, epilepsy, hypochondriasis, loss of memory, manalgia [insanity], fatuity, and death” as the consequences of masturbation.³³ By the end of the story, Linley suffers from at least five of these ailments—dimmed sight, insanity, memory loss, vertigo, and fatuity.

Linley has two more sexually-suggestively “penetrative” experiences before he succumbs to the worst of these onanism-induced ailments (insanity), the next of which occurs not through microscopy but by way of murder. Once Linley receives the plans for building his diamond lens microscope from Leeuwenhoek via Madame Vulpes, along with the assurance that he will come

³¹ Rosario, Vernon A. “Phantastical Pollutions: The Public Threat of Private Vice in France.” *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*. Ed. Paula Bennett and Vernana A. Rosario. New York: Routledge: 1995. 110-132. 120-1.

³² Stengers, Jean. And Anne Van Neck. *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror*. Hoffman Palgrave: 2001.

³³ Quoted in Stengers, *ibid.* 107.

across a diamond of sufficient size momentarily, he returns to his building to share with Jules Simon his experience with the medium. He soon deduces that Simon has just such a diamond in his possession. Getting Simon drunk on wine—“a famous vintage, that of 1848, a year when war and wine thrive together”—Linley reveals that he has learned his “secret” (361). Since homosexuality was “distinctively constituted as secrecy” in the nineteenth-century, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, it is possible to read into this moment the potential of a gay understanding between Simon and Linley.³⁴ The ongoing homoerotic undertone of this exchange intensifies as the scene unfolds. Linley emphasizes the intimacy of the moment in his description of the “uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness,” that Simon gives him while retrieving the small case containing the diamond—named after the “Oriental” custom, “The Eye of the Morning”—from his breast pocket (361). Its beauty evokes in Linley a response of aesthetic—bordering on sexual—arousal: “Heavens!” Linley exclaims, “How the mild lamp-light was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows, as it fell upon a vast rose-diamond that glittered in the case!” (361). The shivering pink prismatic arrows emanating from Simon’s gemmy “Eye”—evocative of vaginal imagery insinuating Simon’s effeminacy—resonate with the romantic longing of Cupid’s arrow, underscoring the potential homoeroticism of their juicy exchange (361).³⁵

Although Simon’s titillating revelation provokes Linley’s “wonder” and then “envy”—the intimacy of the moment is cut short by Linley’s violent impulses. If Simon’s shivering pink prismatic arrows represents a subtle avocation of same-sex desire, Linley cannot or will not reciprocate, whether due to latent homophobia or his anti-social preference for onanism over

³⁴ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. 73.

³⁵ Jonathan Green dates the usage of “eye” for the vagina from the 16th century to the mid-nineteenth-century and additionally notes the phrase “eye that weeps most when pleased” as an expression for vaginal arousal. Green, Jonathan. *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*. <<https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/fqr3ofyo>>

shared romantic intimacy. Instead, his thoughts immediately turn to murder. He quickly devises a plan to kill Simon and fake his suicide, drugging the unwitting antiques peddler with laudanum and stabbing him in the heart in such a way that suggests “self-murder”: “with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I desired to penetrate” (362). The resulting death throws resemble climactic release. As he dies,

[a] convulsive thrill ran through Simon’s limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat, precisely like the bursting of a large air bubble, sent up by a diver, when it reaches the surface of the water; he turned half round on his side, and as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the creese, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity.” (362)

Despite the “convulsive thrill” and “spasmodic impulse” of Simon’s death throws, his demise is instantaneous, Linley claims, and justified, since Simon was “by his own confession a criminal, a robber [...and, he suspected] a murderer,” though whether his confessed crime is theft or homosexuality is subject to interpretation (362).

Linley achieves his third and final “penetrative” experience after he finishes constructing his diamond-lensed microscope. The first substance he samples is a “tiny bead of dew” or “water-drop,” which is, in keeping with the metaphor of microscopic investigation as an onanistic practice, evocative of semen (365).³⁶ Looking through the microscope at his seminal dewdrop, Linley marvels at “the wondrous power of [his] lens”:

I had penetrated beyond the grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and Protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing, as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance. (364)

³⁶ According to Gordon Williams, Shakespeare used a variety of words to allude to the “male principle of generation,” including rain, water, and dew. Williams, Gordon H. *Student Shakespeare Library : Shakespeare's Sexual Language : A Glossary*. London, GB: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006. 332. Incidentally, Leeuwenhoek, quite famously, was the first scientist to examine his own semen and identify the millions of spermatozoa swimming through its seminal fluid. It may be a coincidence that O’Brien used Leeuwenhoek over, say Hook, Ehrenberg, or some other famous dead microscopist, but it also may be an additional acknowledgement of the “seminal” nature of the dew.

This deeper penetration reveals, of course, the beautiful microscopic woman—Animula—living in the seminal dewdrop. To Linley she represents the ideal female subject of masculine heterosexual desire, a “divine revelation of perfect beauty,” whose “lustrous hair,” “suave and enchanting curves,” and sweeping grace lends comparisons to “some graceful Naiad” and “the loveliest daughter of Eden” (364). The depiction parodies Victorian ideals of feminine beauty and grace emphasizing women’s “lightness” and diminutive feminine weakness as exemplified in the hourglass female figure that stressed a tiny waist along with ample bosoms and hips.³⁷ Linley’s presumption of normative heterosexual desire for Animula, however, is cut short with the startling revelation—which Linley vainly attempts to “battle against”—that he “loved an animalcule!” (365). Linley is continuously reminded of the unfortunate fact of her microscopic existence: “Every time that my eye was withdrawn from the instrument, it fell on a miserable drop of water, within which, I must be content to know, dwelt all that could make my life lovely” (365). Linley’s reluctance to “withdraw” his gaze from the “instrument”—a designation increasingly associated with the phallus—yet again reinforces the link between microscopy and masturbation.³⁸

Unperturbed by the absurdity of his love for the animalcule, Linley persists in indulging in his voyeurism of Animula, which seemingly turns him into more of a recluse, perversely watching Animula in all her daily habits—eating, sleeping, and even bathing—in her tiny atmosphere until he realizes the impossibility of her ever knowing of his existence or his intense desire for her. “I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her,” Linley laments, fleeing the

³⁷ Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels*. London & New York: Routledge, 2007. 36.

³⁸ Jonathan Green dates the sexual contexts of “instrument” being used as a euphemism for the penis from the 16th century. Green, Jonathan. “Instrument.” *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*. <https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/w7olhzi>

room “to sob myself to sleep as a child” (366). Linley’s “sobbing grief” in this passage again recalls the suggestive language of onanism and desire for sexual release that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reads into the “uncatchable emission, convulsive and intransitive” of Marianne’s tears in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, and Kathryn Kent discerns in Ellen Montgomery’s “different tears” that she sheds in front of Alice in *The Wide Wide World*.³⁹ David Greven, too, has linked tears in Poe’s *Pym* as onanistic and indicative of homoerotic impulses in the frequent occurrence of all male group cries in the novel, that present the reader with a continuous flow of autoerotic and same-sex desires in men’s collective excessive grief and weeping despair.⁴⁰ Greven reads these displays of “lachrymose economy of onanistic and homoerotic exchange” as an acknowledgement of the “onanistic shame” that prevents some men from forming friendships with other men.⁴¹

Like Poe’s weeping men, Linley’s sobbing grief suggests some level of “onanistic shame” for his narcissistic autoerotic desires, isolating him from all his friends and family and alienating him from feeling desire for any human women in a twist on the Pygmalion myth. In an attempt to overcome his passion for Animula, Linley seeks out a performance by the famed beauty, Signorina Caradolce, at Niblo’s Theatre. Instead of finding a woman of rare beauty and grace, Linley’s experience echoes Gulliver’s on his voyage to Brobdingnag, the fictional land of Giants in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.⁴² In gazing upon the Signorina, Linley discerns only the

³⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl.” *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University of Press, 1993. 114. Kent, Kathryn R. *Making Girls into Women: American Women’s Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 13.

⁴⁰ Greven, David. *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature*. London: Routledge: 2014. 140.

⁴¹ Greven, David. *Ibid.* 141.

⁴² O’Brien also references *Gulliver’s Travels* more explicitly in “The Wondersmith” *Atlantic Monthly*. 4.24 (October 1859): 463-482.

“heavy muscular limbs,” “thick ankles,” and “cavernous eyes,” “crudely painted cheeks,” and “stereotyped smile” of the famed dancer, which makes him long even more for “the vermeil blooms, the liquid expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Animula” (367). O’Brien’s use of “A Voyage to Brobdingnag” in this passage evokes the emasculating anxieties that Gulliver experiences in his encounters with giant women, which reduce him from man to microscope to sexual prop, according to Deborah Needleman Armintor.⁴³ Armintor stresses Swift’s reduction of Gulliver from explorer to pocket microscope to dildo “as a sexual satire of the gynophobia latent in Enlightenment science’s aversion to the new consumerism” that afforded women agency as owners of objects used for intense scrutiny (the microscope) or intense pleasure (the dildo).⁴⁴ O’Brien’s use of the Brobdingnag trope, however, comically inverts this sexual satire of the androphobia latent in nineteenth century culture’s anxieties about the onanistic practices of bachelor consumers living in the urban city. It also invokes the peculiarity theme of masculine surrender to the powerful woman that appears in Aldrich’s short fiction, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

Linley’s onanistic shame, however, does not prevent him from continuing to indulge his autoerotic desires. After sobbing his eyes out all night, he rushes to the microscope the next morning to resume his protracted surveillance. To his delight, he discovers Animula bathing “with an expression of pleasure animating her features, in the brilliant light which surrounded her”:

She lay at full length in the transparent medium, in which she supported herself with ease, and gamboled with the enchanting grace that the Nymph Salmacis

⁴³ Armintor notes how Gulliver “embarks on a three-stage devolution from microscopist to miniature microscope, to a woman-owned miniature microscope, and finally to a woman-owned miniature microscope-cum-sexual prop in the hands of the queen’s maid of honor” (194-5). Armintor, Deborah Needleman. “The Sexual Politics of Microscopy.” *Gulliver’s Travels: New Edition*. Ed. Harold Bloom. 193-210.

⁴⁴ Armintor, *ibid.* 206.

might have exhibited when she sought to conquer the modest Hermaphroditus (366).

With this final invocation of the creation myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, O'Brien fully articulates his queer "Philosophy of Composition" that forwards an alternative to the diachronic equation of Poe's heteronormative poetic equation. The myth represents one of several stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that alludes to changes in sexual identity through its engagement with alternative structures of desire. Sometimes read as a depiction of the desire for the perfect union with a lover, the myth has also been read as communicating a subversive desire for an intersexual queer identity resistant to the dual-gender system.⁴⁵ The allusion expresses Linley's longing to join his masculine and feminine selves in a manner that evokes Emerson's doctrine of hermaphroditism, which symbolizes the "finished soul."⁴⁶ Linley's desire for union with Animula in this passage signals less the completion of his soul and more its comic undoing.

The Diamond Lens Controversy

The irreverence of the comic undoing of the poet-scientist that concludes "The Diamond Lens" is at the heart of the controversy that surrounded its publication, which resurrects a literary rivalry not just between two male artists—O'Brien and North—but also between two competing camps warring over the figure of the male artist. The resurgence of their rivalry in 1858 exposes tensions in the antebellum print sphere over the identity of the male artist as professional author at a significant moment in print culture that in some ways sets the stage for the print war that ensued: the inauguration of two important periodicals, one a short-lived but influential

⁴⁵ Zajko, V. "'Listening With' Ovid: Intersexuality, Queer Theory, and the Myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis." *Helios*. 36.2 (2009): 175-202.

⁴⁶ Kateb, Op. cit. 123.

mouthpiece of the Bohemian movement, the other a representative of the cultural hegemony of the haute bourgeois the Bohemians sought to oppose: *The Saturday Press* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Launched less than twelve months apart, each with the aim of offering an outlet for high literary art, both journals benefited to a greater or lesser degree from the print melodrama of “The Diamond Lens Controversy.” O’Brien’s manipulation of the print war finally served to promote his own identity as a celebrated author and to advance the readership for two key publications of his New York-based Bohemian coterie: Henry Clapp Jr.’s *The Saturday Press* and Frank Bellew’s *The New York Picayune*. Clapp not only employed O’Brien as the dramatic critic for his new publication, he also used North as the posthumous poster-child of the Bohemian journal in the wake of “The Diamond Lens Controversy,” taking advantage of the renewed interest in North and his literature by printing the late author’s most popular short story, “The Living Corpse,” to launch the inaugural issue in the fall of 1858.⁴⁷

O’Brien’s shrewd manipulation of the public debate surrounding questions of authorship of the short story served to draw readership to these two journals and promote his own reputation as a literary celebrity and satirist. The initial report inquiring about the story’s authorship appears as a piece of juicy gossip in *The New York Evening Post* on January 14, just a week after the third issue of the *Atlantic* appeared in print. It relates “tea-table” talk speculating on the authorship of the “brilliant and original story in the last *Atlantic* called The Diamond Lens,” floating Hawthorne, Poe, O’Brien, as well as North as its possible author.⁴⁸ The story might have dissipated, but for O’Brien’s response in the following issue, which served to fan rather

⁴⁷ North, William. “The Living Corpse.” *Saturday Press*. (23 October 1858): 1-2. The two subsequent issues featured another of North’s stories, “The Magnetic Portrait,” which was printed in two installments. William North, “The Magnetic Portraits.” *Saturday Press*. (30 October and 16 November, 1858): 1.

⁴⁸ “Who Wrote the Diamond Lens?” *The New York Evening Post*. (January 14, 1858): 1.

than quell the intrigue. Writing anonymously— simply as “the author of ‘The Diamond Lens,’” presumably to respect the *Atlantic’s* convention of publishing all its articles unsigned —O’Brien discounts reports that William North penned the story, but ends the missive with the challenge for readers to read the story for themselves in order to determine “whether it is the production of Mr. Curtis, or Mr. Hawthorne, or ‘the young man named O’Brien.’”⁴⁹

The fallout from “The Diamond Lens Controversy” reveals how, despite their early deaths, the two authors play an important role in the development of American Bohemianism as well as its impact on the development of *haute bourgeois* literary culture, but the controversy itself exposes the diffuse concerns over the contested identity of the male artist as represented by these two competing versions of the ideal male artist, O’Brien and North, the two men at the center of the controversy. Couched in the various charges of plagiarism are a two-fold disquiet over O’Brien’s representation of the wanton (and thieving) Bohemian artist and his mocking portrayal of the “ideal” artist—Mr. Linley—as a burlesque of his dead rival, William North. The terms of the attacks on O’Brien challenge his authority along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality to not only discredit his authorship of “The Diamond Lens” but to discredit his moral and aesthetic fitness as a representative of the modern male artist. The repeated attacks on O’Brien attempt to reconstruct both North and his “original” story as the truer and purer specimen of the male artistic genius. In essence, both the story and its controversy distills the terms of the long-standing literary rivalry between North and O’Brien, which concerned their differing performances of and differing opinions about the ideal male artist. Ultimately, “The Diamond Lens Controversy” finally concerns not the contested literary property ostensibly under scrutiny but the contested manhood of the male artist.

⁴⁹ “Who Wrote ‘The Diamond Lens’—The Author’s Reply.” *The New York Evening Post*. (January 20, 1858): 1.

Prequel to a Controversy: A Tale of Two Bohemians

Almost unknown today, the two Bohemian authors at the center of this scandal, North and O'Brien, were active during the same bright period of rich literary output F.O. Matthiessen designated as the "American Renaissance."⁵⁰ Each immigrating to New York City in 1852—allegedly in the same week—they became minor celebrities in the blossoming print world and key figures in the loose collective of artists, authors, and musicians who brought Henri Murger's Bohemian movement to Manhattan in the 1850s.⁵¹ Both died prematurely: North killing himself at the age of 28 in 1854 and O'Brien dying as a casualty of the American Civil War at the age of 34 in 1862. Even though North's early death removes him from the official rosters of New York's Bohemian scene that coalesced in 1858 at Pfaff's, his association with many of the artists who would later make up the core of the Pfaffian Bohemians, has earned him a posthumous role in that group as an important catalyst for helping the Bohemians forge their group identity. North's November 14, 1854 suicide, literary historian Albert Parry argues, "began the true Bohemia" by "cast[ing] the cloak of romantic tragedy over his circle."⁵²

However badly it ended, O'Brien and North's antagonistic relationship began in friendship. Arriving in New York City in 1852, the English-born North and the Irish-born O'Brien both sought lucrative employment in the booming New York City print world. Finding work at many of the same periodicals, including *Putnam's Monthly*, *United States Review*,

⁵⁰ Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. 1941. Barnes & Nobel, 2009.

⁵¹ An 1868 *Putnam Magazine* article makes this claim. "The Old and the New: A Retrospect and a Prospect." *Putnam's Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and National Interests*. 1.1 (January 1868): 1-8. 2. Francis Wolle dates O'Brien's arrival in December 1851, however. See Wolle, Francis. *Fitz-James O'Brien: A Literary Bohemian of the eighteen-fifties*. Boulder: University of Colorado Boulder Press, 1944. 2.

⁵² Parry, Op. cit. 49.

American Whig Review, and *Harper's New Monthly*, they both became friends with two important figures in Bohemian New York—Frank Bellew and Henry Clapp, Jr.—ensuring the inevitability of their intimacy. North had previously cultivated friendships with the Massachusetts-born American Clapp and the Indian-born Englishman Bellew in London in the 1840s. Details on North's friendships with Clapp and Bellew are few, but one contemporary described North as a “great chum” of Clapp during his stay in London, recounting a memory of meeting North and Clapp at a restaurant where the former was occupied with writing a story that the latter planned on taking to a publisher in order to pay for the dinner they just ordered.⁵³ Even less is known about North's relationship with Bellew, who left for the United States in late 1850, but North must have considered him a close friend because he left a note for Bellew and his wife at the time of his suicide.⁵⁴ Bellew also illustrated the hallucinatory frontispiece to North's 1850 novel *The City of Jugglers; or, Free-Trade in Souls. A Romance of the 'Golden' Age*, a dystopian fantasy about the commercialization of the spirit world.⁵⁵ O'Brien, on the other hand, seems to have encountered the two Pfaffian Bohemians only after his arrival in New York City. Francis Wolle speculates that O'Brien met Bellew at one of John Brougham's weekly dinner parties. Known for his generous table, Brougham, who was among the first publishers to employ O'Brien in the US, owned the comic paper *The Lantern* (1852-1853) where Bellew also worked

⁵³ Clapp's experiences in Bohemian London are recounted in a 1902 article in Lippincott's Monthly. Senex. “A Slender Sheaf of Memories.” *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. 70.420 (December 1902). 605-17. 610.

⁵⁴ William Winter reprints this letter, as well as an exchange between Charles C.B. Seymour and Bellew at the time of North's death. It reads, “Dear Friends:—May you be happy! Do not regret me. I am not fit for this world. I fly to a better life. I am calm and brave and hopeful. Ever affectionately and truly, W. North.” Winter, William. *Old Friends. Being Literary Recollections of Other Days*. New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909. 313-314, 317.

⁵⁵ For an analysis of this frontispiece, see Life, Page, and Allan Life. “North versus North: William North (1825-1854), in light of new documentation.” *Victorian Newsletter*. 115 (2009): 55-94.

as an illustrator and caricaturist.⁵⁶ Bellew liked O'Brien well enough to let him room with him for a time in 1852, during which time O'Brien finally met North. Through Bellew and North, O'Brien would eventually meet Clapp after his return to the United States in late 1853.⁵⁷ Though O'Brien remained friends with Clapp and Bellew, collaborating with them both until his own death in the Civil War, North would fall out with almost all of his friends, including O'Brien and Clapp, in the months leading up to his November 1854 suicide.

Even so, the friendship between North, O'Brien, Bellew, and later Clapp, had a promising beginning. North, Bellew and O'Brien formed the first of two small literary coteries that predate the Pfaffian Bohemians. The first of these "neo-bohemian" clubs derived its name from the animal curiosity, the duck-billed platypus, or, *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, as it was then known.⁵⁸ First encountered by Europeans in 1798, the semiaquatic egg-laying mammal baffled scientists, defying classification and provoking speculations about biology, evolution, and later, Darwinian natural selection.⁵⁹ William Winter credits Frank Bellew with its adoption by the club and the Spring Street restaurant where the *Ornithorhynchus Club* "habitually met, for the pastime of talking, singing, joking, drinking beer, and smoking church-warden pipes."⁶⁰ Bellew, it seems, not only suggested the name to the owner, who adopted it (a widow named Mrs.

⁵⁶ Wolle, *Op. cit.* 32.

⁵⁷ Wolle has not specifics on O'Brien meeting Clapp, but Justin Martin places Clapp in New York in late 1853. Martin, Justin. *Rebel Souls: Walt Whitman and America's First Bohemians*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2014. 16.

⁵⁸ Hahn, Emily. *Romantic Rebels: an Informal History of Bohemianism in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967. 20.

⁵⁹ Johann Blumenbach gave the duck-billed platypus the name *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, which was later revised to *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*, its officially recognized name. Robin, Libby. "The Platypus Frontier: Eggs, Aborigines and Empire in 19th century Queensland." *Dislocating the Frontier*. Ed. Deborah Bird Rose & Richard Davis. Canberra, AU: The Australian National University Press, 2005. 99-120. One alternate spelling of the *Ornithorhynchus Club* excludes the final "h."

⁶⁰ Winter, William. *Old Friends: Being Literary Recollections of Other Days*. New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1914. 308-9.

Neumann), he painted the sign for the establishment; it depicted a platypus leisurely smoking a pipe while grasping a glass of beer.⁶¹ In addition to O'Brien, North, and Bellew, Charles Gayler, Sol Eytinge, Charles G. Rosenberg, Charles C.B. Seymour, Ned Underhill, Ned Wilkins, George Arnold, Henry W. Herbert ("Frank Forestor"), and Mortimer Thomson were ranked among its members.⁶² Two years after North's death, several key members of the Ornithorhynchus Club formed another more immediate precursor to the Pfaffian Bohemians. "The Bees," so named after their East Houston Street meeting place—Ben Honey's—included Ornithorhynchus members O'Brien and Wilkins along with John Brougham, Henry Clapp, and Mark Smith.⁶³ With "honey soit" as their motto—a play on the well-known French expression, "honni soit qui mal y pense," which roughly translates as "shame on those who would think ill of it"—The Bees hoped to be feared by the New York theatre scene because of their clever criticism of the stage.⁶⁴

Beyond shared employment and social networks, commonalities in their personal histories must have also drawn them together and begged comparison. The spotty details surrounding North's and O'Brien's parallel moves from London to the U.S. suggestively allude to similar stories of soured romantic entanglements, artistic ambition tinged with professional dissatisfaction, and financial and familial difficulties amidst wealth and privilege. For both men, the primacy of their hidden romantic passions and family pedigree appears in the number and variety of rumors connected to their biography. Although North's reputation was chastened in

⁶¹ Winter, *Old Friends*. *ibid.* 308.

⁶² Winter itemizes most of these members. *Old Friends*. *Ibid.* 308. Mark Lause additionally lists Underhill, Herbert, and Thomson. *Op. Cit.* 47-9. An anonymous 1888 article also identifies Wilkins and Arnold in the group, though it mistakenly dates the club originating in 1857 after the formation of The Bees, which started in 1856. "Reminiscences of an Old Publisher. No. III. A Club or Two." *The American Bookseller*. XXIV.5 (September 1, 1888): 127.

⁶³ In "Reminiscences," Ben Honey's on Houston is identified as the club's namesake. "Reminiscences of an Old Publisher," *ibid.* 127.

⁶⁴ Miller, Tice L. *Bohemians and Critics: American Theatre Criticism in the Nineteenth-Century*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1981. 44.

the apotheosis of the author after his death, literary historians have uncovered a more colorful portrait of his early activities. Rumors of crossed love, adultery, and illegitimate children crop up everywhere in his biography.⁶⁵ According to William Rossetti, who rented a London flat from North's father, when North departed for the US, he "left behind two women who had some claim upon him."⁶⁶ These two women were said to correspond to "Brunetta" and "Blondine" in North's fiction.⁶⁷ Scholars additionally speculate that the Rossetti family suspected North fathered a son by one of these women.⁶⁸ In the tributes written after his death, however, North's admirers stress love—a chaste rather than lascivious love—and not poverty, disillusionment, or commercial failure as the final cause of his self-murder, shoring up his image as a romantic artist not interested in money or fame but whose passion was just too much for him. Rumors of romantic wreckage likewise follow O'Brien's coming-to-America narrative. William Winter vaguely alludes to O'Brien "gain[ing] experience in London, where he dissipated his patrimony and underwent a grand passion."⁶⁹ Mrs. James T. Fields, on the other hand, records a gossip story outlining O'Brien's botched elopement with the wife of an English officer stationed in

⁶⁵ Two article length studies have been published recently. Whitely, Edward and Robert Wiedman. "The (After) Life of William North among the New York Bohemians." *The Victorian Newsletter*. 115 (2009): 29-45. Life, Allan and Page. "North Versus North," op. cit.

⁶⁶ Rossetti, William Michael. *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*. London: Brown Langham, 1906. 167.

⁶⁷ According to Whitely and Wiedman, Rossetti annotated this letter fifty years later, noting that North "was not 'married,' but perhaps he ought to have been." (quoted in life and life, op. cit. 88 n23). Whitely, Edward and Robert Wiedman. "The (After) Life of William North among the New York Bohemians." *The Victorian Newsletter*. 115 (2009): 29-45.

⁶⁸ Writing to her brother William in August 1851, Christina Rossetti mentions North's request of the Rossetti family to forward some possessions and letters to his new abode, asking for clarification on North's marital status after "a young lady with a child in a cab left a message" (quoted in Whitely and Wiedman), op. cit. 30.

⁶⁹ Winter, William. *The Poems and Stories of Fitz-James O'Brien*. Boston: James Osgoode and Co., 1881. lii & lvii.

India.⁷⁰ In Mrs. Fields version, it is the unexpected return of the officer that prompted O'Brien to flee England, "concealed" on a ship bound for New York. Beyond these early rumors, however, O'Brien's romantic entanglements thin out; he seems to have formed a reputation of romantic celibacy not unlike Thoreau.

O'Brien and North also embellished their own family pedigrees with a paradoxical mix of radical politics and aristocratic pretensions. For example, North's father and paternal grandfather were prosperous manufacturers and landlords in London, but North elides disclosing the primary source of his family's income, encouraging the belief that he was of the landed gentry.⁷¹ One *New York Daily Times* article published in the aftermath of his suicide makes claims that North was "related to the ancient family of the Earl of Guilford [sic], a Peerage created in the latter part of the fourteenth century."⁷² At the same time, a number of contemporary sources have North coming to the U.S. fleeing a father disapproving of his son's "Republican philosophy."⁷³ O'Brien also came from a family of means as the only son of a Cork county coroner, James O'Brien, Esq., but rumors of his alleged connections to Smith O'Brien, the radical Irish patriot, as well as the Irish aristocracy—Lord Fermoy and Baron Inchiquin, Marquis of Thomond—circulated during and after his lifetime.⁷⁴ Oddly enough, while both North and O'Brien most certainly received ample education, there is evidence to suggest that O'Brien exaggerated his formal education and North downplayed the importance of his formal

⁷⁰ Howe, M.A. DeWolfe. *Memories of a Hostess: A Chronicle of Eminent Friendships Drawn Chiefly from the Diaries of Mrs. James T. Fields*. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1922. 227.

⁷¹ Whitely and Wiedman, op. cit. 78.

⁷² Whitely and Wiedman, Ibid. 67.

⁷³ Whitely and Wiedman, ibid. 30.

⁷⁴ Wolle, *Fitz-James O'Brien*. op. cit. 3 n4.

education. Wolle could find no records of O'Brien attending Dublin University or Trinity College, speculating that the Irish author received a "gentleman's education."⁷⁵ In contrast, almost all of North's autobiographical novels feature protagonists who disdain their expensive but intellectually bankrupt formal education.⁷⁶

And, finally, both authors sought (and failed) to distinguish themselves in the London literary scene. Upon coming of age, O'Brien left Ireland for London in 1849, running through the small inheritance he received from his paternal grandfather, amounting to roughly £8,000, in just two years.⁷⁷ Although rumors of extravagant dinners, "elegancies and luxuries" attend these years of alleged extravagant living, O'Brien set to work establishing his literary reputation. While in London, he began contributing to a number of periodicals—*Home Companion*, *Family Friend*, *Metropolitan Magazine*, as well as Dickens's *Household Word*. He also contributed original poetry and French translations to a new magazine he is rumored to have edited and partially funded, called the *Parlour Magazine of the Literature of All Nations*, which was conceived as a companion publication to the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace—containing guides to the different palace exhibits—and printed on machines within the palace as a practical exhibit.⁷⁸ Like O'Brien, North benefited from familial financial assistance and may have also inherited several thousand pounds once he came of age.⁷⁹ And according to one contemporary, North may have also used these funds to launch his literary career by publishing one or more of

⁷⁵ Wolle, *Fitz-James O'Brien* Ibid. 14.

⁷⁶ *Life and Life*, Op. Cit. 79.

⁷⁷ Wolle, *Fitz-James O'Brien*. op. cit. 17.

⁷⁸ Wolle, Francis. "Fitz-James O'Brien in Ireland and England, 1828-1851." *American Literature* 14.3 (Nov., 1942): 234-249. 244.

⁷⁹ Speculations about this inheritance derive from his autobiographical novel, *The Slave of the Lamp*, see. *Life and Life*, Op. Cit. 76.

his first four novels at his own expense.⁸⁰ At any rate, he benefited from the patrimony of his father, who went to some expense to educate his son at the Temple Grove School in London and the University of Bonn in Germany.⁸¹ Eventually, North's father withdrew this financial assistance. William Rossetti describes how North's "eccentricities had alienated him from his father," forcing him to "shift for himself."⁸² These "shifts," Rossetti explains, "were numerous—assuredly more numerous than his shirts. He shifted lodgings among other things; and how he managed to keep a roof above his head was often a mystery to me."⁸³ Life and Life conjecture that North's father may have granted his son a small allowance in return for resuming his legal studies.⁸⁴ Instead of following through with his promised return to the law, North invested in a magazine, an act that may have provoked the July 25, 1851 revision North's father made in his will, completely disinheriting his only son.⁸⁵ After exhausting personal and familial funds with little success, both North and O'Brien looked to New York City for personal and professional redemption.

The Scandal in Bohemia

The subtle contradictions inherent in North's and O'Brien's Bohemian mythologies are in keeping with contemporary perceptions of the Bohemian artist as a liminal figure, potentially

⁸⁰ See Henry Vizetelly's comments quoted in Life and Life, Op. Cit. 80-1.

⁸¹ Life and Life, Op. Cit. 62.

⁸² Rossetti, Op. Cit. 166.

⁸³ Rossetti, Op. Cit. 167.

⁸⁴ Life and Life, Op. Cit. 78.

⁸⁵ Life and Life confirm that John North's July 25 1851 will disinherits both William and his sister Eliza, leaving the whole of his property to his second wife. *ibid.* 89.

threatening or liberating depending on the circumstances. Representing an alternative to bourgeois “middle class aspirations and mobility,” not bound by class or social convention, the American Bohemian inhabited a liminal space between the worker and the aristocrat, the old world and the new.⁸⁶ As a result, “artistic Bohemians were either seen as a threat to bourgeois values or as their purest expression.”⁸⁷ Although both authors embody this contradiction, the crucial differences in their representative strategies reveal two competing visions of male authorship at mid-century. North, on the one hand, appears to have been as invested as O’Brien in the radical Bohemian critique of bourgeois life—through his Republican philosophy—but his legacy was more closely bound to the Romantic cult of genius and noticeably sanitized of his bad boy behavior by his surviving friends. In the context of the controversy, he comes to embody the literary and scientific genius whose passion for women and art dictated the romantic tragedy of his life and death. Although the dramatic details of his suicide, which were well circulated, reveal a number of reasons for his suicidal ideation—poverty, professional failure, romantic disappointment and poetic idealism—North’s supporters deliver an even more romanticized version of his poetic genius in their case against O’Brien in “The Diamond Lens Controversy.”

O’Brien, on the other hand, is subject to a much harsher critique in the course of this controversy. As the artist “most likely to inspire comparisons to both the working-class loafer and the effeminate aristocratic dandy,” O’Brien epitomized the male artist whose questionable gender and class makes him a threat to the establishment.⁸⁸ His well-known pecuniary wants (and feast or famine lifestyle) made him the subject of much gossip and criticism. Although he

⁸⁶ Levin, Joanna. *Bohemia in America: 1858-1920*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. 30.

⁸⁷ Levin, Joanna. *Ibid.* 17.

⁸⁸ Levin, Joanna. *ibid.* 17.

made labor and class issues a personal matter—once assuming “a proletarianized stance” while picketing *Harper’s* for denying him a twenty-five dollar advance while wielding a sign stating ‘One of Harper’s authors. I am starving.’—he was also known for his tendency to indulge in high living, to seldom repay loans, and to pretend to be part of the ranks of aristocracy.⁸⁹ A contemporary, Thomas Gunn, collected a number of clippings on O’Brien in his diary, most of which characterized O’Brien in a negative light. In one article describing a saloon brawl between O’Brien and another journalist, the Irish author is portrayed as being both overly delicate and overly belligerent, starting fights with other men when he is not “man” enough to defend himself.⁹⁰ Another clipping features a satirical illustration of the Irish author as a faux Baron (with his protruding “Hibernian” nose) wearing a too-big crown, strutting in front of his laundry hanging up to dry.⁹¹

Although O’Brien’s own masculinity was consistently the subject of ribaldry and ridicule by his contemporaries, in his fiction and criticism, the Irish author often takes issues with the gender and sexuality of his fellow male authors and their fiction, paying particular attention to dangerous representations of “unmanliness” or “uber-manliness” in action and in text. He advocated for manly activities and masculine pursuits in his poems about bare-knuckle boxing (“The Prize Fight”) and the modern technological industry-like steam locomotion (“The Song of the Locomotive”); and wrote essays on outdoor sports as manly exercise. These poems also illuminate O’Brien’s attempts to devise a masculine style suitable for manly subjects. For example, “The Prize Fight”—which was first published in a November 1858 issue of *The*

⁸⁹ Ibid. 32-33.

⁹⁰ The clipping is titled “A Rumpus among Distinguished Journalists,” and it describes O’Brien drunkenly badgering another editor—a Mr. Wilkes—who violently assaults him, slapping him in the face several times with the aid of “the notorious California ruffians “Billy Mulligan and Charley Walsh” who held him down. Gunn, Thomas. Ibid. Vol. 9. 30.

⁹¹ Gunn, Thomas. Op. cit. Vol. 10. 38.

Saturday Press before being republished in *Harper's Monthly* the following month—uses dactyl tetrameter to effect a clipping pace, replicating the consistent blows of a boxing match.⁹² Each stanza opens and closes with the repeated refrain “hammer and tongs” to echo the sounds of each round of the match. Although the poem initially highlights the manly physiques of the boxers, their “erect and arching chest” and “sturdy muscular limb,” O’Brien’s satirical portrayals of these “heavily-jawed and beetle-browed” men with “Concave faces trampled in” transform them in to brutes as the men proceed to beat each other to a pulp, surrounded by a “bestial crowd.”⁹³

In his early criticism, O’Brien calls out unmanly literary styles like Donald Grant Mitchell’s too effeminate—“limpid, pellucid streams of thought, flowing in mid-air”—prose, criticizing the author’s portrayal of a widower’s “slippered grief,” preferring instead Hawthorne’s more manly “Analytic” treatment of “human sentiments”: “he [Hawthorne] would at once have thrown aside the scalpel, and grasped the subject with nervous, quivering hand, and, Milo-like, rent it asunder.”⁹⁴ Later, he satirized the effeminacy of the male shop attendant and the luxuriant materialist, commercial world these “counter-jumpers” came to represent in a series of essays and poems written for *Vanity Fair*: “Natural History: The Counter-Jumper,” “The Sybarites of the Shop,” and “Counter-Jumps. A Poemettina. After Walt Whitman.”⁹⁵ The latter poem parodies a passage from Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, which was then coming out in its newest (third) edition. Emphasizing the materialism and egotism of Whitman’s poetry, the

⁹² O’Brien, Fitz-James. “The Prize-Fight.” *Harper's Monthly Magazine*. (20 November 1858): 1.

⁹³ O’Brien, “The Prize Fight,” *Ibid.* 1.

⁹⁴ O’Brien, Fitz-James. “Our Young Authors—Mitchell.” *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*. 1.1. (1853): 74.

⁹⁵ O’Brien, Fitz-James. “Natural History: The Counter-Jumps.” *Vanity Fair* 1 (4 Feb. 1860): 84. “” “The Sybarites of the Shop.” *Vanity Fair* 1 (28 January 1860): 72. “” “Counter Jumps. A Poemettina—After Walt Whitman” *Vanity Fair*. (17 March 1860): 183. “” “The Sewing Bird.” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. 21 (Sept 1860): 518. “The Prize Fight” *HNMM* 18 (December 1858): 84-6.

caricature also targets homosexuality, according to Ruth L. Bohan, who argues that the counter-jumper was a stereotype “for men who were attracted to other men.”⁹⁶ Even Emerson becomes the subject of these parodies, which reduce the transcendentalist’s poetic mysticism to its basest element. O’Brien parodies Emerson’s poem “Brahma,” for example, substituting “the red slayer” for “the red drinker” who misconstrues “the Morphic Sphinx”—an allusion to Emerson’s cryptic poem “The Sphinx,” which might also double for a (trans) woman—but finally lacks virility—“the too, too tonic spunk.”⁹⁷ O’Brien’s mocking portrayal of Emerson’s Brahma reduces the transcendental seeker to a lascivious drunk.

The attacks on O’Brien’s authorship play on these class and gender stereotypes, which were linked to his identity as a Bohemian artist. One of the initial reports of the plagiarism, for example, characterizes O’Brien’s theft as a literary cannibalism, suggesting, “a good story is told of the way it feeds on dead men’s brains.”⁹⁸ As the charges escalate, O’Brien’s attackers become intent on not just proving the theft but demonstrating the superiority of North’s more pure expression of the narrative and on identifying the “injuries” done to the text by the unworthy plagiarist, conflating authors’ bodies and authors’ texts in a morbid reduction of Melville’s

⁹⁶ Bohan, Ruth L. “Whitman and the ‘Picture Makers.’” *Whitman Among the Bohemians*. Ed. Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2014. 132-154. 136.

⁹⁷ Emerson’s “Brahma” was published in the first issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1857): 48. O’Brien’s parody appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* a few weeks later. This may be one of the earliest representations of alcohol-induced impotency. O’Brien, Fitz-James. “Bacchus.” *Harper’s Weekly*. 14 November. 1857: 735. In nineteenth-century British and US literature, the sphinx was symbolic of a great mystery, but also came to represent the modern woman. Murray, Alex. “Enigmatic Intertexts: Decadence, De Quincey and the Sphinx. *Decadent Romanticism: 1780-1914*. Ed. Kostas Boyiopoulos and Mark Sandy. London: Routledge: 2015. 89-103. The first recorded use of “spunk” as seminal fluid occurs in 1890 according to the OED, though Jonathan Green dates it to the mid-nineteenth century, but the term spunk—which references spirit or pluck was also synonymous with “mettle” at that time. Mettle carried the double weight denoting a man’s virility but also implied his seminal fluid from the 17th century through the end of the nineteenth-century. “spunk, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 2 July 2017. “mettle, n. and adj.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 2 July 2017. “spunk, n.” *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*. <https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/plwrvavq>

⁹⁸ “Literary Intelligence: Who Wrote the Diamond Lens” *The New York Evening Post*. (February 20, 1858): 1.

challenge for the flesh-brush practice of authorship (in *Pierre*).⁹⁹ In the same article that prefaces the scandal with the image of literary cannibalism, the anonymous author charges O'Brien with adulterating the story with "some German diablerie" or his "Hibernian pretensions" and obscuring the beauty of the original text in his too "wrought up" narrative.¹⁰⁰ As the accusations and evidence reaches its climax to itemize the injuries wrought on the original narrative—now figured as a female body—the reports increasingly represent O'Brien as a deviant author whose criminal charges have been trumped up from mere theft to textual/sexual assault on the feminized text. Another of O'Brien's accusers comes forward as a "witness," testifying that he can identify the mutilated text of "The Diamond Lens" as "the waif on which Mr. O'Brien has laid violent hands."¹⁰¹ The resulting characterizations portray O'Brien not simply as a cannibal but as a deviant artist whose aggressive aesthetic practices of textual excess has mutilated the pristine feminine body of North's original text, a metaphor that insists on imagining a material form (a body and a text) for the immaterial idea.

In the process of explicating O'Brien's violent assaults on the original text, North's supporters reconstruct the original "ideal" text, reconstituting North's "waif" with their recollections to compliment the dead artist's romantic literary legacy. All the "touching, tender poetic beauty" of the story belongs to North, according to one anonymous accuser, who claims to discern parts of the "delicious little fancy called the 'Dew Drop' in 'The Diamond Lens.'"¹⁰² They also stress the double tragedy of North's life "as a young man of wonderful genius, who

⁹⁹ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; Or the Ambiguities*. 1852. Ed. William C. Spengemann. New York: Penguin, 1996.

¹⁰⁰ "Literary Intelligence: Who Wrote," op. cit. 1. Charles C.B. Seymour lays the charge of Hiberian pretensions in "The Diamond Lens Controversy." *The New York Times*. (March 5, 1858): 2.

¹⁰¹ "Literary Controversy." *American Publishers' and Circular and Literary Gazette*. (March 6, 1858): 111.

¹⁰² "The Diamond Lens Controversy," *ibid.* 2.

came to the country, and after struggling awhile with poverty and his hopes, committed suicide” only to have his one lost story “directly plagiarized” by O’Brien.¹⁰³ The double insult shows North losing not just his life but his art to a hack writer whose textual disfigurement of the “waif” is a double insult to the late author’s memory.

Finally, O’Brien’s accusers suggest the clear motive for his thieving and mutilating the text is revenge for North’s parody of the Irish author in his posthumously published autobiographical novel, *The Slave of the Lamp* (1855). In it North casts O’Brien as the prototypical Bohemian threat to bourgeois respectability. In the thinly disguised figure of Fitzgammon O’Bouncer, North satirizes O’Brien as a hack writer whose aristocratic pretensions, foppish demeanor, and social scheming fail to secure an advantageous marriage to a wealthy heiress. Instead—as the insulting pun in his pseudonym implies—the ham-headed O’Bouncer gets his just dessert. He is fired from his position at “P[utnam’s] Magazine” and is forced to marry a poor actress to support his “carpetbag” existence, characterizing O’Bouncer as a deviant male artist exploiting female bodies and texts to sustain his derelict existence.¹⁰⁴ O’Bouncer, of course, serves as a foil for the novel’s protagonist and North’s fictional analogue, Dudley Mondel, whose genius extends well beyond authorship to include a knack for technological invention. This difference is reinforced in the bucolic undertones of his English first name—Dudley, meaning “of the meadow”—which, when combined with the worldly overtones of the hidden anagram in his full name—“du le monde”—champion North/Mondel as the ideal Bohemian artist, an innocent yet worldly young masculine genius.

“The Diamond Lens,” O’Brien’s accusers imply, is finally, not simply a mutilation and a theft, but a spiteful burlesque of North and his fictional analogue Mondel in his characterization

¹⁰³ “Literary Intelligence: Who Wrote the Diamond Lens,” *ibid.* 1.

¹⁰⁴ North, William. *The Slave of the Lamp: A Posthumous Novel*. New York: H. Long and Brothers, 1855.

of Linley, whose name—meaning “flaxen”—is doubly suggestive of North who was fair-haired.¹⁰⁵ Mondel, like Linley, is a technological genius with refined artistic sensibilities. But where Mondel’s efforts are only met with success (which is appreciably measured against O’Bouncer’s failures), Linley’s scientific genius is finally revealed to be morally, financially, and aesthetically bankrupt. In his mocking portrayal of Mr. Linley’s microscopic search for ideal beauty, O’Brien highlights the most unappealing qualities of North’s fictional self. At his worst, Mondel is arguably North’s least appealing protagonist, according to *Life and Life*, who characterize him as “a vainglorious cad, who dismisses the former women in his life as ‘experiments,’ perverts his friends into tools of his destiny, and exploits anyone inclined to finance his hedonism, beginning with a father whom he detests.”¹⁰⁶

O’Brien’s characterization of Linley’s microscopic search for ideal beauty distills these more unfortunate qualities. In his characterization of Linley’s inspired amateur investigations, O’Brien ridicules North’s glorification of the untutored scientific genius. “North, like his characters,” *Life and Life* explain, “tend to dismiss academe as irrelevant to an author of genius and certainly a ‘gentleman.’” Like so many of North’s characters, Linley comes from a comfortably middle class family, possessing all the advantages of wealth and family connections, which he uses to establish himself as a microscopist in New York City. Thanks to a bequest by his “poor Aunt Agatha” Linley is set “to inherit a small fortune sufficient to place [him] above want.” But because his parents are “staid New England people, who insisted on the necessity of labor,” they press him to find a more “useful” profession, preferably in the “counting-house” of his uncle, Ethan Blake, a prosperous merchant in business in New York City. Declining to work

¹⁰⁵ William Rossetti describes North in *Some Reminiscences* as “a pale, rather fleshly young man, with bright eyes, a slightly high clear voice, and very pallid straight hair of a yellowish tinge.” *Quoted in Life and Life*, Op. Cit. 75.

¹⁰⁶ *Life and Life*, Op. Cit. 56.

in “trade,” Linley instead moves to the city in order to secretly study microscopy under the false pretense of going to medical school.

Linley also betrays the same lack of empathy and insatiable egotism present in North’s protagonists, whose “genius” always seems to validate their megalomaniacal pretensions. Such is the case, Life and Life note, with the protagonist of North’s “The Living Corpse,” who is “resigned to a factuality of desire and fulfillment that leaves him ‘contented.’”¹⁰⁷ Linley’s scientific and aesthetic aspirations also seem to justify his anti-social, thieving, murderous behavior. For in his pursuit of microscopy, Linley not only lies to his family about his intentions to study medicine, but also murders his only friend, Jules Simon, in order to conceal his theft of Simon’s diamond, a diamond which the Franco-Jewish peddler stole from a slave who was attempting to conceal/steal the diamond from the Brazilian diamond mine where they worked, respectively, as overseer and enslaved miner. The compounding of thefts place the luxury commodity within a global economy punctuated by the pervasive exploitation of human labor.¹⁰⁸ The cumulative thrust of the diamond’s tainted provenance, then, underscores the corruption and hypocrisy of Linley’s consumer-driven pursuits.

Ultimately, O’Brien structures the narrative as an anti-bildungsroman, inviting readers’ critical assessment of the reasons for these failures. Observing the progress of his monomaniacal passion for microscopic investigations, the reader comes to understand how the competing interests of art and consumer culture problematize Linley’s pursuit of the poetic ideal as an

¹⁰⁷ Life and Life, *ibid.* 68.

¹⁰⁸ The history of diamonds in Brazil reveals a complex commercial system enmeshed in larger geo-political market forces. According to Michael Coulson, in the eighteenth-century the Indian diamond industry began to flag as the preferred source of diamonds with the discovery of diamonds in Brazil and with South African diamond production beginning after the close of the American Civil War. By the 1850s, Ian Smilie notes, Brazil was a leading exporter of diamonds, producing almost 200,000 carats in the 1830s and 1840s. Coulson, Michael. *The History of Mining: The Events, Technology, and People involved in the industry that forged the modern world.* Harriman House Limited: 2012. 77. Smilie, Ian. *The Blood on the Stone: Greed, Corruption and War in the Global Diamond Trade.* New York, London: Anthem P, 2010. 30.

exercise in onanism rather than a poetic practice. The resulting queer masculine poetics burlesques the poetic principles and aesthetic practices of O'Brien's contemporaries, from North to Emerson to Poe.

Chapter 2: Queering the Highly Wrought Style in Thomas Bailey Aldrich's Short Fiction

Best known for his late-career editorship of the *Atlantic Monthly* (1881-1890), Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1907) established his reputation as a genteel poet with his first publication, *The Bells* (1855), a collection of *vers de société*—featuring church bells and pretty ladies—that met with a warm reception. Later that year he gained somewhat more literary fame with the much-reprinted sentimental ballad about the tender life and beautiful death of a cherubic little girl, *Baby Bell*, before turning to fiction with the serial publication of the sentimental novella, “Daisy’s Necklace and What Came of It,” appearing in the *Sunday Atlas* the following year.¹ These early works announce a decidedly feminine, sentimental, romantic, and at times, comic blueprint that Aldrich would maintain throughout his literary career. With few exceptions—notably his 1870 semi-autobiographical novel *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870), the coming-of-age work now recognized as an important precursor to Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)—the feminine themes, fantastic rhetoric, and comedic elements of his fiction and poetry have been largely discounted or else marshaled, rather paradoxically, in defense of his realism. For example, Charles E. Samuels, the only scholar to offer a book-length study of the author, noticeably downplays Aldrich’s sentimental rhetoric and romantic tendencies by praising the “unoffending sentimentality” and “purity” of his poetry and fiction.² Aldrich’s comic style,

¹ Greenslet, Ferris. “Aldrich in New York.” *Scribner’s Magazine*. 43 (January-June 1908): 609-622. 612.

² Samuels, Charles E. *Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1966. 61.

Samuels suggests, elevates his “realism” to an art form.³ Samuels, however, ultimately attempts to overcome these issues of contradicting style by categorizing Aldrich as neither romantic nor realist but “Classicist.”⁴ Despite these subtle distinctions, Aldrich remains curiously ensconced in the realist tradition through his longstanding associations with the *Atlantic Monthly* and for his ability to “make a reality more real than real life,” in the words of contemporary biographer Ferris Greenslet.⁵

Samuels’s assessment of Aldrich as “Classicist,” though, rightfully acknowledges the persistent strain of romantic idealism circulating in his texts, even if it does little to explain the significance of the feminine themes and gorgeous rhetoric in his fiction, or address his use of humor. It also leads Samuels to minimize the complexity of Aldrich’s short stories to one level (if any) of meaning since they are “all about romantic love but not in the swooning sense.”⁶ Aldrich’s fiction, however, pertains to far more than romantic love and his stylistic and comic choices are far from simple. The ornate rhetoric of his fiction taps into the verbose textual experiment that Dorri Beam investigates in her study of women’s highly wrought fiction. For Beam, the stylistic experiment of excess and ornament opened up space for female writers to express their transgressive desires and imagine alternative ontologies of gender that challenged the supremacy of masculinity over femininity.⁷ This interpretative framework, which ostensibly links textual ornament to feminine desire and social reform, cannot fully account for Aldrich’s

³ Samuels, *ibid.* Samuels cites Jewett’s praise of Aldrich’s ability to create “realism from the humorous point of view” in coming to this assertion (quoted on 76).

⁴ Samuels, *ibid.* 63.

⁵ Greenslet, Ferris. *The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, and The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1908. 12.

⁶ Samuels, *op cit.* 61.

⁷ Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009.

fiction or its comic tone. Although his highly wrought style remains deeply indebted to the feminine form, its thematic significance extends to a broader structure of aesthetic and social concerns rooted in masculine and queer, more than feminine, desires. Much of his fiction, in fact, addresses the masculine concerns of bachelor culture and homosocial networks through the feminized discourse of the highly wrought style. As a result, Aldrich's fiction exhibits many of the same transgressive desires as the women in Beam's study, even as his comic tone sometimes works to undermine its radical potential. His choice in representing bachelors and men's clubs reflects nineteenth-century cultural preoccupations with (and anxiety about) unmarried men as "threshold figures" who crossed boundaries between bourgeois domesticity and bachelor men's sporting cultures.⁸ Since bachelors maintained an "ambiguous proximity" to the domestic world, they were equally reckoned as its antithesis and its epitome and thus occupied a "vexed cultural position" for their perceived threat to bourgeois marriage.⁹ Through their highly wrought discourse, Aldrich's bachelors inhabit this ambiguous space and create, however tenuously, a temporary space in which to explore alternative masculinities and sexualities through a queer masculine poetics of textual excess.

The two stories that concern this chapter, "Marjorie Daw" and "Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski," first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1873 before being published as part of the collection, *Marjorie Daw and Other People*, later that same year, a shrewd business tactic Aldrich employed with many of his *Atlantic* publications.¹⁰ With its winking nod to realism in the coy substitution of *People* for *Stories*, the collection features sentimental and domestic

⁸ Snyder, Katherine V. *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁹ Snyder, *ibid.* 19.

¹⁰ Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. *Marjorie Daw and Other People*. Boston: J.R. Osgood and Co., 1873. All in-text parenthetical citations for the two stories refer to this edition unless otherwise stated.

character sketches about exceptional or eccentric women and lovesick or foolish men.

“Marjorie” and “Mademoiselle,” in fact, contain both, but as each title suggests, the stories spotlight the exceptional woman, making feminine subjects and feminized rhetoric the ostensible focus of the narratives. However, as each story progresses, readers quickly discover that the narratives pertain more to the admiring men who become enamored with Marjorie and the Mademoiselle, respectively, than the exceptional women themselves. These lovesick bachelors, in fact, both frame and narrate the stories, using the highly wrought style to showcase the erotic and exotic natures of the exceptional women. Each story concludes with the comic revelation that these exceptional women are not really women at all. Instead, they are exposed as fictions, fabricated from the fervid imaginations of the lovelorn bachelors. The comic unveiling thus exposes the highly wrought nature of the masculine imagination while undermining its radical potential as the stories return to order and restraint in their respective resolutions.

As specimens of men’s highly wrought fiction, the stories demonstrate many of the key features of the coopted feminine style. Though formed of feminine rhetoric and focusing on feminine subjects, these stories ultimately are not about women at all. Rather, they concern the lives of bachelors and their unruly highly wrought masculine imaginations. Similar to the other highly wrought fictions in this study, they feature the misadventures of bachelors in search of romantic love. The stories are structured around one of the key mythos of men’s florid writing: Pygmalion, Ovid’s sculptor, fated to fall in love with his sculpture, Galatea, who is later brought to life by Aphrodite as a reward for his constancy. Aldrich’s Pygmalions emerge in the text as gentleman-bachelors living out the heady (if liminal) days of their bachelorhood gallivanting around New York City in search of good male companionship and pretty ladies. His Galateas, true to Ovid’s myth, spring forth from their bachelor imaginations, the perfect women to trap

them in a marriage plot. But unlike her mythical counterparts, Aldrich's Galatea-figures are not granted "real" life at the conclusion of the stories, but instead remain fictions, much to the chagrin of their would-be suitors and the delight of contemporary readers and critics who were humored by such unexpected plot twists and charmed by the metafictional female creations.

This comic undoing of both myth and marriage plot demonstrates most pointedly how Aldrich's fiction fits into, and departs from, the shared project of men's and women's highly wrought fiction. His gendered interest in desire and the imagination closely resembles that of contemporary women writers. Indeed, his fiction celebrates the fervid masculine imagination as much as it relishes the homosocial networks of urban bachelor culture. Its feminine discourse opens a liminal space, however briefly, for homosocial, queer, and homosexual desires to flourish. It appears, most pointedly around the exotic and erotic descriptions of the Galatea-figures flitting through the text. However, the comic revelations that punctuate each story temper its radical possibilities. His highly wrought fiction ultimately forecloses on its transformative potential and contains its transgressing impulses, converting the myth into a comedic parable about misplaced (male) romantic desire, and the dangers of homosocial desire and the masculine imagination. But even amidst this ultimate foreclosure, Aldrich's fiction nevertheless establishes a textual space for men's queer desires to exist and even thrive, however briefly.

I. Aldrich's Galateas: Gender, Politics and the Visual Culture of Sensual Women

Since Aldrich ostensibly makes women the central figures of each story with his titular focus on the Galatea-figures of Marjorie and Olympe, I begin this study with these women. His

initial treatment of these two specimens of ideal womanhood reinvests in the frequent pairing of women as classically light and dark foils of one another, deeply ingrained in the masculine tradition of the American Romance of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and, later, James.¹¹ Mirroring the conventions of these authors, Aldrich situates the fair-haired New England-born Marjorie in a rural retreat while staging the darker-toned and foreign-born Olympe in a public, urban, cosmopolitan setting. Marjorie materializes on the piazza of a secluded beach house amidst a genteel backdrop of “high-bred” architecture bordered by “an obsequious retinue of fringed elms and oaks and weeping willows, a curious selection for a beach retreat called “The Pines” where Edward “Ned” Delany is spending the hot months of the summer with his ailing father (12-13). Olympe, in contrast, glides into the text as “a most daring and startling gymnaste,” the star of a popular trapeze act in the New York City variety theatre scene frequently visited by Ralph Van Twiller (247-8).

Reinforcing this dark-light contrast, Aldrich circumscribes both heroines within specific national narratives. He grounds Marjorie within a colonial American past signaled by her patriotic arboreal retinue of oak and elm trees.¹² A descendent of a wealthy, long-standing American family, according to Ned, Marjorie enjoys a suitably tragic backstory and a thoroughly

¹¹ According to Leslie Fiedler, the “Fair Maiden and Dark Lady” trope typically stands for the “conventional moral color-scheme” of “American innocence and European experience” in the works of Hawthorne, Melville, and especially James, who adds significant richness to the character archetypes. Fiedler is quick to note that Hawthorne only “tentatively approaches the them; it is not until Henry James that the Dark Lady-Fair Girl archetype and the myth of the American in Europe are fused into a rich and unified subject” (302). Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960.

¹² Oak and Elm trees have specific historical significance to the colonial development of the New World before and after the American Revolution. The oak tree, for one, became a symbol of American patriotism during the Revolution, its symbolism derived from Connecticut’s Charter Oak tree, the famed tree in which defiant colonists hid an important Royal Charter. The American elm tree has a similar history and cultural significance. Throughout the nineteenth-century elms were a popular feature of cities and town squares along the eastern United States, and written about by the likes of Henry David Thoreau and Oliver Wendell Holmes. They were also considered to be sacred “council” and “friendship” trees for Native Americans before colonization. Penn’s Elm is the famous site of Penn’s “friendship” treaty with the Lenape tribe. Weeping willows, of course, have an array of symbolisms—often associated with water, they can express grief, loss, mortality, & immortality.

Anglo-American pedigree of historic national importance: a mother dead, along with an older brother lost in the October 1864 Battle of Fair Oaks, a particularly bitter and bloody Union loss late in the war. The demure heiress now lives with her father, an ex-colonel and current banker. In contrast, Olympe, true to her Dark Lady archetype, comes from obscurity with a suggestively foreign title, leaving Van Twiller to speculate on her possible origins given her “queer”—apparently multinational—name (249). “Olympe is French, and Zabriski is Polish,” Van Twiller muses, concluding, however, that the peculiar composite must be “her *nom de guerre*, of course; her real name is probably Sarah Jones” (249). On the surface, Van Twiller’s innocent musings about the queerness of her name registers a common practice with American stage performers like Susan Adeline Stewart, who built a successful career as Leona Dare, the racially and ethnically ambiguous aerial acrobat who billed herself alternately as the “Queen of Antilles” and the “Pride of Madrid.”¹³ It also signals her radical—and potentially threatening—difference as not just simply foreign, but “other,” as Van Twiller begins to wrestle with his simultaneous attraction to and revulsion of that indefinable difference.

The national and historic substance of this light/dark dichotomy reflects the more divisive late-Reconstruction era politics, revealing Aldrich’s conflicted, but ultimately more conservative, social and political attitudes on issues of immigration, the Reconstruction, and the overall balance of power in the United States after the Civil War. Since the story appears at the peak of President Ulysses S. Grant’s power—who was just beginning his second term in office before late-Reconstruction strife and the panic of 1873 drove the country into an extended depression leading to the end of Reconstruction and Republican power—Mr. Daw’s Union veteran status, rank, and banking acumen positions him in an emerging class of wealthy and powerful U.S.

¹³ Leona Dare (1854/55-1922). Her specialty act was the “iron jaw,” an aerial feat in which she held herself or other artists with her mouth only.

citizens and reflects Aldrich's Republican optimism and northeastern preference for banking and business over agriculture. His initial characterization of Olympe as both foreign and potentially fraudulent, in contrast, puts a face to the massive European immigration already ongoing in the 1870s, and points to Aldrich's more conservative attitudes about immigration. Aldrich voices these prejudices more clearly and deliberately in his 1892 anti-immigration poem, "Unguarded Gates."¹⁴ The poem, which may have been devised as a response to Emma Lazarus's 1883 pro-immigration ode—"The New Colossus," depicting Liberty as the "mother of exiles"—represents a different version of Liberty as the "white goddess," who must safeguard the "unguarded gates" with "hand of steel" in order to prevent the "wild motley throng" (of mostly East Asian and Eastern European immigrants) from entering the country.

The xenophobic social conservatism Aldrich expresses in the poem—as well as in the stories—interestingly, echoes the problematic "privileging of gender over racial politics" Dorri Beam identifies in women's highly wrought fiction, marking one of the more troubling intersections between the shared project of men and women's highly wrought fiction.¹⁵ Following the criticism of Yu-Fang Cho, Beam notes, for example, the intermingling subversive and conservative elements in Ann Stephens's highly wrought novels that promotes white middle-class ideals of femininity as universal.¹⁶ Aldrich also promotes a white-middle class ideal of femininity as universal in his construction of the relative desirability of his dark and light ladies. Marjorie, who is fair and genteel and thoroughly American, easily trumps Olympe with her

¹⁴ Aldrich, T.B. "Unguarded Gates." (1892) *Unguarded Gates and Other Poems*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1894.

¹⁵ Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, Fantasy*. Op. cit. 61-2, 74. David Blight's history of the Reconstruction also underscores how racial reconciliation proved more daunting than sectional reconciliation given the prolonged history of sexual abuse (and lynching and racism) of enslaved African Americans. Blight, David. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. 254.

¹⁶ Beam, *ibid.* 61-2.

ambiguous status as something “other.” Moreover, Aldrich reinforces this bias in the comic twists that reveal Marjorie as purely fictional—and therefore unassailable in her perfection—while exposing Olympe as only partially fictional, but fully fraudulent: *she* is exposed as a *he* in the dramatic conclusion of “Mademoiselle,” the homophobic implications of which will be explored more fully in subsequent sections.

Despite these differences in nationality and social standing, both women share the remarkable particulars of their slender physique and graceful carriage, which Aldrich draws from the visual culture of sensual women in the popular imagination in equally troubling terms: Aldrich aligns both women with the classical forms associated with Greek mythology, forming a tableau of the popular art form of “ideal sculptures”—life-sized marble sculptures featuring female subjects from history & mythology—that dominated the cultural landscape of mid-nineteenth century America.¹⁷ These ideal sculptures, according to Joy Kasson, were freighted with nineteenth-century anxieties about “the meaning of women’s nature and about the survival of the family,” often playing on the same light/dark lady themes of American literature.¹⁸ While the more athletically inclined Olympe appears “a lithe, radiant shape out of the Grecian mythology, [...] gleaming through the air like a slender gilt arrow,” Marjorie occupies half her day in more mythically genteel pastimes, “with some mysterious Penelope web of embroidery in her hand, or a book” or swinging in a hammock “like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon” (248, 13-4). Both appear more as objects than women: Marjorie, the hammock-swinging “pond-lily,” has the appearance of “a Dresden china shepherdess,” a popular decorative art then in mass production for middle-class consumption; whereas the “slender gilt arrow” that is Olympe barely

¹⁷ Kasson, Joy. *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

¹⁸ Kasson, *Ibid.* 4.

materializes on stage, “melting from one graceful posture into another, like the dissolving figures thrown from a stereopticon” (14, 248). With these cursory descriptions, Aldrich reduces the former to mere ornament—rigidly unchanging—while framing the latter in ambiguously trans/sexual and vaguely threatening (if also exciting) terms: her melting/dissolving figure is both sexually suggestive and explicitly transitional in its liquid movements; she is also weaponized, after a manner, as a “slender gilt arrow,” yet clearly objectified as a spectacle of middle-class entertainment. The undulating bodies of both women ultimately reinforce the male, consumptive gaze.

As a female aerial artist, Olympe, in particular, invites a specific type of spectatorship since female acrobats, like the above mentioned Dare, began reaching celebrity status for the first time in the late 1860s and by the 1870s were fixtures in the NYC variety theatre scene, touring, periodically, in most major U.S. and European cities.¹⁹ Female aerial acrobats, in particular, provided theatre managers an act that could cater to male audiences interested in ogling the female body without ruffling the moral feathers of civil authorities who might otherwise censor the display of women’s bodies.²⁰ At the same time, professional female acrobats drew crowds that included some respectable middle and upper class women interested in spectacles of aerial flight. Public fascination with aerial arts, according to Peta Tait, had to do with power and empire, scientific and spiritual mastery of the air, and Darwinian evolution.²¹ For example, when Dare made headlines in 1872 for her hot-air balloon “iron-jaw” act, lifting her husband Thomas Dare (r.n. Thomas Hall) using only the power of her mouth, the act caused considerable

¹⁹ Tait, Peta. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. London & New York: Routledge, 2005. 16.

²⁰ Rodgers, Gillian. *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 45.

²¹ Tait, *ibid.* 11-13.

sensation. It illustrated Dare's defiance of the perceived natural order with her strength and power over the male body; "accompanying its sexual innuendo of male surrender was an impression of predatory abduction and disappearance fueled by masculine fears of being overpowered by increasing female strength."²² Newspaper accounts of aerial exhibitions reflect a twinned fear and fascination of female acrobats in their emphasis on paradoxical displays of innocence and experience joined in the delicacy, dexterity, and strength of the female body.²³

Importantly, Aldrich's depiction of Olympe mimics such accounts, registering the same fascination with female athleticism and anxiety for all its potential threats. His initial descriptions of Olympe reflect some of the more positive portrayals in the media in his expression of awe for her "daring" and "startling" feats and admiration of her "wondrous dexterity and pliant strength"; he is careful to note that she performs these feats "with a beauty and a grace of movement that gave her audacious performance almost an air of prudery," giving her absolution for the "unpardonable things" she does with her body (248). However, as Van Twiller's obsession grows, this aura of decorum and "prudery" dissolves and she quickly becomes a threatening, even demonic, figure. Invoking imagery of the ancient underworld, the narrator describes Van Twiller's descent into a feminine hell, as "the soft silk threads become iron chains, and the pleasant avenues Avernus" (251). Readers soon learn the nature of Van Twiller's silken-threaded hell. Not only has he attended every single performance for two weeks, auto-piloting to the theatre night after night, his pleasure at watching her perform has transformed into pain and fear for her safety. He imagines all sorts of terrible accidents that might befall the beauty: "she might slip from that swinging bar" or "one of the thin cords supporting it might snap, and let her go headlong from the dizzy height" (251). Finally, he

²² Tait, *ibid.* 46.

²³ Tait, *ibid.* 16.

would imagine her dead, “lying a glittering, palpitating heap at the foot-lights, with no color in her lips!” (251). Fear *for* her safety eventually becomes fear *of* his own “weakness” and humiliation that he has been unable to “conquer it” (255). Van Twiller, in short, becomes utterly emasculated by his passion for a powerful woman.

And in his weakness, Van Twiller becomes emblematic of all the masculine anxiety about male surrender to female strength ascribed to acts like Dare’s “iron jaw” performance. Olympe, in turn, comes to embody the predatory figure of threatening female power. He awakens one morning to find on his bedroom wall “an aggressive poster with MADEMOISELLE OLYMPE ZABRIKI on it in letters at least a foot high,” appearing “as if by necromancy” (253-4). Every night he has the same “harrowing dream” that is “singularly adapted to shattering the nerves of a man like Van Twiller” (256). In it, he is “seated at the theatre (with all the members of Our Club in the parquette), watching Mademoiselle Olympe as usual, when suddenly that young lady would launch herself desperately from the trapeze and come flying through the air like a firebrand hurled at his private box” (256). The imagery in this nightmare, charged with the dual threats of physical violence and social humiliation, is also strongly suggestive of sexual violation. As a “firebrand” threatening entry into Van Twiller’s “private box,” Olympe no longer appears in the graceful, though clearly phallic and vaguely threatening, form of the “slender gilt arrow”; rather, she becomes a menacing, emasculating force on multiple levels, as an incendiary projectile threatening bodily harm and as a subversive troublemaker threatening gender norms as well as social conventions connected to class and race. Though violent and threatening, the moment is also designed to be humorous, at the expense of Van Twiller and his unruly passion for the racial, socioeconomic, and as is later revealed, trans/sexual “other.”

In contrast, Marjorie appears, at least superficially, as non-threatening and demure as Olympe is inflammatory and dangerous. Saturated in romantic and sentimental discourse, Marjorie is a “nice sort of girl,” according to Ned, manicured in dress and meticulous in decorum—“prim”—and appropriately shy in her shrinking, “violet-like,” nature (20). Lacking dimensionality, her most persistent activity—hammock swinging—is also her most defining feature. When Ned and Jack aren’t referring to her as the “girl in the hammock” they seem preoccupied with thinking about and describing her hammock activities, whether they consist of sitting, swinging, reading, or just looking sweet [in her hammock]; in fact, the image becomes so strongly associated with the story, a picture of Marjorie swinging in her hammock appears as the frontispiece for later editions of the monograph collection.²⁴ At face value, the sentimental trope signals her girlish innocence, but it may also reference the subversive rhetoric of contemporary highly wrought women writers who embraced the trope as an expression of hidden desires for women’s sexual freedom. The hammock-swinging temptresses in Rose Terry Cooke’s “In the Hammock” and Elizabeth Stoddard’s “Mercedes,” published in *The Galaxy* (1866) and the *Atlantic Monthly* (1858), respectively, in many ways, supersede the exoticism and eroticism of Olympe as a female acrobat.²⁵ Both poems feature sultry, subaltern women suggestively swinging in their hammocks. The title character in Stoddard’s “Mercedes,” for example, appears as a seductress in the jealous eyes of her would-be lover, who narrates the dramatic monologue to its tragic conclusion when he kills her lover: she spends her days swinging in a hammock in a resplendent courtyard, surrounded by the “slender shadows” cast by tropical “palm-trees,” while

²⁴ There are at least nine direct references linking her to the hammock throughout the story.

²⁵ Stoddard, Elizabeth. “Mercedes.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. 1.7 (May 1858): 871. [Cooke], Rose Terry. “In the Hammock.” *The Galaxy*. (May 15, 1866): 106.

“fountain falls with silver sound.”²⁶ The hammock-swinging temptress in Cooke’s “In the Hammock,” in contrast, openly acknowledges her numerous lovers as she gleefully calls on her friend, “Tita,” to continue to swing her in the hammock, a repetitive, undulating act that Paula Bennett and others interpret as an empowering metaphor for masturbation and female homo/sexual desire.²⁷

Marjorie’s hammock-swinging activities, though, run counter to these empowering images since all her exertions, but especially these genteel leisured pursuits, revolve around masculine, rather than feminine, pleasure. When not swinging in her hammock, she devotes her attentions to the every need of her father or collecting flowers for her many would-be suitors. At every instance, Aldrich underscores the unreality of such a vision of femininity. She has the appearance of “some lovely phantom that had sprung into existences out of the smoke-wreaths” (24). “If she had melted into air, like the statue of Galatea in the play,” Ned finally confides in a particularly coy moment of foreshadowing, “I should have been more sorry than surprised” (24).²⁸ Accordingly, Marjorie figures as a heterosexual surrogate for the homosexual passion circulating in this bachelor culture: she is the heterosexual glue that dispels the homosexual bonds of their homosocial network. Moreover, the double allusion in this passage—first to the Pygmalion myth itself with the direct reference to Galatea and second to the popular satire undoing that myth by English humorist W.S. Gilbert—points to Aldrich’s broader interest in satirizing the developing visual culture of spectacle as well as contemporary conventions of ideal

²⁶ Stoddard, *ibid.* 871.

²⁷ Bennett, Paula. “‘Pomegranate-Flowers’: The Phantasmic Productions of Late-Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Women Poets.” *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourse of Autoeroticism*. Ed. Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario II. New York: Routledge, 1995: 189-213. 201.

²⁸ This direct reference to Galatea represents one of the few revisions Aldrich made to the original manuscript published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, which refers only to “that lady in the play” without identifying what lady or what play.

womanhood.²⁹ Like Gilbert's other "fairy" plays, *Pygmalion and Galatea* burlesques the idealism of the original Ovid myth by portraying its central character, Pygmalion, as a vulgar, selfish prig. As a result, Galatea chooses to forsake living as a human and rematerializes into her statue-form at the conclusion of the play. Ned's reference to her melting again, in fact, is a direct reference to the elaborate special effect of "The Wonderful Optical Illusion of the DISSOLVING STATUE" invented (and vigorously advertised) for Gilbert's production of the play.³⁰

By making such a conspicuous allusion to the Gilbert satire, Aldrich signals his shared interest in satirizing the conventional norms of ideal feminine beauty embodied in Marjorie (and to a lesser degree, Olympe). Such idealized depictions of female devotion to masculine pleasure, Aldrich seems to insist throughout the story, are so far from reality that they underscore her status as a fiction. Indeed, from Ned's initial description of her as a Dresden china shepherdess to the above allusion to Gilbert's dissolving statue—Aldrich broadcasts her thinghood, which he repeatedly invites readers to witness and acknowledge. Even her name, which Aldrich blatantly borrows from the popular English nursery rhyme "See Saw, Margery Daw," announces her fictional status and her potential sexual subversion for readers more familiar with the bawdier version of the nursery rhyme.³¹ In fact, Ned invites Jack (and by extension, the reader) to perform this fiction with a challenge to repeat her name over and over again, "half a dozen times" (20). The vocal effect of this repetition transforms "Marjorie Daw" into "Marjorie Doll," yet another babyish signifier of her thingness. Marjorie, unlike her hammock swinging counterparts, utterly lacks agency in her performance of femininity.

²⁹ Gilbert's play debuted in the London Haymarket Theatre in 1871 and in Wallack's Theatre in New York in 1872.

³⁰ Stedman, Jane W. *W.S. Gilbert: A Classic Victorian and His Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 97.

³¹ The rhyme is meant to accompany a child's "seesaw" ride and there are at least two well-known versions, one bawdy, the other relatively chaste. The latter mostly chastises a boy named Jack for being a slow worker while the former makes use of the term "daw," meaning (at its best) a "lazy person," or (at its worst) an untidy slut or slattern, essentially representing the modern phenomenon known as "slut shaming."

The acute infantilization of Marjorie in these passages points to the limits of Aldrich's understanding of or appreciation for the feminine imagination and female sexual desire, a pattern which Aldrich established early in his literary career when he forged his reputation on a series of poems featuring beautiful, cherubic—often dead or dying—little girls. As mentioned above, Aldrich's first volume of poetry, delicately titled, *The Bells* (1855), earned the admiration of writers and critics, including Walt Whitman, who told Aldrich—much to his embarrassment, according to contemporary accounts—"I like your tinkles: I like them very well."³² Shortly thereafter, he gained significantly more recognition with the publication of the ballad of "Babie Bell" (1855), the popularity of which caught the attention of N.P. Willis, who reprinted it in his *Home Journal* and helped Aldrich secure a position as junior literary critic at *The Evening Mirror*, thus ensuring his literary success.³³ That Willis was more interested in helping the literary career of a relative stranger, a young man of nineteen with almost no experience—and at a moment, literary historians now know, when he actively sought to thwart the increasingly successful literary career of his own sister, Sarah Payson Willis Parton, better known as Fanny Fern—speaks to the prevalence of sexist publishing practices predicated on limiting, excluding, or exploiting women writers. That contemporary critics attempted to distinguish Aldrich as a distinctly realist writer—in spite of the volumes of sentimental, domestic, and highly wrought fiction and poetry he persisted in producing—speaks to how much gender complicated (and still complicates) the perception and reception of genre and style, a topic I address in more detail in subsequent sections.

³² Quoted in Samuels, op. cit. 37. Whitman's teasing admiration is also vaguely emasculating in its contrasting associations with tinkles as delicate, feminized sounds.

³³ Samuels, *ibid.* 35-6.

There is, however, an important difference between Aldrich's early sentimental poems and his later highly wrought fiction: his fiction lacks the apparent sincerity of his early sentimental verse because of his deliberate comic framing. Throughout both stories—indeed, throughout almost all of his fiction—Aldrich subjugates his feminine discourse with humor, most explicitly with the “comic twists” that conclude so many of his short stories. “Marjorie” and “Mademoiselle” close with a dramatic unveiling of the truth behind the seeming perfections of Marjorie and Olympe: these impossibly lithe women are not real (or really women). Though we may be tempted to congratulate Aldrich for dismantling the unattainable mythos of ideal womanhood, the comic twists that close “Marjorie” and “Mademoiselle” not only thoroughly dismantle the Galatea myth, they effectively eliminate all female characters from the narratives, bringing Aldrich's burlesque of the feminine ideal full circle. At the close of “Marjorie,” Ned confesses that Marjorie is a product of his imagination, a fantasy he created to entertain his ailing friend, Jack Fleming. In his final letter to Jack, Ned confesses his deception, announcing in a singsong fashion deeply reminiscent of nursery rhymes, “there is n't any piazza, there is n't any hammock—there is n't any Marjorie Daw!” (54). Following a similar formula in “Mademoiselle,” Olympe makes a similar confession to Van Twiller in a polite, but matter-of-fact, note thanking him for his recent generosity for the rather extravagant gift of a diamond bracelet. Filled with all manner of spelling, syntax and grammar errors typical of a non-native (or uneducated) English speaker, Olympe explains how “The Mademoiselle Zabriski dodg is about Plaid out. my beard is getting to much for me. i shall have to grow a mustash and take to some other line of busyness,” signing the note with *his* name, “CHARLES MONTMORENCI WALTERS” (261).

As in the Gilbert play, both women ultimately dissolve on the page with the revelation of each hoax, one, a seemingly innocent diversion between two trusting friends—Ned and Jack—the other, tapping into the more sinister practice of gender trickery perpetrated on Van Twiller and the public-at-large by male acrobats (and their theatre managers) eager to capitalize on the recent fad for fantastic feats of female athleticism. What remains in their absence is the subject of the following sections, which explores the homoerotic tensions incubating in Aldrich's humorous portrait of bachelor culture in the Gilded Age and the problematic reception of his work as realist rather than sentimental, romantic, or highly wrought. The homoerotic tensions within his fiction—which fluctuate between benign homosocial desire and full-scale homosexual panic—form one of the cornerstones of Aldrich's complicated and conflicted use of the highly wrought style. Although the body of his work speaks to his obvious affinity for feminized discourse, his comic use (or abuse) of the style demonstrates a need to create distance between its feminine discourse and his integrity as a male author.

Aldrich's Pygmalions: Gender, Politics, and Bachelor Culture

With all the narrative focus on the two Galatea-figures, it is easy to forget that the more significant target of both Ovid's myth and Aldrich's two stories is not Galatea but Pygmalion, the narcissistic artist who falls in love with his own creation and vows celibacy rather than partner with any human woman who might fall below his impossible standards. Once Olympe and Marjorie are exposed as fictions, Aldrich's real objective comes into crystal focus: his primary interest resides not in women but in men, or more specifically, in bachelors. Almost all of the "real" characters in these stories are young, unmarried men. And indeed, both acts of

(gender) trickery are perpetrated by men, for men, and sometimes even at the behest of other men.³⁴ Marjorie Daw, for example, springs forth from the mutual correspondence between two “intimate” bachelors, the ailing John “Jack” Flemming and his well-meaning friend, Edward “Ned” Delaney. Marjorie is the product, Ned confesses in the final lines of the story, of his playful imagination, created out of an earnest desire to “make a little romance” for his sick friend (54). Their correspondence, moreover, is initiated by Jack’s concerned doctor whose letter opens the story and directs the course of events with a plea to Ned, as Jack’s “fidus Achates”—a classical reference identifying him as a close friend—to divert the sick patient with entertaining stories (9).

This letter sets the comic tone of the story with its humorous portrait of the irritable, sick patient who is laid up with a broken fibula. Jack, Dr. Dillard explains, has already chased away a well-meaning sister who came to nurse him and is currently amusing himself by lobbing volumes of Balzac at his servant, Watkins, and by being generally disagreeable. Fearing Jack may succumb to an “inflammation of the fibula,” Dr. Dillard hopes Ned might “write to him frequently, distract his mind, cheer him up, and prevent him from becoming a confirmed case of melancholia” (9). Importantly, Dr. Dillard’s letter not only initiates the story with the pretext for Jack and Ned’s increasingly heated correspondence, it sets the stage for the homoerotic subtexts of the story with the first of several allusions to homosocial intimacy that borders on homosexual desire. Classical allusions to Greek mythology, particularly male homosocial friendships like Aeneas and Achates, according to James Gifford, was a common signifier of homosexual

³⁴ The only exceptions are “Old” Dr. Dillon, who opens “Marjorie Daw” with his epistolary plea to Ned and the pseudo-presences of Jack’s sister and of Van Twiller’s mother in “Mademoiselle Olympe”; neither woman actually appears in the narrative proper. Dr. Dillon only mentions Jack’s sister in passing to explain how she was ousted from Jack’s sick room. Dame Van Twiller’s actions are relayed second-hand: she’s said to have suddenly appeared in NYC to discourage her son’s romantic pursuit of Olympe (a la Austen’s Lady Catherine de Bourg) when a rumor of the infatuation reaches her.

intimacy for nineteenth-century readers.³⁵ It is among the first of many suggestive references to homosexual desire that Gifford, Axel Nissen, and others have identified as part of a broadening sphere of homosocial and homosexual men's culture; both Nissen and Gifford, moreover, classify "Marjorie Daw" as part of a growing body of nineteenth-century male romantic friendship literature.³⁶

These initial homoerotic subtexts position Aldrich's stories within the shared project of men's and women's highly wrought fiction that celebrates the transformative potential of homosocial friendships and homo/sexual desire. Much like the hammock-swinging narrator in Rose Terry Cooke's "In the Hammock," who swings to a sexual climax with the aid of her companion, Tita, Ned and Jack write themselves into a masturbatory moment with their mutual creation/appreciation of Marjorie. Their correspondence serves as a safe space for them to nurture and cultivate their highly wrought imaginations. The initial exchange between Ned and Jack, according to Gifford, sets the stage "for a knowing complicity, a conscious mutual-masturbatory exercise."³⁷ In it, Ned amply demonstrates his ability to describe and romanticize even as he makes outward professions at having no literary skills. "I wish I were a novelist," Ned proclaims, after describing a procession of increasingly erotic character studies of women—"sea-goddesses" with "raven and blonde manes" and "Aphrodite in morning wrapper, in evening costume, and in her prettiest bathing suit"—before introducing Marjorie in her hammock," the agreed upon object of their mutual-masturbation exercise (12). For Jack, who feels entombed by his present handicap—a broken leg, deeply symbolic of castration—the letter is a "godsend"

³⁵ Gifford, James. *Dayneford's Library: American Homosexual Writing, 1900-1913*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1996. 25.

³⁶ Gifford, *ibid.* 25. Nissen, Axel. *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

³⁷ Gifford, *ibid.* 25.

(15). It raises his spirits considerably and seems to bring them to a more intimate understanding of each other. “I did n’t suppose you had so much sentimental furniture in your upper story,” Jack confesses, “It shows how one may be familiar for years with the reception-room of his neighbor, and never suspect what is directly under his mansard” (17).³⁸

The intimacy of this metaphor indicates that the two have reached a new awareness now that Jack has been ushered into Ned’s sentimentally furnished “upper story.” It also stages homosexuality “as the ‘unsuspected’ drive under Ned’s mansard/man’s hard,” according to Gifford, and broadcasts “an unspoken gay understanding as the real connective tissue between the two,” as friends, “who on one level, at least, engage in the mutual reverie of masturbation.”³⁹ The mutual reverie, more importantly, is a wildly effective treatment for Jack, first “consol[ing]” then “curing” him of all his ailments.⁴⁰ Their colorful exchange offers him the much needed-transcendence of bodily pain and emotional distress from his present predicament. Importantly, this mutual reverie of masturbation also offers Ned a much-needed break from the emotional isolation of “The Pines,” the aptly named beach retreat where Ned is visiting his aging (and ailing) father. Subject to a variety of coded meanings, “The Pines” works as a verb, noun and anagram, all of which point to Ned’s deeply repressed homosexual desire for Jack. As a verb—to pine—it implies personal heartache and sexual longing, perhaps indicating the secret desires Ned shares for Jack; as a noun—a pine tree—it is visually suggestive of an erection; rearranged as an anagram it reads as “The Penis,” more explicitly suggesting male physical arousal and

³⁸ Aldrich’s use of the term “story” over “storey” may be another deliberate wink at his metafictional hoax, although “story” has the dual meaning of tale and building level in the Standard American English of the twentieth century. Current British English maintains the distinction between story and storey. In the nineteenth-century, these distinctions were still in the process of solidifying.

³⁹ Gifford, op. cit. 26.

⁴⁰ This “orgasm cure” may also reference the nineteenth-century phenomenon of the water cure, which was sometimes used to induce orgasms in women. See Haynes, April R. *Riotous Flesh: Women, Physiology, and the Solitary Vice in Nineteenth Century American*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015. 19.

repressed homosexual desire. In essence, their highly wrought correspondence represents a separate space where Ned and Jack lounge in the sentimentally furnished upper story of Ned's imagination. Here they can express subversive homosexual desires for one another because they are directed at an appropriate female subject (Marjorie). Their highly wrought correspondence, then, functions as a positive, regenerative space of homosocial brotherhood and a safe space where the men may express homosexual desires without censure.

The pattern, as would be expected, repeats itself in "Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski," but with a slightly wider circle of male intimates and with slightly different consequences. Where readers were party to two men's highly wrought correspondence with "Marjorie," with "Mademoiselle," readers have a whole group of men indulging in their accumulative highly wrought imaginations. The story built around Van Twiller's obsession with the Mademoiselle is structured as a gossipy sketch about men's clubs and bachelor culture, narrated by one of its members. The members of "Our Club," as the bachelor society is lovingly called, gossip, rather than write, their way into the mutual-masturbatory moment, dreaming up potential candidates for Van Twiller's romantic obsession. "The Cimmerian darkness which surrounded Van Twiller's inamorata," the unnamed narrator writes, "left us free to indulge in the wildest conjectures. Whether she was black-tressed Melpomene, with bowl and dagger, or Thalia, with the fair hair and the laughing face, was only to be guessed at" (244). The tragicomic speculation blossoming in the narrator's exposition of men's club gossip, however, dramatically lacks the conviviality of Ned and Jack's homosocial epistolary compact. The Club's gossip is expansive and as much interested in counterfactual information as it is in factual: "it is here," the narrator explains, "that everything is canvassed—everything that happens in our set, I mean, much that never happens, and a great deal that could not possibly happen" (239). Indeed, the inamorata conjured in the

speculative gossip is either menacing (in the case of Melpomene) or mocking (in the case of Thalia). If the friendly exchange between Jack and Ned “suggests an unspoken gay understanding as the real connective tissue between the two,” as Gifford suggests, the gossip discourse in “Mademoiselle” poses a threat to any understanding, gay or otherwise, as a connective tissue between the bachelors in “Our Club.”

Aldrich depicts this threat most vividly in the above-mentioned graphic nightmare Van Twiller experiences while still in the throws of his passion for Olympe. At face value, the nightmare represents Van Twiller’s fear of being exposed for loving a woman whose physical strength, agility, and social status threaten both emasculation and social alienation. With the revelation of Olympe’s gender trickery, the nightmare translates into full-blown homophobia in the symbolic “firebrand” assault on Van Twiller’s “private box,” which is deeply suggestive of homosexual acts that border on sexual violation, especially since Van Twiller’s passion for Olympe resides in his fascination with her physicality: he is an “enthusiast” for “calisthenics,” which may hint at his genuine desire for the masculine body (249). Since circus acts were known to employ gender duplicity in the real world, the revelation of Olympe’s gender trickery exposes a double assault, not just on Van Twiller, but on variety theatre audiences everywhere who might be tricked into experiencing homosexual desire for cross-dressing male acrobats. Indeed, the paradoxical grace and muscularity of aerial performers exposed significant cultural anxiety about male-female interchangeability (trans identity) at the time.⁴¹ One particular incident occurred in 1871 with Dan Rice’s New York-based Paris Pavilion Circus when the

⁴¹ Tait, *op. cit.* Tait notes the disparate impact on male and female performers: men generally retained their masculinity while women were almost always unsexed. 26-28.

aerialist sisters—Lila and Zoe De Lave—were revealed to be boys.⁴² Public outrage often accompanied such revelations because “part of the aerial act’s theatricality [was] to confound ideas about female physicality.”⁴³

Importantly, the most threatening aspect of this nightmare is neither Olympe’s gender trickery nor Van Twiller’s accidental homoerotic desire, but the potential risk of exposure and social ostracism implicit in it, since “all the members of Our Club [sitting] in the parquette” witness this assault on Van Twiller’s “private box.” Van Twiller’s prompt flight from the city, and then the country—complete with appropriate heterosexual horror since he stages a marriage as the pretense for his exodus—exposes the limits of homosocial desire for Aldrich and other men in his social world. If Aldrich allows for the limited and liminal space of homosexual desire in Ned and Jack’s highly wrought correspondence with “Marjorie,” he forecloses on this possibility in “Mademoiselle” with its wider circle of highly wrought gossip. “Mademoiselle,” then, is illustrative of how men’s gossip functions as a mechanism for social control, taming, subduing, or conversely (and perversely), provoking the homosexual pleasures of homosocial networks like “Our Club.” The story itself takes men’s gossip as its controlling theme in order to illustrate how gossip is as much (if not more) of a “masculine peccadillo” as a feminine pursuit (238). Such story telling, Amy Milne-Smith notes, helped to monitor and police men’s behavior, reinforce elite, insider status, and most importantly, perform genteel masculinity.⁴⁴ The story,

⁴² William Slout cites an article from an August 1871 newspaper exposing the fraud: “Dan has no female trapeze performers. One of the girls was discovered to be a boy recently, and the other one left and went into Canada” (339). Slout, William, *Olympians of the Sawdust Circle: A Biographical Dictionary of the Nineteenth*. San Bernadino, CA: The Borgo Press, 1998.

⁴³ Tait, op. cit. 68.

⁴⁴ Milne-Smith, Amy. “Club Talk: Gossip, masculinity and oral communities in late nineteenth-century London.” *Gender & History*. 21.1 (2009): 86-106. 87-8.

then, might best be read as an illustration of how privileged talk within men's clubs and bachelor culture created and reaffirmed or denied certain gender, sexual, and social behaviors.

The performance of this genteel masculinity in both stories, interestingly, is charged with military language, framing bachelor culture as a homoerotic battleground that requires such policing of gossip to curb homosexual tendencies in men like Van Twiller, Jack, and Ned. In addition to the dramatic nightmare featuring Olympe's "firebrand" assault on Van Twiller's "private box," Van Twiller's Club friends engage in a number of tactical measures to discover his secret passion for Olympe. Several of the members of the club, the narrator explains, "abruptly discovered in themselves an unsuspected latent passion for the histrionic art" and in "squads of two or three," they begin "storm[ing]" theatre districts and undergoing all types of "rigid explorations" (243). The combination of "histrionic" passions and "rigid explorations" underscores the homoerotic pleasures in the homosocial pursuit of other men's secrets. The acts of reconnaissance, ironically, also replicate the act of homosexual "cruising."⁴⁵ The letters between Ned and Jack contain military language charged with similar homoeroticism. They repeatedly jest about exchanging "artillery" (words or semen)—enough so that Jack feels "a pretty lively fire on [his] inner works," a reference, perhaps, to his growing passion for Marjorie (or growing sexual arousal for Ned, by extension) (26-7). Jack even makes a martial analogy to explain how he might, finally, be drawn to the charms of a young woman like Marjorie Daw. "Cynicism is a small brass field-piece that eventually bursts and kills the artilleryman," Jack explains, implying an interest in Marjorie that has life-saving potential, especially if it takes him out of the line-of-fire of Ned's verbal assaults (26). Added to this martial language are curious allusions to the *Arabian Nights* in both stories, affixing the threat of death (or romantic

⁴⁵ Chauncey writes about homosexual cruising in 1890s Central Park, but the phenomenon of cruising for hetero- or homo-sexual encounters is not a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Perseus, 2008. 98, 182.

abandonment) to the relations between these men and delineating clear masculine and feminine roles between Ned, figured as a Scheherazade-esque storyteller hoping to keep the “Pasha” (Jack) entertained and engaged with tales of Marjorie.⁴⁶

Since Aldrich links the two stories within the same circle of bachelor friends—with Ned Delaney, Jack Flemming, and Frank Livingstone crossing over from “Marjorie” to “Mademoiselle”—the homosexual panic exhibited in each, with all the weight of its cynicism and fear of men’s gossip, reverberates between and within both narratives. Even though Aldrich expresses more radical potential for male homosocial desire in the blossoming discourse between Ned and Jack, “Marjorie Daw” eventually devolves into a “full-scale homosexual panic” once Jack takes action to meet Marjorie.⁴⁷ Ned must flee his beach retreat before his friend’s arrival forces a face-to-face confrontation and confession that Marjorie Daw exists only in his imagination. As a small kindness, he does leave a letter for Jack with his father, which makes a full confession, quoted above. As a small unkindness, Ned leaks all or part of the story to The Club, which he attempts to rehash during a gossipy discussion of the mystery surrounding Van Twiller’s as yet unidentified passion for Olympe in “Mademoiselle.” Since Jack is present to interrupt and silence the re-telling of the humiliating episode, readers can assume the social humiliation Jack experienced was acute, but of short duration as he appears dually shamed and reformed and thus materially untainted by his pseudo-homoerotic encounter with Ned in their highly wrought correspondence. Ned, however, does not appear unscathed by the incident. In fact, Van Twiller’s nick-naming him “Muslin Delaney,” the narrator suggests, might be the

⁴⁶ Aldrich makes only one direct reference to the Arabian Nights in “Mademoiselle Olympe” with his allusion to Prince Camaralzaman and Princess Badoura, a rather sadistic story in which two people, antithetically opposed to romance, fall in love when they glimpse one another in a dream and must endure a lengthy period before they finally are able to be together.

⁴⁷ Gifford, op. cit. 25-6.

reason for his being “unusually active in the search to ferret out Van Twiller’s secret” (244). Van Twiller, on the other hand, remains under self-exile at the close of the narrative, indicating that his brush with homosexual desire was too severe to salvage his reputation. Both stories, then, signal an openness to homosexual desire but also expose its limits in Aldrich’s fiction, which must remain curbed and contained within safe spaces like the highly wrought correspondence between Ned and Jack—or narrative fiction itself—to simultaneously sustain and suppress full-blown homosexual encounters between men within mainstream heteronormative culture.

In keeping with the theme of fear and cynicism surrounding the potential for men’s homosexual encounters, both stories contain an unsettling sense that something within their natures, upbringing, or current homosocial networks have left these bachelors particularly susceptible to homoerotic desire. Van Twiller’s fascination with calisthenics, as mentioned above, makes him particularly vulnerable to the gender trickery Olympe performs in “her” act. Since his admiration is almost entirely focused on her more “masculine” features, his seemingly innocent fascination with female physicality contains the subtle suggestion that he might really be attracted to men. But gender trickery aside, even his initial attraction to a person like Olympe—so obviously inappropriate as a potential marriage partner for the scion of a wealthy American family—signals his reluctance to sincerely participate in the marriage plot. The brief genealogy offered by the anonymous narrator portrays Van Twiller as suffering under the influence of an ancient Dutch matriarchy. His bachelor existence reads as a masculine escape from a domestic sphere ruled by “mother.” In his reluctance to return to the rule of mother, Van Twiller compares well with Herman Melville’s Pierre Glendenning, who also retreated to the literary and theatrical venues of New York City to escape his mother’s vicious feminine rule.

Jack, on the other hand, has impulse control problems that hint at an unruly nature and an undisciplined mind. His injury—a broken fibula caused, inexplicably, by slipping on the rind of a citrus fruit—is the final result of an impulsive trip to the city to buy Frank Livingstone’s mare “Margot,” which turned into a night out with the boys at Delmonico’s that resulted in his fall. The curious circumstances of this fall—slipping on a lemon-peel—may also indicate a moral failing as much as a literal slip. As early as 1863, the term lemon was used as a descriptive term for a person with “a tart or snappy disposition” or “a simpleton or loser.”⁴⁸ The reference might also indicate Jack’s over-indulgence in alcohol since lemon peels were being incorporated into mixed drinks as early as the 1860s.⁴⁹ The exact nature of his (moral/gender/sexual?) slippage, however, must be gleaned from the veiled allusions Dr. Dillon makes to his present program of treatment using lemons. In addition to being a common treatment for scurvy, lemons were more particularly prescribed to treat rheumatism, alcoholism, dyspepsia, flatulence, and other “heated” conditions of the body.⁵⁰ It is also employed as an antidote to alkaline poisons and used in opioid and other narcotic overdoses.⁵¹ If the broken fibula is the result of a night of men’s club debauchery, then its symbolic castrating and emasculating effect serves as proper punishment for his bad-boy behavior.⁵²

⁴⁸ "lemon, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017. Web. 15 March 2017.

⁴⁹ The earliest cocktail manuals, which were published in the 1860s, feature the lemon peel as a key ingredient for a number of alcoholic concoctions in New York City. See *Savoring Gotham: A Food Lover’s Companion to New York City*. Ed. Andrew F. Smith. Oxford UP, 2015. 373.

⁵⁰ Crellin, J.K. and Jane Phiplott. *A Reference Guide to Medicinal Plants*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990. 285. An 1894 pharmacopoeia by Sir Peter Wyatt Squire recommends Limonis Cortex (Lemon Peel) as particularly applicable to dyspepsia. *Companion to the latest edition of the British Pharmacopoeia*. 16th edition. London: J & A Churchill, 1894. 337.

⁵¹ Andrew, Thomas. *A Cyclopaedia of Domestic Medicine and Surgery*. Blackie and Son, Glasgow and London: 1842. 322-3.

⁵² Gifford also notes the symbolism in Jack’s broken fibula. *Ibid.* 26.

The cultural freight of the presence of citrus fruit in the story, however, likely extends beyond its medical significance into the world of fine art. The curious mention of lemon peels possibly references the popular genre of seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings featuring copious fruit and/or flowers. These paintings frequently featured exotic citrus to symbolize the transience or impermanence of life, or, as in Manet's *Déjeuner a l'atelier* (1868), the frivolity and corruption of the decadence of the modern beau monde.⁵³ Aldrich, though, would not have had to reach as far as French impressionism to reference the succulent image of citrus fruits, peeled or unpeeled. The genre underwent a resurgence in popularity in the United States around mid-century with a number of American artists—William Harnett, Helen Searle, John F. Francis, Severin Roesen, and Robert S. Duncanson—turning to the still life subject from the 1850s well into the 1880s. Severin Roesen, who worked in New York and Pennsylvania from 1848-1872, became well known for opulent still life paintings featuring an overabundance of flowers, fruit, and champagne. These paintings are typically understood as a celebration of the nation's upwardly mobile standards of living.⁵⁴

Beyond these veiled allusions to bad-boy behavior and luxurious standards of living with lemon peels, Van Twiller and Jack also share a striking aversion to women in general (and “Yankee” girls in particular), much like their mythical analogue, Pygmalion. Van Twiller's objection to American women, unsurprisingly, has to do with them having “no physique” (249). Using the coded language of flowers, Van Twiller classes women according to their varying degrees of delicacy: “They are lilies, pallid, pretty—and perishable. You marry an American

⁵³ Brettell, Richard R. Stephen Eisenman and Sara Campbell Abdo. *Nineteenth-century Art in the Norton Simon Museum*. Vol. 1. Pasadena, CA: Norton Simon Foundation, 2006. 262.

⁵⁴ Shana Klein makes the argument that Cincinnati-based African American artist Robert S. Duncanson's portrayal of bountiful fruits from both tropical and less temperate climes is meant to symbolize the prosperity of Cincinnati and were likely commissioned by wealthy merchants and botanists. Klein, Shana. “Cultivating Fruit and Equality.” *American Art*. 29.2 (Summer 2015): 645-85.

woman, and what do you marry? A head-ache. Look at English girls. They are at least roses, and last the season through” (249). Less prejudiced against Yankee women, per se, Jack seems to have an aversion to all women, leaving Ned to ponder whether any woman might awaken his passions: “Yet I wonder if even a Liza [from Turgenev’s *House of the Gentry*] or an Alexandra Paulaovna could stir the heart of a man who has constant twinges in his leg. I wonder if one of our own Yankee girls of the best type, haughty and *spirituelle*, would be of any comfort to you in your present deplorable condition” (13). The clutch of women Ned itemizes is overtly pious—women known for their explicit devotion to orthodox religion—amplifying the reader’s understanding of Jack’s overall heterosexual unavailability.⁵⁵ Much like Pygmalion, no earthly woman—no matter how charming, beautiful, or pure—contains all the necessary qualities to lure him from his bachelor contentment.

Ultimately, Aldrich’s characterizations of Van Twiller, Jack, and Ned as modern-day Pygmalions, whose preference for celibacy—which may in fact represent a preference for homosexuality—outweighs even the purest expression of feminine beauty and piety, opens a space, however tenuous, for exploring alternative masculinities and sexualities. Within the intimacy of their correspondence, Jack and Ned are free to explore the “sentimental furniture” of their highly wrought imaginations so long as they direct their fervid discourse on an appropriately heterosexual object like Marjorie or Olympe (before her big gender reveal). Similarly, the young bachelors of “Our Club” are free to indulge in “womanly” gossip about their fellow members and investigate the romantic inclinations of the men in their circle up to the point when their highly wrought imaginations lead them into close proximity of actual homosexual acts. The comic conclusions, which partially recover these men from their

⁵⁵ Grand Duchess Alexandra Pavlovna’s dedication to orthodoxy forced the dissolution of her first marriage while Turgenev’s pious heroine Liza rejects all her suitors and eventually joins a convent. Henry James was also an admirer of Turgenev’s fiction.

dangerous sexualities even as they police homoerotic desire, also enable the representation of men's queer desires. Aldrich's use of the highly wrought style, then, might be seen as a means of exploring alternative sexualities without making any damning commitment to them.

Aldrich's Realism and the Highly Wrought Style

Importantly, Aldrich's use of humor to distance himself from the feminine themes of his highly wrought rhetoric also allows contemporary reviewers to disregard the romantic, sentimental, domestic discourses marbling his texts and define Aldrich's style as distinctly realist: The comic twists in both stories earned high praise from contemporary reviewers who repeatedly categorized Aldrich's fiction as dramatically innovative (instead of derivative) and comically realistic (rather than romantic or sentimental), thus illustrating how tone as well as gender complicates the reception of style in the nineteenth-century literary sphere. In his *Atlantic Monthly* review of *Marjorie Daw and Other People*, William Dean Howells compliments the book for its innovation and simplicity even if it "may be justly described as tending to dupe the single-minded reader."⁵⁶ Apart from this trickery, Howells contends, Aldrich's collection remains fantastically innovative, singling out "Marjorie Daw" for its use of the epistolary format, "so long disused in fiction that it may equally well be called new."⁵⁷ With such innovation, Howells claims, Aldrich has "almost created a new species of fiction."⁵⁸ The resulting "trifles"—"unlaboriously made out of the slightest material"—supply readers with ready relief from the "many serious things we know, and which are wanting in grace, wit, and

⁵⁶ [Howells, William Dean]. "Recent Literature." Op. cit. 625.

⁵⁷ Howells, "Recent Literature," ibid. 625.

⁵⁸ Howells, "Recent Literature," ibid. 625.

point.”⁵⁹ Though Howells remains one of Aldrich’s warmest critics, he is not alone in emphasizing the translucency of his prose. An anonymous reviewer for *Scribner’s* similarly describes Aldrich’s writing—“clear, vigorous and full of light”—in equally buoyant and glossy terms.⁶⁰

The desire to gloss over Aldrich’s highly wrought style represents a deliberate effort to distance the author from other writers, particularly women writers, who were often accused of literary excess, over-working and belaboring their texts with excessive description. The literary excess of women’s highly wrought fiction, according to Beam, was a “strategy of increase, on display in stylistic profusion, spreading words out over the page; in elaboration that elongates; and in fine writing, labored detail that, far from miniaturizing, adds weight and mass to the surface of the narrative.”⁶¹ The added weight, Beam suggests, links “ornament and reform” as a means of “alter[ing] models of gender as dual and complementary or of femininity as subordinate to masculinity.”⁶² Although Beam stresses the importance of reform as a key feature connecting the shared project of men and women’s highly wrought fiction, with Aldrich as with the other men in this study, reform marks a distinct point of departure. Indeed, the most defining feature of Aldrich’s fiction and poetry, according to Samuels, is an extreme distrust of reform and reformers.⁶³ In an 1884 letter to William Winters—recounted in Winters’s literary memoir *Old Friends* (1901)—Aldrich gives full vent to his anti-reformist sentiment: “Look at the shortsighted, intolerant prohibitionists, the howling women suffragettes and the raving maniacs

⁵⁹ Howells, “Recent Literature,” *ibid.* 626.

⁶⁰ “Thomas Bailey Aldrich.” *Scribner’s Monthly Illustrated Magazine for the People*. 8.2 (June 1874): 201-204. 203.

⁶¹ Beam, *op. cit.* 21.

⁶² Beam, *ibid.* 21.

⁶³ Samuels, Charles E. *Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. *Op. cit.* 43,116.

who are banging their heads against both sides of the fence. They all mean well—confound them!”⁶⁴ In betraying his lack of sympathy with contemporary experience, Aldrich reveals his greater interest in timelessness and stasis, not change. His overall emphasis on stasis appears in his short stories, which, for all their fleeting dalliances with the highly wrought style, are marked by a return to order with the comic twists that conclude them. Where women’s highly wrought fiction links ornament and reform, Aldrich’s use of the style ultimately relegates ornament to mere form (even if it dabbles in the possibilities of reform in momentary explorations of alternative masculinities and sexualities of the highly wrought style).

Unsurprisingly, Aldrich’s contemporaries latch on to this sense of timelessness and continuity in their assessment of his literary career arc. When Howells revisits Aldrich’s works in a more substantial review a few years later, he takes care to address the author’s style in order to normalize his use of textual excess as inherently realistic. In fact, Howells dedicates the first third of the review to account for Aldrich’s “reputation” as a florid poet “whose verse was jeweled and tinted in the taste” of the day, that is to say, in a style punctuated by artificiality.⁶⁵ For Howells, there is no question that Aldrich’s style tends toward excess ornament but this excess is more or less superfluous or irrelevant because his foundations are solidly realist. He successfully recovers Aldrich by tactfully suggesting “the substance which Mr. Aldrich was so painfully encrusting with colored pastes was real gold, of a fineness now incontestable.”⁶⁶ Howells’s assessment effectively absolves Aldrich from accusations of literary excess and artificiality—so often leveled at women writers—by claiming the purity of his literary

⁶⁴ Winters, William. *Old Friends. Being Literary Recollections of Other Days*. New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909. 367.

⁶⁵ Howells, William Dean, “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction.” *Atlantic Monthly*. 46.277 (November 1880): 695-8. 695.

⁶⁶ Howells, “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction,” *ibid.* 695.

foundations as “real gold.” With the complete exoneration of Aldrich’s highly wrought style, Howells proceeds to harness it as evidence of his realism. After characterizing Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy* as “an excursion in dreamland, for boyhood, realized with whatever conscientiousness, is in the region of romance,” Howells suggests that “[e]ven its extravagances and excesses added to its universal verisimilitude.”⁶⁷ To further drive home this point to readers, Howells additionally locates the enduring “charm” of “Marjorie Daw” in its “comedy-like framework,” use of dialogue, and “in the realism of certain particular touches within the general unreality.”⁶⁸ Howells, it seems, only requires the trace evidence of realism to enshrine Aldrich as a realist author regardless of the intensity of his sentimental, domestic, and highly wrought rhetoric. Howells reviews highlight the sexist practices engrained in the Atlantic Group that classified writers more by gender rather than by style.

These early reviews set the tone for Aldrich’s reception as a purveyor of realism well into the twentieth century. Early biographers, like Ferris Greenslet, echo Howells’s sentiment, finding the “reality” of Aldrich’s fictions “more real than real life.”⁶⁹ Other twentieth-century critics like Charles E. Samuels, however, are more careful in applying broad labels. He categorizes Aldrich as a writer of local color and “limited realist” linked to the “classical” tradition of the “genteel school” of Bayard Taylor, E.C. Stedman, and the Stoddards.⁷⁰ Far from acknowledging Aldrich’s romantic tendencies, Samuels links the “purity” of Aldrich’s imagination solely to his “classicist” leanings.⁷¹ Even Fred Lewis Pattee, who remains alone in

⁶⁷ Howells, “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction.” Ibid. 695.

⁶⁸ Howells, “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction.” Ibid. 696.

⁶⁹ Greenslet, Ferris. *The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. Op. cit. 16.

⁷⁰ Samuels, Charles E. *Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. Op. cit. 7, 104.

⁷¹ Samuels, *ibid.* 106.

his characterization of Aldrich as more romantic than realist, suggests his “severe classical spirit” eventually overcomes “his romantic excesses.”⁷² Pattee traces the “restraining force” Aldrich develops as a mature writer to the advice Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. offered him in 1863:

You must not feed too much on “apricots and dewberries.” There is an exquisite sensuousness that shows through your words and rounds them into voluptuous swells of rhythm as “invisible fingers of air” lift the diaphanous gauzes. Do not let it run away with you. You love the fragrance of certain words so well that you are in danger of writing nosegays when you should write poems. [...] Now your forte is sentiment and your danger sentimentality. You are an epicure in words and your danger is that of becoming a verbal voluptuary,—the end of which is rhythmical gout and incurable poetical disorder. Let me beg you, by your fine poetical sense, not to let [...] your tendency to vanilla-flavored adjectives and patchouli-scented participles stifle your strength in cloying euphemisms.⁷³

The care with which Holmes infuses his fruit-filled critique with the same “cloying euphemisms” he cautions Aldrich against mimics without mocking, suggesting he, too, takes some pleasure in momentarily inhabiting the role of “verbal voluptuary.” The gendered terms of his caution, however, are clear: the feminine excesses of his literary style threaten to “stifle” the masculine strength of his descriptions. The need to construct him as realist, then, represents a twinned desire to reconstruct him as masculine.

The import of Holmes’s gendered critique of Aldrich’s feminine excesses, however, has even more resonance in the broader context of his biography. In reading early biographical accounts of the author, one gets a sense that his preference for feminine themes and sentimental verse left him particularly vulnerable to gender attacks (or teases), much like his fictional Pygmalions, Ned, Jack, and Van Twiller. When Aldrich and his wife, Lilian Woodman, moved to a house on Pinckney Street, for instance, Sophia Hawthorne dubbed the location—with its distinctive “white muslin and pink ribbons, white muslin and blue ribbons”—“Mrs. Aldrich’s

⁷² Pattee, Fred Lewis. *A History of American Literature since 1870*. New York: Century Co, 1915. 129.

⁷³ Quoted in Pattee, *ibid.* 129. Holmes’s letter is also reprinted in *The Argonaut*, Vol. 63 (December 19, 1908): 435.

workbox.”⁷⁴ The designation, by itself, seems relatively innocuous. However, around the same time, Howells made a habit of referring to Aldrich’s study as his “boudoir,” much to his [Aldrich’s] annoyance; Aldrich may have felt as betrayed by this emasculating descriptor as Whitman’s praise of the “tinkles” of *The Bells*.⁷⁵ And much later in life, Mark Twain famously characterized the author’s genius in equally feminine terms, describing Aldrich as “a fire-opal set with rose diamonds; when he is not speaking, you know that his dainty fancies are twinkling and glimmering around in him; when he speaks the diamonds flash.”⁷⁶ Taken together, the designations indicate the degree to which his contemporaries recognized his affinity with the feminine, domestic sphere. In essence, Howells’s and Twain’s teasing commentary unwittingly (or wittingly?) queer Aldrich’s authorial persona as “trans.”

The accumulative effect of these feminine associations also suggests that Aldrich’s peers may have been commenting on more than his literary style with these effeminate constructions. In fact, they may also reference his bi- or homo-sexual preferences, which may have been an open secret. In documenting Aldrich’s romantic friendships with men in his study of men’s romantic fiction, *Manly Love*, Nissen points to the numerous intimate friendships he maintained with men (most notably, Bayard Taylor and William Winter) before his marriage to Lilian Woodman in 1865.⁷⁷ And beginning in 1874, Aldrich—still married and now a father—maintained a lengthy relationship with the bachelor millionaire politician Henry L. Pierce, who lived with the couple until his death, nearly a quarter of a century later. The relationship, interestingly, met with his wife’s approval, according to Nissen, who notes her warm description

⁷⁴ Quoted in Samuels, op. cit. 15-6.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Greenslet, Ferris. *Thomas Bailey Aldrich*. Op. cit. 160.

⁷⁶ Quoted in *Mark Twain’s Letters: 1874-1875* Vol. 6. Ed. Albert Bigelow Paine. New York: Hardpress, 2015. 322. Originally from (CU-MARK, in *MTA*, 1:247-8).

⁷⁷ Nissen, op. cit. 53-4. Both Taylor and Winters are believed to be gay.

of the friendship in her memoir, *Crowding Memories*, a title curiously reminiscent of suffocation via excess that she published after the death of her husband:

The deep and unaffected friendship that existed between Mr. Aldrich and Mr. Pierce was most unusual. Each by turn was guide to each. They shared the mutual interest of two very distinct lives, and the varied interests of one were vital to the other. For the quarter of a century in which they were together, it was exceptional...if a day passed in which they did not meet.⁷⁸

Aldrich's devotion to Pierce, though not necessarily homosexual, indicates how much he valued homosocial networks in his own life and helps to explain why bachelors' and men's clubs maintained their currency in his fiction and poetry well into his married years. It may also point to why Aldrich appears to be so conflicted about homosocial networks and homosexual relationships both inside and outside of his fiction.

These biographical details may also suggest why the Pygmalion myth in particular (and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in general) was so appealing to Aldrich and the other male authors in this study. Although most of the transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* deal with destruction or undoing—from human to inhuman, animate to inanimate, life to death—the Pygmalion myth reverses that flow. It is a queer generative myth with special appeal to the male artist and his creative impulses. It affirms men's god-like positions as creators and women's roles as creations, diminishing their capacities as artists and authors. Aldrich's unique transformation of the myth into homosocial fantasy, curiously, reverses the flow for a second time, reinforcing men's capacities as mythmakers while completely obliterating any need for women as either objects or creators. His use of the myth, moreover, uncovers the more troubling aspects of men's highly wrought fiction. The masculine project celebrates but also satirizes the idealism of the style, exposing its artifice, and colonizing it as the rightful (if not the exclusive) property of male authorship. Though he flirts with the themes of women's more radical use of the style—the

⁷⁸ Quoted in Nissen, *ibid.* 43-4.

pleasures of the imagination, sexual freedom, and freedom of sexuality—Aldrich contains these transgressive expressions, which reveals his social and literary conservatism. In effect, the work of Aldrich’s fiction is to undo the reformist impulses of women’s highly wrought fiction.

His revisions of the myth are also indicative of his limited appreciation of women and the general lack of sympathy he exhibits for women elsewhere in his fiction. For example, when Aldrich rehashes his signature comic twists—revealing some unexpected knowledge—in stories featuring female protagonists, it smacks more of cruelty than comedy. Neither wealthy nor young, these female characters lack status due to economic and social constraints in their limited roles as servants and spinsters. In “A Rivermouth Romance” (1872), for example, Aldrich makes an utter fool of a spinster maidservant—Margaret—for her impulsive elopement with an Irish sailor who turns out to be a belligerent, illiterate drunk, much to her surprise and dismay.⁷⁹ He goes missing shortly after their nuptials—presumed drowned by suicide or intoxication—reappearing, briefly, on a list of Civil War prisoners—alive and well—but never returns to his wife who is happy to be rid of him because she has had enough romance for one lifetime with her brief encounter with such an undesirable marriage partner. The spinster in “Miss Hepzibah’s Love” (1862) also comes to love late in life, wooed by a much younger man who, in the comic twist that closes the story, is really just sleepwalking, and who is actually in love with, and eventually marries, her niece. He ends the story with her confident (if false) belief that “he was not so fast asleep as he appeared to be” and the anonymous narrator’s coy suggestion that Miss Hepzibah, now older, remains open to proposals from any eligible young men wanting to come

⁷⁹ “A Rivermouth Romance” was also included in his collection *Marjorie Daw and Other People* (1873). Original published in *Atlantic Monthly*. 19 (August 1872): 157-171.

calling.⁸⁰ The substance of these stories adds to the complexities of Aldrich's treatment of women, both real and imagined.

However, the most surprising—and impressive—comic twist of “Marjorie Daw” is not of Aldrich's making. The sensation he created with this story extends well beyond its pages, a point remarked upon by Howells in one of his glowing reviews. “It is curious to observe,” Howells muses, “that, although one knows her to be a wholly fictitious person, one finds it intolerable when she proves no person at all; and it would be interesting to inquire just how tangible the figures of romance do really become to the reader.”⁸¹ “To be sure,” he concludes, “she lives in spite of him, and is at this moment enjoying a polyglot immortality in Europe; when we saw her last she had passed through French, Spanish and German into Danish and now she is doubtless figuring in the braided jacket and the neat boots of the Magyar.”⁸² Howells's remark about “Marjorie Daw” is meant to demonstrate Aldrich's success as an author by pointing out the popularity of the story—which was translated into several different languages in Aldrich's lifetime—but it also comments on the imaginative mechanisms that sustain fictional characters well beyond the conclusion of a story in readers' highly wrought imaginations.

Howells assessment could not be more prescient. Marjorie, in fact, enjoyed a remarkable afterlife, far exceeding the bounds of Aldrich's fiction. This afterlife, notably, is perpetuated not by Aldrich or any other men, but by women. In the month preceding the publication of Aldrich's “Marjorie Daw,” the *Atlantic Monthly* published a poem dedicated to her everlasting appeal to readers who keep her memory alive in their imaginations. The poem begins by describing how a

⁸⁰ Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. “Miss Hepzibah's Lover.” *Out of his Head: A Romance*. New York: Carleton, 413 Broadway: 1862. 191.

⁸¹ Howells, “Recent Literature,” *Op. cit.* 626.

⁸² Howells, “Recent Literature,” *ibid.* 625.

“cunning artist” painted a “picture, so divinely fair / That each beholder’s wonder grew and grew, / Beholding loveliness so rare.”⁸³ As the poem progresses, though, the narrator describes how this beautiful portrait “seemed undone” with one “sweep” of the painter’s brush (7-8), alluding to Aldrich’s comic twist that reveals Marjorie’s metafictional status. This apparent undoing, however, “*only* seemed,” the narrator explains,

For we, her lovers, will not yield so much
As one pale, silken shining thread

For, having once bestowed this wondrous gift,
The hand that gave may not withdraw;
So long as light shall change and shadows shift,
So long shall live rare Marjorie Daw. (19-24)

In essence, Eunice Comstock’s ode to “Marjorie Daw” not only argues for her continued existence in readers’ imaginations but posits her a priori existence; Marjorie is always already there, never disappearing. This poem is not the only instance of her fictional perpetuation beyond Aldrich’s story. Across the Atlantic Ocean, Mary Elizabeth Braddon swipes the entire concept of Aldrich’s “Marjorie Daw” and transforms the story into a two act “comedieta,” changing the names of all the characters except Marjorie.⁸⁴ In the 1880s, the botanist Theodosia Burr Shepherd, created two varieties of Begonias, one of which she named “Marjorie Daw” (*B. Coccinea* x *B. glaucophylla*).⁸⁵ Even in the twentieth century, Marjorie Daw maintained her appeal. The silent film actress Margaret House adopted “Marjorie Daw” as her stage name

⁸³ Comstock, Eunice. “Marjorie Daw.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. Issue 16 (November 1873): 610. Lines 1-4.

⁸⁴ Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. “Marjorie Daw.” (1881) *Under the Red Flag*. Reprinted as *Marjorie Daw: A Domestic Comedieta in Two Acts*. New York: De Witt, 1885. In Braddon’s play Jack becomes Frank Heathcote, a young artist. Dr. Dillon becomes Dr. Luttrell, a young doctor. And Ned becomes Miss Mattie Parks. Braddon’s play, unsurprisingly, dramatically reduces the homoerotic subtexts of Aldrich’s original story.

⁸⁵ Taylor, Judith M. *Visions of Loveliness: Great Flower Breeders of the Past*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press: 2014.

around 1916 and enjoyed a lucrative career until she retired with the advent of sound.⁸⁶ These afterimages of “Marjorie Daw” highlight two important things. First, that Aldrich’s clever use of familiar subjects—nursery rhymes and popular constructions of sensuous women—to create a memorable character may be the real key to his success. Second, that the real joke, at last, is on Aldrich whose highly wrought creation, ironically, far exceeded his own fame.

Ultimately, constructions of Aldrich as a writer of realism stem less from his adherence to realist practices than from the perception that he was able to apply a masculine “restraining force” to his romantic tendencies. His success as a realist, in other words, springs not from his realistic practices but from a perceived triumph of masculinity over femininity. The careful recovery of Aldrich as a writer of realism—even in the face of overwhelming evidence of his sentimentality, romanticism, and his various effeminacies—highlights how sexist constructions of high realism allowed for the exclusion of so many female authors as sentimental and the paradoxical acceptance of so many male authors as realist, regardless of theme and style. This perception, however, has revealed itself to be as much of a fiction as Marjorie Daw. Aldrich, and the other male writers in this study, not only reinforce Nancy Glazener’s assessment of realism as a set of reading practices set forth by Holmes, Howells, and the rest of the Atlantic Group, they demonstrate how these reviewers worked to create realism as a masculine reading practice. Finally, the critical treatment of Aldrich and his writing suggests that the highly wrought style, far from disappearing in the flood of realism, maintained its continuity through the rise of realism whether it was appropriated by male writers, absorbed into realist reading and writing practices, or perpetuated by women outside the exclusive category of high literary realism.

⁸⁶ Lowe, Denise. *An Encyclopedic Dictionary Women in Early American Films: 1895-1930*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Chapter 3: The Fatal Fluency of the Fleshly Element: Henry James's Highly Wrought Fiction

When Henry James so roundly rebuffs Harriet Prescott [Spofford] and her “Azarian school” in his 1865 review of her novel, *Azarian: An Episode* (1864), he was still in the process of developing his own theory of “realist” fiction.¹ Indeed, realism—as its own “school”—was only beginning to congeal in its historical sense and James had yet to pen the novels and stories that solidified his reputation as a psychological realist and scion of the high realism of the Atlantic Group.² This vitriolic review, in fact, is among his earliest print appearances as a literary and cultural critic. And while it reads as more of a polemic against women’s use of the highly wrought style and an ad hominem attack on “Miss Prescott” than a book review, the essay serves as a stage for James to outline the crucial differences between the “ideal descriptive style” of this florid, feminine “school” of “excess” and the similarly “descriptive manner” of “the famous realistic system” established by male writers like Balzac and Merimée (269). But far from making any stylistic distinctions between the two descriptive styles, James’s rant exposes his stake in defining the art of fiction in terms that have historically privileged realism over romanticism in problematically gendered terms.³ His characterizations of the two aesthetic systems are almost indistinguishable save for the differing intentions he attributes to each school.

¹ James, Henry. “Miss Prescott’s Azarian.” *North American Review*. 100.1 (January 1865): 268-77.

² Nancy Glazener uses this term to describe the collection of periodicals that produced the highly literary realism of latter half of the nineteenth century: *Scribner’s*, *Lippincott’s*, *Harper’s*, *Galaxy*, the *Critic*, the *Forum*, as well as the *Atlantic Monthly* (25). Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a US Literary Institution, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

³ Glazener traces the subtle pushing out of women writers from the inner circle of the Atlantic Group in her third chapter, “Addictive Reading and Professional Authorship” (93-146). Glazener, *Reading for Realism*, *ibid*.

James chides Spofford for her “crude” execution, comparing her, at one point, to a “little girl” who “fingers her puppets to death” (271). The women of the Azarian school, according to James, possess “in excess a fatal gift of fluency,” assuming “the fleshly element carries such weight” and consequently use detail purposelessly, “simply for the sake of describing” (272). In contrast, Balzac’s prose is “*scientifically* done,” replicating details “with the fidelity of a photograph” and the foresight of a logical “a posteriori” methodology: the “eminently real” and the “literally real” writings of Balzac and Merimée exercise description purposefully, “*only in so far as they bear upon the action*” (emphasis James’s 269, 272-3). Accordingly, James recommends that Spofford “renounce new-fashioned idealism for a while, and diligently study the canons of the so-called realist school” if she wishes “to accomplish anything worth accomplishing” (272).

His bilateral condemnation of Spofford’s fatal fluency and fleshly elements, in fact, marks the beginning of an ongoing critique of women’s textual excesses, which James continues in his public and private assessments of women’s literature throughout his career. The terms of the dual critique bear a strange resemblance to each other, relating a correspondence that is neither synonymous nor contrary.⁴ Together they constitute James’s twinned concern, paradoxically, with literary formlessness and (mere) form. Both comprise a feminine weakness in his judgment of Spofford and the other women writers at which he levels the charge.⁵ On the one hand, his objection to Spofford’s fatal “fluency” implies verbal excess: volubility or facility gone wrong, transformed into logorrhea, words wrung of their meaning. But elsewhere this appraisal of women’s writing extends to include what he deems to be their excess “fluidity” and

⁴ Many thanks to Eliza Richards for formulating the phrasing of this comparison.

⁵ His critique of the “fluidity” of women’s writing, according to Richard Salmon, adopts a common metaphor reviewers used for “encoding not only their concern with the onset of ‘democratization,’ but also with a perceived process of ‘feminization’” (53). Salmon, Richard. *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

textual “looseness,” which connotes his concern for their lack of boundaries, constraint, or a general instability of form. On the other, his complaint of her “fleshly element” entails a concern for the overly descriptive or merely descriptive quality of her writing that offers superficial assessments of the material world but cannot penetrate below the surface of things.

In coming to this conclusion, James exposes his problematically sexist understanding of style, which has been replicated and proliferated in contemporary scholarship. James’s concern with the mere form and formlessness of women’s ornate writing constitutes the thrust of early twentieth century scholars’ objection to the formlessness of American literary romanticism as suggested by F.O. Matthiessen’s criticism of the inorganic structures of Whitman and Thoreau, whose “emphasis on the inner urge rather than on the created shape can quickly run to formlessness, particularly when it insists on the same spontaneous growth for a poem as for a plant.”⁶ Dorri Beam, however, argues for “the formlessness of women’s literary production as a manner of artful expression,” constituting the immaterial material of women’s highly wrought fiction that “move[s] out of the physical body” and “overproduce[s] the textual body.”⁷ The results of this formlessness create a different “representational economy” as “an experience of the textures of language—the sound, graphics, diction, syntax, pattern, repetition, and imagery of the style.”⁸ James’s fiction is, ironically, rife with this “representational economy,” which he attempts to establish as a corrective to what he understands as the fatal fluency and fleshly excesses of women’s highly wrought fiction. This early avowal of realism as a remedy to romanticism is part of what Richard Brodhead has identified as James’s evolving theory of

⁶ Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. 1941. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. 134.

⁷ Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 33.

⁸ Beam, *Style*. *ibid.* 33.

fiction, which outwardly affirms but only superficially embraces the realist tradition.⁹ Brodhead traces James's intensifying "realist effort" from *The Bostonians* to *The Golden Bowl*, arguing that the "overly-wrought texture" of James's later fiction emerges from his repeated attempts to reinvent the "Hawthornesque Romance" in the tradition of realism by containing its stylistic excesses within a more rigorous realist methodology.¹⁰ James's late style, Brodhead concludes, most fully articulates a Hawthornean "equation of the novel's fully realized form with an expression so wrought as to have meaning packed into its 'every point.'"¹¹ The ironic result of his so-called "realist effort," in other words, is the production of a style that is as heavily wrought as the Azarian school.

James's opposition to the formlessness of women's writing, consequently, belies his own use of the florid style, which he finally absorbs into his own, internalizing its properties to render them psychological rather than physical and therefore "realistic." The resulting queer masculine poetics of textual excess of James's fiction forms the foundation for what scholars typically identify as his unique brand of "psychological realism." This *highly wrought introspective style* incorporates the Azarian rhetoric to develop his characters' interior wants, dreams, hopes, and struggles to describe, as James acclaims in his review of *Azarian*, not only "the external signs of passion," but "Passion's self,—her language, her ringing voice, her gait, the presentment of her deeds" (271). In other words, the traditional Jamesian style—marked by complex sentences

⁹ Brodhead, Richard. "Late James: The Lost Art of the Late Style." *The School of Hawthorne*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 166-200.

¹⁰ Brodhead, for example, notes the striking parallels between *Roderick Hudson* and *The Marble Faun*, *The Bostonians* and *The Blithedale Romance*, and so forth, suggesting many of James's novels, in fact, represent carefully realist revisions of Hawthorne's romances (167-8). Brodhead, *The School*. Ibid. William James also characterized *The Bostonians* as having combined the "datum" of "the region of fancy" with "the treatment" of "the most elaborate realism." See his letter to Henry James. May 9, 1886. Cambridge. *The Letters of William James*. 2 Volumes. Ed. By his son, Henry James. Vol. 1. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920. 251.

¹¹ Brodhead, *The School*. Ibid. 168.

filled with accumulating descriptions used to articulate unspoken thoughts, emotional intuition, and hidden desires—is better understood as James’s (albeit conflicted) response to the feminine highly wrought style, which he was simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by—than as a subscription to or elaboration of a realist system.¹²

Masculine Desire & Forming the Foundations of Highly Wrought Introspective Style:

Roderick Hudson

While James certainly articulates a more thoroughly wrought style with his later fiction, his interest in rewriting the Hawthornesque Romance in terms of realism (or vice versa) appears as much in his earliest criticism (like the above review) and his earliest fiction as in his later literary and critical productions. For example, Hawthorne’s influence on James’s first “acknowledged” novel, *Roderick Hudson* (1875), is well documented.¹³ A number of scholars—Brodhead included—have noted how aspects of the plot and character structures in *Roderick Hudson* recall Hawthorne’s fiction, particularly *The Marble Faun* (1860).¹⁴ Both texts feature

¹² James’s brother, William, incidentally, was quite critical of James’s highly wrought introspective style. Writing to Henry about reading *Roderick Hudson* in book form in 1875, William declares that he is “struck unfavorably by the tendency of the personages to reflect on themselves and give an acute critical scientific introspective classification of their own natures & states of mind, à la G. Sand. Take warning once more!” [Letter to Henry James.] December 12, 1875. *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*. Ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkely. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997. 100.

¹³ *Watch and Ward*, serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1871, is technically his first novel, but in his 1907 introduction to the revised text of *Roderick Hudson*, James distinguishes this later work as his “first attempt at a novel, a long fiction with a ‘complicated’ subject” (vi). James, Henry. Preface. *Roderick Hudson*. 1875. New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1907. v-xx. All in-text citations come from the 1891 edition unless otherwise noted: *Roderick Hudson*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1891. 21.

¹⁴ Hawthorne’s influence on James is well documented. James’s earliest critic, T.S. Eliot, argues that *Roderick Hudson* and *The Americans* exhibit “the heavy facetiousness of the [Hawthornean] style,” “tedious whimsicality” as well as his tendency toward “verbalism” to the more recent observations of Brodhead and other scholars. Eliot, T.S. “On Henry James.” *Henry James: Critical Assessments*. Ed. Graham Clarke. Vol. 1. The Banks, Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1991. 301-310. 308. (Eliot’s review was originally published in *The Little Review* in

American artists who travel abroad to cultivate their artistic talent in the Old World; both include four key characters—Hawthorne creates Kenyon, Donatello, Hilda, and Miriam; James contrives Roderick, Rowland, Christina, and Mary—who are tragically romantically linked; and the central protagonists of both stories also suffer dramatic “falls” (figurative and literal). James, however, seeks to capture an aesthetic fall in *Roderick* (Roderick’s failure to create his ideal sculpture), where Hawthorne depicts, as he is wont to do, a moral fall. James also takes the traditional romantic pairing that Hawthorne establishes in *Marble* (Kenyon with Hilda, Miriam with Donatello) and constructs a much more complicated and convoluted—and much more highly wrought—love quadrangle with his four main characters: Roderick is engaged to Mary but ostensibly in love with Christina who may really be in love with Rowland (if she can love anyone), who claims to be in love with Mary even as he may harbor a homoerotic desire for Roderick, who may even reciprocate this desire. More remarkable is the noticeable absence of any direct reference or even veiled allusion to Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, or any of its pivotal works of art in *Roderick*, despite the characters occupying many of the same Italian landscapes.¹⁵ Hawthorne’s influence, then, might be said to have an important but limited significance to the novel.

August 1918). Richard Brodhead’s *School of Hawthorne* offers the most in-depth examination of this influence on a number of authors, including James. He makes some slight connections between *The Marble Faun* and *Roderick* (132-3). Op. Cit. Sheila Teahan sees *Roderick* as a metaphorical stand-in for Hawthorne. Teahan, Sheila. “Hawthorne, James, and the Fall of Allegory in *Roderick Hudson*.” *The Henry James Review*. 12 (1991): 172-98. Miliman and Saint-Amour have more cynical readings of Hawthorne’s influence, reading the novel as self-conscious, stereotypical, and deeply ironic. Milliman, Craig A. “The Fiction of Art: Roderick Hudson’s Pursuit of the Ideal.” *The Henry James Review*. 15. (1994): 231-41. Saint-Amour-Paul K. “Transatlantic Tropology in James’s *Roderick Hudson*.” *The Henry James Review*. 18.1 (Winter 1997). 22-40.

¹⁵ Neither Praxiteles’s faun nor Guido’s Beatrice Cenci make an appearance, although Sanford Marovitz notes the parallels between Donatello’s resemblance to the faun in *Marble* and Roderick’s resemblance to his small ideal statue. Marovitz, Sanford E. “Roderick Hudson: James’s *Marble Faun*.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 11.4 (Winter 1970): 1427-1433.

Instead, the material concerns of *Roderick* more clearly reflect those of the Azarian school in its thematic focus on ideality in art and its aesthetic attention to rhetorical, emotional, and material excess. Indeed, the novel might be better read as an expression of James's deep fascination with (and obvious fear of) the excesses of the highly wrought aesthetics he disparages in his 1865 review. Unlike *Marble Faun*, which represents a romantic tragedy in an artistic milieu, James's tragicomic *künstlerroman*, *Roderick Hudson*, delineates the ideal artist's development and his struggle to master his aesthetic idealism, reflecting James's interest in rewriting the romance not simply in terms of Hawthorne (as Brodhead has suggested), but also in terms of the highly wrought aesthetics of the Azarian school. James uses the novel to revisit the two key flaws of the Azarian school, which he articulates in the above-mentioned review as a tendency toward feminine "fluency" and an overemphasis of the material dimensions of "the fleshly element." He explores these flaws stylistically—by reproducing and critiquing the same painterly aesthetic, picturesque idealism, and emotional intensity that he so roundly criticizes in the Azarian school a decade earlier—and thematically—in his central focus on the emotional and aesthetic struggles of the *male* highly wrought artist, Roderick, and his literary double/foil, Rowland, who are both positioned in varying relation to the florid style. Roderick, defined by his passion, neurasthenia, and feminine fluency, is entirely subject to the feminine fluency of the fleshly element, which Rowland resists through the highly wrought architecture of his mind.

In reading *Roderick* as a reduction of and correction to the highly wrought excesses of the Azarian school, we can better understand James's impulse to develop a literary aesthetic outside both the realist practice and its traditionally masculinized aesthetic as well as the romantic school and its typically feminized rhetoric. With *Roderick Hudson* James begins to develop a more gender-neutral literary style and method that is rooted not in the "fleshly element" of the external

material (and gendered) world as represented by Roderick, but in its interior, as represented by the florid architecture of Rowland's imagination, which delineates the highly wrought introspection of James's so-called "realist" style. As a result, James's style constitutes a sort of hermaphroditic literary aesthetic that, like the other highly wrought writers in this study, continues to privilege the masculine over the feminine in problematic ways. The style exposes James's conflicted relationship with not just feminine and masculine forms, but female and male bodies and texts, which scholars claim extends from his closeted sexuality and/or conflicted gender identity.¹⁶

By making the claim that James seeks to develop a more gender-neutral or androgynous aesthetic practice—his hermaphroditic literary aesthetic—in his fiction and criticism, I do not wish to suggest that gender (or sexuality) does not factor into (or trouble) his highly wrought introspective style. Indeed, the style reflects his conflicted understanding of gender, sexuality, and rhetoric. James's gender and sexual politics complicate his fiction—and its style—as much as his literary criticism.¹⁷ For example, in *Roderick*, only Rowland benefits from the full expression of his highly wrought introspection, which he tends to offer his bachelor protagonists

¹⁶ A number of scholars have commented on James's conflicted sexuality and gender identity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, reads James's critical prefaces as "a kind of prototype of not 'homosexuality,' but queerness, or queer performativity," that represents a "strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (61). Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University, 2003. See also, Person, Leland S. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. Philadelphia, US: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Haralson, Eric. *Henry James and Queer Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁷ There are a number of critiques of gender and sexuality in James's fiction and biography. Leon Edel presents James as a repressed (and passive) observer who entertains homoerotic and incestuous feelings for his brother William and who is also haunted by his fear of womanhood as well as his own troubled sexuality. Fred Kaplan's later biography represents James as a celibate homosexual man who sublimates his homosexual impulses into his art. Edel's five-part biography—published between 1953-1972—was condensed as Edel, Leon. *Henry James: A Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. Kaplan, Fred. *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. For textual readings that take into account James's gender, sexuality and queer theory, see Haralson, Eric. *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (2003) *ibid*; Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. (Berkeley: California UP, 1985) and *Touching Feeling*, *ibid*.; Stevens, Hugh. *Henry James and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

more than his women in many of his novels, though there are exceptions to this general rule.¹⁸

The accumulative intensity of thoughts and feelings on the action of the story belong to him alone, giving the style the assumption of a masculine expression. Rowland, however, is not a robustly masculine figure at any point in the novel, but he is made to seem even less so in its conclusion, which renders Mary and Rowland symbolically or performatively asexualized. The novel ends with the literal and figurative deaths of the two mostly highly wrought characters—Roderick, dead from a catastrophic fall, and Christina, figuratively dead by marriage (as with most married women in most of James's fiction, see, for example, *Portrait of a Lady*)—while their more subdued literary doubles/foils, Mary and Rowland, remain romantically unattached, each devoted to a lost cause: Mary remains dedicated to the memory of Roderick while Rowland ostensibly continues to hold a torch for Mary, declaring himself in the final sentence of the novel to be “the most patient” of men with a dramatic flair reminiscent of Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroine's description of “his” sister's patient endurance of unrequited love in *Twelfth Night*, which may be a veiled allusion to Rowland's essentially queer “trans” identity.¹⁹ James's two unrequited lovers present the perfect gender-blending bachelor/spinster pairing, performing their asexuality by remaining forever celibate in their undying devotion to a lost ideal.

¹⁸ There are, however, female characters to prove an exception to this rule, according to Victoria Coulson, who argues that the figure of the “actress as a woman who embodies the interdependence of public meaning and private being that James equates with feminine subjectivity and with realist representation,” a designation he offers only his “favourite female characters,” the “portrait heroines.” Coulson, Victoria. *Henry James, Women, and Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 63.

¹⁹ In Act 2, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the cross-dressing Viola (who is disguised as a boy) relates “his” sister's unrequited love for an unnamed man to the Duke Orsino (who is, in fact, the man she is in love with), saying “she sat like patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief.” With Viola assuming a trans-man position in the text—dressed as a boy and assuming her brother's identity—“his” confession of “her” love for the Duke takes on a homoerotic connotation, but one that is ultimately reversed at the end of the play when “he” reveals himself to be a “she,” which in turn sanctions their increasing attachment within the romantic love plot. Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*. The North Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1997.

But even in this symbolic resolution, which stages the triumph of celibacy and asexuality over the heterosexual romantic love plot, issues of gender and sexuality still problematize the text. Mary not only figures as a surrogate for Roderick (and thus a properly heterosexual object onto which Rowland may more safely bestow his homoerotic affections for the sculptor), she also serves as an ambiguous double for Rowland, a conflation that baffled the contemporary reviewer for the *New York Times*, who noted their essentially transferable (e.g. transgender) natures. Rowland Mallet “might be a male Mary Garland,” the reviewer observes with frustration, “and Mary Garland a female Rowland Mallet, Esquire.”²⁰ Such problems with gender ambiguity, Leland S. Person suggests, undermines James’s “claim to a ‘robust’ gender identity of his own,” at least for contemporary reviewers uncomfortable with such indistinctness.²¹ Person, however, sees James’s gender ambiguity as contributing to a deliberate experiment, reading the novel as an early example of James’s effort “to plot the narrative trajectory of male homoerotic desire” between the staid bachelor, Rowland, and his protégé, the young, ambitious, sculptor as a means of experimenting “with multiple gender and sexual performances.”²² Accordingly, *Roderick Hudson* explores a range of masculine roles and male-male relationships in order to dissect the highly wrought male imagination. These homosocial relationships are disrupted by the inclusion of two female love interests, Christina and Mary, whose presence allow James to frame the narrative in a traditional romantic love-plot, but the primary substance of the novel is built around the evolving relationship between Roderick and

²⁰ [Review of *Roderick Hudson*]. *New York Times*. 10 December 1875: 2.

²¹ Person, Leland S. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. Op. cit. 39. This may also be a frequent strategy in James’s work. A *Chicago Tribune* review of “The Awkward Age,” unceremoniously titled “A Typical Novel by Henry James,” takes issues with the multiple divisions of the novel, its 10 characters, 10 chapters. “It is as if Mr. James had multiplied himself by ten and made a novel of ten Jameses, masculine and feminine.” “A Typical Novel by Henry James.” *Chicago Tribune*. (13 May 1899): 10.

²² Person, *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. ibid. 39.

Rowland, as is typical of the flourishing male romantic friendship literature of the nineteenth century.²³ Although the dynamic love quadrangle between Rowland, Roderick, Mary, and Christina offers sufficient cover for the homoerotic subtexts of the novel, it only serves to distract from the important dilemmas in the novel: the male-male relationships that the narrative develops, the aesthetic and emotional predicament that Roderick faces in his struggle to master his attenuated idealism and his struggle to navigate his own fatal fluency and fleshy elements.

Fleshy Elements

The terms of James's critique of the Azarian school have fluctuating and contradictory associations in his fiction and criticism, which inform their gendered usage as stylistic signifiers of emasculating rhetorical excess. His resistance to the fleshy element, for example, is not a critique he consistently applies to women writers alone, though it does have gendered implications even in its application to male writers. Writing to Charles Eliot Norton in 1871, James issued a similar charge at Howells, who "seems to have resolved himself, however, into one who can write solely of what his fleshy eyes have seen; and for this reason I wish he were 'located' where they would rest upon richer and fairer things than this immediate landscape."²⁴

²³ According to Naomi Sofer, James is "acutely aware" that homosociality cannot "exist outside of the compulsory heterosexuality of patriarchal society and realistic fiction" which is why he frames so many of his novels within the marriage plot (192). See Sofer, Naomi. "Why 'different vibrations...walk hand in hand': Homosocial Bonds in *Roderick Hudson*." *Henry James Review*. 20 (Spring 1999): 185-205. According to Axel Nissen, this coded framework offered cover for James to engage with the genre of male romantic friendship literature without openly acknowledging the genre. As typical of the male romantic friendship fiction, two male characters often found their own love-connection through the surrogacy of a female character, like Mary Garland. Nissen offers a convincing reading of the novel that demonstrates how Mary functions as this surrogate. For more on Henry James's relationship to male romantic friendship fiction see Nissen, Axel. "Compulsory Domesticity: Roderick Hudson, Love, and Friendship in the Gilded Age." *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship Fiction in American Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

²⁴ James, Henry. [Letter To Charles Eliot Norton.] Cambridge, Mass, January 16, 1871. *The Letters of Henry James*. Vol. 1 Ed. Percy Lubbock. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920. 30.

James's unease with Howells in this assessment marks a challenge to his too passive perception: "our country is to a certain point a very sufficient literary field," he goes on to explain, "But it will yield its secrets only to a really *grasping* imagination" (emphasis James).²⁵ James's resistance to the fleshly element, in other words, suggests a subtle gender critique of Howells's passive perception as an unmanly or effeminate literary technique.²⁶

Although James avows an aversion to this "fleshly element" in his review of *Azarian* and his critique of Howells, *Roderick Hudson* betrays a surprising preoccupation with the superficial circumstances of the material world, which it explores through the two utterly "superfluous" "characters" in the novel, Christina's poodle, Stenterello, and the Light family's Cavaliere, who does not even get the distinction of a name, but only identified by his relational position within the Light family. James inscribes these characters with the fleshly element to hazard against an over-emphasis or excessive investment in the material. Christina's fluffy white poodle, for examples, appears in the novels along with his mistress, signaling her character's superficiality and superfluity, but also forecasting the dangers of her emasculating materiality. Rowland and Roderick observe him being led on a leash by Christina:

He was combed and decked like a ram for sacrifice; his trunk and haunches were of the most transparent pink, his fleecy head and shoulder as white as jeweller's [sic] cotton, his tail and ears ornamented with long blue ribbons. (66)

James's characterization of the poodle's "sacrificial" aspect foreshadows Roderick's final blood sacrifice in the novels conclusion, but the contrasting features of the poodle present him to the reader as a figure of emasculated manhood. Though he is a "ram" his fleecy head—so white as

²⁵ James, Henry. [Letter To Charles Eliot Norton.] *ibid.* 30.

²⁶ Only a few years later, however, James uses similar language in praise of Turgenev's fiction, which never leaves a character "shivering for its fleshly envelope, its face, its figure, its gestures, its tone, its costume, its name, its bundle of antecedents." James's praise of Turgenev, in this context, signals his interest in presenting more fully a psycho-social landscape that will later become the hallmark of his psychological realism. James, Henry. "Honore de Balzac." *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers. The Prefaces to the New York Editions.* New York: Penguin Books, 1984. 53.

to suggest a jeweler's prop—and his “transparent pink” “trunk and haunches” symbolize male vulnerability with its association with male nudity.

Even his name—Stenterello—which references a popular archetype from the Venetian Carnival whose buffoonish demeanor and dress, denotes his superfluity. But more importantly, he serves as a double for the other emasculated characters, the Cavaliere, in particular, who has already been transformed into a human poodle before the novel opens. When he first appears, walking with Mrs. Light, Christina, and her poodle, he is described in similar terms as Stenerello, having not only a Faustian “grotesque-looking personage” but also a gemmy association with jeweled ornament: “He had a little black eye which glittered like a diamond, and rolled about like a ball of quicksilver, and a white moustache, cut short and stiff, like a worn-out brush” (65). The Cavaliere, in other words, embodies emasculated manhood, whose gaze now seems to “grasp” nothing since his diamond-glittering, quick-silver rolling eyes, move about but never seem to see with any acute awareness. His objective in the novel, moreover, is more to be seen rather than to see. He appears throughout the novel more as a prop than a person, holding the arm of Mrs. Light and propping up her respectability but sometimes appearing literally as a prop. He materializes at one point in the novel almost as a wax sculpture, “modestly stationed in a corner” decorated—a la Stenterello—“with an enormous bouquet, and his neck encased in a voluminous white handkerchief” (134).

As an analogue for the Cavaliere, moreover, Stenterello also figures as a harbinger for other men's potential emasculation should they attach themselves permanently to Christina. Roderick speculates, rather presciently upon first seeing Stenterello, that the poodle is a “grotesque phantom like the black dog in *Faust*,” an unfortunate allusion that aligns Christina with the devil (66). James allegorizes Christina's attempts at emasculating Roderick in a

bizarrely intimate scene in the middle of the novel when she happens upon Roderick napping in the park. Observing his “delicious oblivion,” Christina cannot let him sleep, desiring to make him one of her “companions to misery” and to “show off her dog” (155). Ordering Stenterello to “wake him up,” the poodle “extended a long pink tongue and began to lick Roderick’s cheek” (155). The moment evokes not just intimacy but sexual contact, with Stenterello’s phallic “long pink tongue” licking Roderick’s cheek, and potential sexual violation since he is unaware of the oncoming assault. Rowland’s assault on the dog, a few chapters later, may, in fact, be a sort of retaliation for this violation. In another bizarre scene in Madame Grandini’s apartments, Rowland witnesses Christina’s violent emotional outburst just before she is lead away from the room. Left alone, “Rowland vented his confusion in dealing a rap with his stick at the animal’s unmelodious muzzle” as he vacates the apartment (205). Roderick, too, signals his too close affinity for the fleshly element in his attraction to Christina’s superficiality, his wanton luxuriating in material excesses of European decadence, and his final failure to grasp the dramatic subject and create a worthy work of art, but it is his fatal fluency that James, finally, constitutes as his failure as an artist.

Fatal Fluency

Women writers, James repeatedly asserts in his public reviews and private criticisms, simply lack the masculine vigor and sexual virility to create forceful art. “Like the majority of female writers,” James argues in his final word on *Azarian*—linking Spofford to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Sand, Gail Hamilton, and Harriet Beecher Stowe—“she possesses in excess the fatal gift of fluency” (275). Spofford’s fatal “fluency” is both a sign and a signifier of

literary failure, which James relates elsewhere in the review to her lack of maturity; here he condemns her fatal fluency as part of her problematically-acquisitive nature: she “tacks on, interpolates, piles up,” James goes on to explain, but cannot edit or erase (275). The result is a “wearisome series of word-pictures, linked by a slight thread of narrative, strung together, to use one of Miss Prescott’s own expressions, like ‘beads on a leash,’” conveying the sense that Spofford coyly strings readers along on a directionless journey in a story that seemingly has no beginning or end (270). Her novel, in other words, lacks the vigorous structure of a masculine framework. In *Roderick*, James replicates this sense of being lead along to no apparent end his construction of Christina Light, who leads Roderick “along to the very edge of fulfillment”—just like her poodle—only to “stupefy [him] with all she suffered [him] to believe,” much to Rowland’s dismay (430).

In his criticism of women’s writing, James repeatedly attributes this flaw of endless accumulation, lack of direction, and fatal fluency to women writers, implicating their gender in their disarrayed method and style. He uses similar terms in his response to Mrs. Everard Cotes, who sends James a copy of her novel—*His Honour and a Lady*—in 1900 for his appraisal. James identifies its fault with its plot, which

lacks a little, *line*—bony structure and palpable, as it were, tense cord—on which to string the pearls of detail. It’s the frequent fault of women’s work—and *I* like a rope (the rope of *the direction and march of the subject*, the action) pulled, like a taut cable between a steamer and a tug, from beginning to end. It lapses and lapses along a trifle too liquidly (emphasis James’s).²⁷

Implicit in James’s assertion is the idea that women’s writing lacks the appropriate structures to carry the narrative to its completion. More troubling, the terms of his critique, according to Katherine Snyder, “attributes the ‘liquidness’ of a woman’s texts to its lack of fictional rigor and

²⁷ “To Mrs. Everard Cotes.” January 26th, 1900. *The Letters of Henry James*. Vol. 1. Ed. Percy Lubbock. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920. 346.

physical turgor, making it possible to read into James's extended metaphor an authorial 'pissing contest' in which the male writer maintains a distinct advantage over the female."²⁸ In its obvious phallic imagery reminiscent of an erection—the line, the rope, the “taut cable”—the passage additionally frames her feminine weakness as a masculine impotence that prohibits the female writer from achieving sufficient “pull” to “tug” the narrative to its necessary (sexual) climax.

James calls upon similar language describing the flaccidity of feminine fluency in his critical assessment of George Sand. “She is loose and liquid and iridescent,” James writes of Sand in *Notes on Novelists*, explaining that her shortcomings as an author derive from her lack of adherence or “sticking together”:

It is hard to say of George Sand's productions, I think, that they show closeness anywhere; the sense of that fluidity which is more than fluency is what, in speaking of theme, constantly comes back to us, and the sense of fluidity is fundamentally fatal to the sense of particular truth. The thing presented by intention is never the stream of the artist's inspiration; it is the deposit of the stream.²⁹

Here James ascribes the fatal fluidity of Sand's writing to her failure to create a cohesive narrative to explore a “particular truth” in terms that forecast the metaphorical “pissing contest” he later stages in his response to Cotes in similarly sexualized language. In presenting the fluency of the stream only, James seems to argue, Sand neglects to represent the more important seminal “deposit” of men's virile writing. James levels similar critiques at particular male writers who fail to measure up to his standard of masculine virility in their lack of aesthetic economy. In reviewing Whitman, for example, James equates the poet's lack of (bodily/aesthetic) control with his lack of masculinity and artistic ability, disparaging the

²⁸ Snyder, Katherine V. *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel: 1850-1925*. 1999. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 110.

²⁹ James, Henry. *Notes on Novelists: With Some Other Notes*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. 105, 192.

“incontinent expression of *Drum-Taps*,” according to P Rawlings, “as having something of this popular, vulgar, femininity.”³⁰ Even with non-fiction prose, James found Eugene Fromentin “guilty” of overelaboration of his style in his study of Rubens and Rembrandt, “which gives his book occasionally a somewhat sickly and unmasculine tone” that breeds ambiguity.³¹

Importantly, James’s concern for fatal fluency is not only applicable to women’s fiction. He also uses the term to express a broader anxiety about “self-revelation,” which he articulates in his preface to *The Ambassadors* when he describes his discomfort with “the terrible fluidity of self-revelation” inherent in first person narration as “a form foredoomed to looseness,” which he likens to “the darkest abyss of romance.”³² Although Kathrine V. Snyder reads these “multiple and inconsistent readings of this narrative technique” as James’s attempt to “reclaim literary fiction as an arena of properly regulated masculine endeavor,” Richard Salmon argues for James’s opposition to the self-revelation of first-person narratives as a discomfort with “the dissolution of cultural boundaries” between the public and private.³³ James’s resistance to the “terrible” self-revelation of first-person narratives, however, may additionally indicate a fear of a queer self-revelation. In his extended assessment of the terrible fluidity of self-revelatory narration, James expresses his concern that this narrative technique may allow for a “variety and many other queer matters” to be “smuggled in by the back door.”³⁴ The fear of this terrible

³⁰ Rawlings, Peter. *Henry James and the Abuse of the Past*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1988. 45.

³¹ James, Henry. “The Painter’s Eye.” [1876] *The Painter’s Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts*. Ed. John L. Sweeney. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. 118.

³² James, Henry. “Preface to *The Ambassadors*.” *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James*. 1934. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 307-326. 319-20.

³³ According to Richard Salmon, James resolves in his novels by creating a more explicitly “exhibitional conditions” on his characters: in *The Ambassadors*, his solution is to “encage” his protagonist, Strether, “within an impersonal narrative form.” Salmon, op. cit. 172. Snyder, Katherine V. *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel*. Op. cit. 16.

³⁴ James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. Op. cit. 320.

fluidity, then, extends from anxiety about certain things—gender, sexuality, and desire—slipping or spilling in or out. Indeed, Rowland’s discomfort with Christina’s emotional outburst—another type of terrible fluidity of self-revelation embodied by uncontrolled weeping—most explicitly registers James’s opposition to the dissolution of not just cultural boundaries, but emotional, social, as well as aesthetic boundaries within the novel.³⁵ But it is his treatment of Roderick’s fatal fluency as the apex of his artistic genius and the crux of his aesthetic downfall—in terms that recall (but modify) his earlier and later critiques of women writers like Spofford, whose aesthetic failures derive from their excessive fluency, fluidity, and textual looseness—that James imaginatively works through his fascination with and fear of feminine fluidity. His development of the relationship between Roderick and Rowland exposes the radical potential of fluidity as a medium for imagining all manner of gender and sexual “crossings” between Rowland and Roderick.

Like these unmanly or too feminine men and women writers, Roderick suffers from a similar problem with verbal excess that James links to his lack of mature, virile, masculinity. Evidence of his feminine florid expression appears in Rowland’s first encounter with the young man, marveling at Roderick’s “relish for brilliant accessories” that is “visible in his talk, which abounded in the florid and sonorous” (21). Roderick’s floridity, like Spofford’s, is rooted in his peculiarly childish manner, which James characterizes as an ambiguous combination of boyish manhood that is strangely alluring rather than repulsive, which may be a reflection of James’s aversion to women in general. While Rowland “sat by in silence,” Roderick “rattled away for an hour with a volubility in which boyish unconsciousness and manly shrewdness were singularly combined” (21). This “singular” combination of childish masculinity proves to be an

³⁵ One never witnesses one of James’s bachelor protagonists cry.

intoxicating draw for Rowland, who finds him “crude and immature” though he nevertheless takes an immediate “fancy” to the young artist whom he desires to help shape into a mature artist in a homoerotic twist on the Pygmalion myth that positions Rowland, not Roderick, as the ideal artist who falls hopelessly in love with his own creation (23).

Roderick appears to be the answer to the Galatea-esque inspiration Rowland tells his cousin Cecilia he has been impatiently waiting for in the opening chapter of the novel. “I am waiting till something takes my fancy irresistibly,” he tells Cecilia upon his arrival (just before his first encounter with Roderick) before sharing his reservations about his impending plans to travel abroad to partake in an “idealized form of loafing” in Rome (9). Worried that his own “sensitive soul” might suffer from “rambling too often among the ruins of Palatine, or riding too often in the shadow of the aqueducts,” Rowland confides in Cecilia about the dangers these travels have for his more sensitive “intellectual nerves” (9). “In such recreations the chords of feeling grow tense,” Rowland explains, “and after-life, to spare your intellectual nerves, must play upon them with a touch as dainty as the tread of Mignon when she danced her egg-dance” (9). Rowland’s avowal of his own “sensitive soul” as well as his choice allusion to Goethe’s cross-dressing heroine, Mignon, reinforces the assumption of his queer (sexual, gender) vulnerability. Mignon has multiple uses in nineteenth-century culture, all of which could apply to Rowland’s peculiar admission of sensitivity.

On a whole, Mignon embodies a new conception of childhood or symbolizes a sense of interiority—which easily applies to Rowland’s introspective nature—but she also functions as an androgynous (perhaps hermaphroditic) object of homoerotic desire as a cross-dressing woman; indeed, *fin-de-siècle* psychological readings of Mignon associate the figure with male longing to

become a female child.³⁶ If James had her hermaphroditic exploits in mind when penning the reference, this allusion is the first of several veiled references to Rowland's potential transgender affinity (the final being the above-mentioned reference to Shakespeare's Viola that closes the narrative). Cecilia's reaction to his rambling rant about his sensitive soul—which continues for several lines as he expresses his desire for “an absorbing errand”—clenches this sense of Rowland's and Roderick's shared vulnerability in their verbal excess and potentially queer identities (9). Cecilia reinterprets his existential angst as romantic longing, reasserting the heteronormative framework to obscure the possibility that he may harbor queer affinities. “What an immense number of words,” Cecilia exclaims after a brief pause, “to say you want to fall in love!” (9). The combination of verbal excess and romantic longing signals Rowland's tendency to feminine fluidity, simultaneously reinforcing and obscuring his queer affinity. Rowland cheekily acknowledges Cecilia's diagnosis of his romantic longing—jokingly asking her to find “some perfect epitome of the graces” among her Northampton, Massachusetts acquaintances—but he ultimately shies away from any attempts to place him within the marriage plot, instead substituting his patronage of Roderick for matrimony (10).

Rowland's deft elusion of romantic entanglements in this playful exchange serves as the first indication of a potentially gay understanding of his romantic longing, which James reinforces shortly thereafter in his initial encounter with Roderick's ideal male nude statuette, *Thirst*. But before James introduces Roderick and his statuette, James effectively elides this initial gay understanding of Rowland's attraction to men through a deliberate narrative rupture that separates Rowland's avocation of his “sensitive soul” from his initial encounter with the

³⁶ Cave, Terence. *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 241-3. See also Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Inferiority, 1780-1930*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995. Steedman, Carolyn. “New Time: Mignon and her Meanings.” *Fin de Sicle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*. Ed. John Stokes. Palgrave Macmillan, 1992. 102-116.

statuette. Instead of interrogating the emotional geography of Rowland's feelings on the subject of matrimony—as he does elsewhere in the novel through his highly wrought introspection or simply by shifting directly to his homoerotic encounter with Roderick's *Thirst* (an obvious double for Roderick's and Rowland's same-sex libidinal desire)—James abruptly shifts the focus from Rowland's witty exchange to offer a (not so) “rapid glance at his antecedents” to allow “the reader to perceive” how much this “little profession of ideal chivalry” is “not quite so fanciful on Mallet's lips as it would have been on those of any another man” (10). The narrative rupture functions to distinguish Rowland's subtle avocations of florid fluency from Roderick's more riotous facilities by establishing his more principled nature, effectively throwing a metaphorical “wet blanket”—so-to-speak—on Rowland's homosexual romantic longing.

Originating from “a rigid Puritan stock”—an indication of his virile manhood—Rowland has been raised “to think much more intently of the duties of life than of its privileges and pleasures” (11). Though his father gained considerable wealth, he took care to ensure his son was not “corrupted by luxury” (12). His education, too, was conducted on “rigorous” principles that suggest an inclination for celibacy over any kind of sexual longing as he was taught by “a master who set a high price on the understanding that he was to illustrate the beauty of abstinence not only by precept but by example” (13). It is only as he comes into his young adulthood that Rowland begins to understand the narrow limits of his upbringing, “that his young experience was not a fair sample of human freedom” as he is awakened to his mother's deeply unhappy union with “her husband's rigid and consistent will,” an experience that likely dissuaded Rowland from any interest in future matrimony (14). Rowland survives the strictures of his Puritanical upbringing, James explains, “because nature had blessed him inwardly with a well of vivifying waters” (13). This description of Rowland's internal “well of vivifying waters”

is the first indication that Rowland, like Roderick, has his own wellspring of florid fluency that has been suppressed by a rigid upbringing predicated on abstinence (13). He thus emerges in adulthood mostly unscathed, “an awkward mixture of strong moral impulse and restless aesthetic curiosity,” but sadly not “a vigorous young man of genius,” as secretly wished (15). In all, the lengthy exposition serves to illustrate how Rowland has been inoculated against the threat of fatal fluency. This inoculation against excess floridity allows Rowland to bear witness—with considerably more detachment—to Roderick’s fantastic rise and fatal fall without drowning in his aesthetic excess.

Roderick, in contrast, embodies James’s ideal of being “saturated” in life but he lacks Rowland’s disinterested detachment, the twofold aesthetic ideal James imagined for his ideal artist.³⁷ His literal and figurative (and fully embodied) thirst/*Thirst*, which ultimately proves to be unquenchable, is the first indication of his excessive fluency. The “exquisitely rendered” nude male is represented “drinking from a gourd” with his “head thrown back, and both hands raised to support the rustic cup” (16). With the “loosened fillet of wild flowers” adorning his head, the statuette, Rowland speculates, “might have been some beautiful youth of ancient fable, -a Hylas or Narcissus, Paris or Endymion” (16). While James’s invocation of these “pretty” boys (Cecilia’s designation for Roderick/Thirst) from Greek mythology may not be an explicit signifier of homosexuality, but they nevertheless suggest a certain bisexual fluidity: Hylas, who was carried off by youths, was the intimate of Hercules, Narcissus dramatizes a queer aesthetic with his obsessive self-love, while Endymion and Paris are marked by their excessive personal

³⁷ In an 1888 letter to his brother William, Henry declares the “great thing is to be saturated with something—that is, in one way or another, with life; and I chose the form of my saturation.” [Letter to William James] October 29th 1888. Hotel de L’Ecu: Geneva. *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*. Op. cit. 209. But James does not subscribe to saturation alone, as Maurice Beebe discusses in his article. James required a balance of saturation or engagement and detachment. Beebe, Maurice. “Henry James: The Ideal of Detachment.” *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: the Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce*. New York: New York University Press, 1964. 197-231.

beauty. The statuette itself serves to initiate the homosocial bond between Roderick and Rowland. As a double for Roderick, “young Water-drinker”—which Rowland observes to be “guzzling in earnest”—also symbolizes his unquenchable aesthetic thirst and signals his reckless fluidity, foreshadowing the sculptor’s watery ocean-side demise in a freak rainstorm (22). The statuette is thus a reflection of Roderick’s dangerous, fatal fluency. Roderick conceives of life, he explains to Rowland shortly after their departure, as an expansive stream of activity that serves to expand the intellect and fuel his art. He imagines “all the material of thought that life pours into us [...] all melt[ing] like water into water,” but never flooding; “the more the mind takes in, the more it has space for,” Roderick contends, imagining the aesthetic experience as an eternal spring continually expanding and enriching the human imagination (61).

At first Rowland perceives Roderick’s fluency as an indomitable asset buoying his artistic endeavors. After leaving for Europe, Rowland observes with pleasure Roderick’s total absorption in the world around him, which he at first perceives to be a confirmation of the young artist’s inevitable success. “[N]one ever made a fairer beginning than Roderick,” Rowland muses, describing the sculptor as straddling

two horses at once with extraordinary good fortune; he established the happiest modus vivendi betwixt work and play. He wrestled all day with a mountain of clay in his studio, and chattered half the night away in Roman drawing-rooms. It all seemed part of a kind of divine facility. (71)

In his early exploits, Roderick appears to embody the ideal balance between a well-structured masculine work ethic, “wrestling” clay by day, and a feminine sociality, “chattering” away his evening hours, making the most of his artistic talents characterized not by “fatal fluency” but by “divine facility.” Importantly, this curious description of Roderick riding “two horses at once” doubles as a suggestion of his bi-fluent (and potentially bi-sexual) dual nature.

But not long after their arrival, Roderick's aptitude for bi-fluency begins to dissipate (or dissolve/evaporate as James describes elsewhere in his torrid descriptions of this decline), presumably due to his lack of financial, aesthetic, sexual, and gender economy. Roderick's dissipation prompts Rowland to admonish the poor sculptor for playing "dangerous games with [his] facility" (95). "If you have got facility," Rowland explains, "revere it, respect it, adore it, treasure it--don't speculate on it" (95). The aesthetic economy James establishes during his slow build toward Roderick's eventual breakdown presumes a limited store of aesthetic, sexual, and gender currency, which is paralleled in his apparent lack of financial economy. Early in their journey, Rowland takes notice of Roderick's inability to economize financially or lexically with the "great loosely-written missives" he sends home to his mother and fiancé that cost "unconscionable sums" of money (65). Later Roderick's lack of economy materializes in his excessive gambling when he reveals to Rowland that he is "up to his knees" in debt (65). In essence, Roderick falls to the sin of violating the financial, aesthetic, gender, and sexual economy of rigorous formal control that governs the well-regulated bourgeois male ego as represented by Rowland.

But Roderick stalls, finally, not because of his gambling or drinking or philandering but because of his desire to create an aesthetic ideal for another seemingly benevolent male patron, Mr. Leavenworth, who commissions him to create a "monumental" sculpture (129). At this point in the story, though, Roderick has spent his store of aesthetic currency. Roderick's excessive ambition has sapped his creativity. The fluid and flowing imagery previously associated with Roderick has dried up, replaced with torrid imagery associated with desiccation and sterility. Where Rowland once perceived Roderick "floating unperturbed on the tide of his deep self-confidence," he now begins to witness the gradual depletion of the sculptor's once

“divine facility” (65). Roderick’s attempts to begin the work are met with “the dead blank” of his mind and his “miserably sterile mood” (150). Fearing he may “disappear, dissolve, be carried off in a cloud,” Roderick imagines his creative powers stranded in “the dead calm in the tropics,” his “imagination as motionless as the phantom ship in the Ancient Mariner!” (153). To make matters worse, Mr. Leavenworth’s numerous suggestions and hints at improvement seem to accelerate Roderick’s decline. Leavenworth’s “benignant and imperturbable pomposity gave Roderick the sense of suffocating beneath a large fluffy bolster,” and he contemplates, for the first time, “the danger of dying of over-patronage.”³⁸ Although he finally begins to create a “representation of a lazzarone lounging in the sun”—hardly the monumental figure he once aspired to, but deeply symbolic of how far the aspiring artist has fallen from his former idealism—Roderick is unable to complete the sculpture, being overwhelmed by Mr. Leavenworth’s “oppressive personality” punctuated by “voluminous” talk (200). In breaking with Leavenworth, Roderick declares his “inspiration” to be “dead”; “You yourself killed it,” he childishly admonishes Leavenworth (201). And, of course, in typical Jamesian dramatic foreshadowing, Roderick’s declaration of inspirational death by over-patronage is followed by a literal one.³⁹ Roderick meets his untimely end, falling from the precipice of a seaside cliff onto a rocky shore during a freak rainstorm that is symbolic of the emotional flood that comes over him after his final break with Rowland.

Embedded within this final characterization of his death-by-over-patronage is the notion that oppressive male patrimony inevitably feeds upon the youthful exuberance and aesthetic

³⁸ This quotation comes from the 1875 edition (243). Op. cit. This passage is slightly revised in the 1891 edition: “fluffy bolster” becomes “feather-bed” and “over-patronage” becomes “too much attention” (178). Op. cit.

³⁹ Male patronage never ends well in James’s fiction as Ralph Touchett demonstrates in his secret bequest to his cousin Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In making her an heiress, he turns her into prey for fortune-seeking men like Gilbert Osmond who prefers to marry, rather than earn, his fortune.

excesses of “pretty boy[s]” like Roderick. Although Roderick throws this charge at Leavenworth in the final chapter of the novel, James leaves the reader with the subtle suggestion that Roderick is finally killed not just by Leavenworth’s oppressive masculine dictation but also by Rowland’s vampire-like benevolent patronage. Rowland comes to recognize his own predation on Roderick’s aesthetic wellspring during their final argument, the pretense of which is money and women but the substance of which has more to do with the terrible self-revelations of their joint profession of love for women who do not return their affections (and the potential for their shared same-sex desire). After Roderick storms away in anger, Rowland attempts to ponder why Roderick would pursue a woman—Christina—who does not return his affections. “And why the deuce need Roderick have gone marching back to destruction?” Rowland queries. But his meditation, instead of bringing his usual comfort, only delivers more “unrest”:

He felt conscious of a sudden collapse in his moral energy; a current that had been flowing for two years with liquid strength seemed at last to pause and stagnate. Rowland looked away at the sallow vapors on the mountains; their dreariness had an analogy with the stale residuum of his own generosity. (328)

The passage posits, for the first time, Rowland’s unacknowledged thirst for the aesthetic ideal in its graphic illustration of his two-year predation on Roderick’s fluency, the apparent product of his own self-serving “generosity.” And like the stagnate “sallow vapors” he observes on the mountains, his life stagnates after he discovers the lifeless body of Roderick at the bottom of the cliff: “Now that it was all over Rowland understood how exclusively, for two years, Roderick had filled his life. His occupation was gone” (346). The story ends, of course, with Rowland assuming the pretense of “the most patient” of men when in fact he remains, as his Cecilia suggests, “the most restless of mortals,” a figure not of heterosexual patience, but of unrequited homosexual desire for Roderick.

Highly Wrought Introspection

Rowland's introspective passage also reveals how James incorporates the unstable feminine fluid stream of the Azarian in Rowland's wandering current of thought to formulate the basis of the highly introspective style delineating the highly wrought architecture of his mind. It represents one of dozens of such personal reflections Rowland has on the developing actions of the novel where he considers how things "seemed" or "felt" or "appeared" to him. For example, after Sam Singleton and Rowland discover Roderick's body, Singleton returns to the lodge where they are staying to fetch enough men to transport the body safely. Rowland stays behind with the body in what turns out to be a seven-hour vigil that would remain "for ever memorable" for him:

The most rational of men was for an hour the most passionate. He reviled himself with transcendent bitterness, he accused himself of cruelty and injustice, he would have lain down there in Roderick's place to unsay the words that had yesterday driven him forth on his lonely ramble. (346)

Rather than describe the material conditions of this extended vigil—the outbursts that must have attended the transformation of this "most rational of men" becoming briefly the "most passionate"—James contains the emotional impact of this loss in terms that appear to be as muted as "the dumb exultation of the cliff" that looms above him as he waits.

But even in this muted introspection, James does not entirely divest his language of the "fleshly element" he so abhors in Spofford's *Azarian*. What accumulates in his mind all the are material possibilities of what might have happened to cause this death—he went too high, he slipped, he tried to return too early or too late—but "before the absoluteness of the fact one hypothesis after another lost its interest" (346). The emotional charge of the final event of the novel, moreover, is mapped onto Rowland's perception of the environment—as reflected in the

sympathetic fallacy of the dreariness of the mountains—as well as his consciousness. As Rowland and the funeral procession finally reach the inn, he is startled by the vivid tableau of horror that greets him in the expressions of Mrs. Hudson, “totter[ing] forward with outstretched hands and the expression of a blind person,” and Mary Garland flinging herself “with a loud tremendous cry, upon the senseless vestige of her love” (347). It is this moment that echoes in Rowland’s cavernous memory, inscribed on his soul in a manner reminiscent of Melville’s “flesh-brush” theory of authorship outlined in *Pierre*, though Rowland is authoring not just texts but human experience.⁴⁰

That cry still lives in Rowland’s ears. It interposes, persistently, against the reflection that when he sometimes—very rarely—sees her, she is unreservedly kind to him; against the memory that during that dreary journey back to America, made of course with his assistance, there was a great frankness in her gratitude, a great gratitude in her frankness. (347)

The passage attempts to transcribe the emotional palimpsest of Roderick’s memory as an acknowledgement of the material weight of feelings, expressions, and words in what Victoria Coulson sees as the “the suppressed materiality of language” reasserting itself everywhere in what she has identified as James’s “sticky realism”: “language’s body, as it were, disrupting the smooth dematerialized flow of signification, blurring the boundaries between sense and sensation.”⁴¹

The ultimate function of what Coulson calls the “sticky realism” of James’s highly wrought introspection, however, is not to adhere to bits of realism but to internalize the descriptive materialism of romanticism in order to dramatize the psychological consequences of its excesses. In his formulation of the highly wrought introspective style, James seeks to capture

⁴⁰ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; Or the Ambiguities*. 1852. Ed. William C. Spengemann. New York: Penguin, 1996.

⁴¹ Coulson, Victoria. “Sticky Realism: Armchair Hermeneutics in Late James.” *The Henry James Review*. 25.2 (2004): 115-126. 121.

some of women's fluidity and fluency to represent, as he describes so ardently in his review of Spofford's *Azarian*, not the "external signs and accidents of passion" but "Passion's self,—her language, her ringing voice, her gait, the presentment of her deeds" (271). His highly wrought introspective style represents an attempt to find in manhood some sustainable version of the feminine rhetoric not in the external material, but in the internal immaterial of the florid-fluid imagination, even as it continues to adhere—stickily—to the textual body of James's highly wrought introspective style.

Chapter 4: Higginson's *Epanchement*: Towards a Theory & Masculine Practice of the

Highly Wrought Style

After all, sentimentalism is a thing immortal, for it represents the slight overplus and excess of youthful emotion; it bears the same relation to the deeper feelings of later life that the college contests of the foot-ball ground bear to life's conflicts.¹

~TW Higginson "The Decline of the Sentimental"

Remembered primarily for either his abolitionist activism or his famous correspondence with and tutelage of Emily Dickinson, as well as a handful of other important American women writers, Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911) began his literary career as a prolific contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*. According to Ellery Sedgwick, Higginson contributed over 150 essays, reviews, and stories to its pages in the first few decades of its inception alone.² With the exception of Christopher Looby's work on Higginson, however, most scholars tend to overlook the significance of his contributions to both the *Atlantic* and the American literary tradition.³ Nancy Glazener, for example, while tacitly crediting Higginson's postbellum criticism with helping to define the emerging high realism of the Atlantic Group, largely ignores his critical role in the development of the journal and its production of high realism, and for good reason: Higginson's ambiguous style, which adheres, at times, more to the sentimental or romantic than the realist tradition, makes him a problematic figure for a study on American

¹ Higginson, T.W. "The Decline of the Sentimental." *Independent* (November 3, 1887): 1.

² Sedgwick, Ellery. *A History of the Atlantic Monthly: 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994. 78.

³ Most scholars addressing Higginson do so solely through his relationship with Emily Dickinson. See for example, Wineapple, Brenda. *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

realism.⁴ But he does belong, somewhat marginally, to the “genteel tradition” of American literature. From his early life, Higginson was, in the words of his second wife, Mary Thacher, “inclined to the sentimental.”⁵ Late in life, Higginson came to a similar conclusion, describing his writing more in terms of the romantic or sentimental discourse of women’s writing as having a “fineness and fire, but some want of copiousness and fertility.”⁶ This sentimental inclination to “fineness” is everywhere in his writing, as many of his *Atlantic* essays illustrate in their attention to feminine subjects and female audiences. Even in his journals and letters, Higginson’s sentiments tend toward the romantic; a sizeable number of his literary references derive from what Looby categorizes as the “literature of chivalric romance.”⁷

To define Higginson’s writing as thoroughly romantic or entirely sentimental, though, only partially accounts for the substance of his texts. For Higginson was, at almost every point in his career, equally invested in the aesthetic and social production of masculinity. A number of his early *Atlantic* essays, for example, address male health, bodily fitness, and military heroism; his Civil War journals also show Higginson “deeply invested in the aesthetic production of military spectacle,” an affinity that announces itself loudly in Higginson’s semi-autobiographical account of the Civil War, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1869).⁸ As a consequence, his writing is best understood as neither romantic, sentimental, nor realist but rather as an expression of that

⁴ Glazener gives very little attention to Higginson, mentioning his contributions only briefly in her chapters. Her acknowledgement of his contributions appears mainly in her footnotes, where she credits Higginson, along with several other critics, with developing the style (303 n.70). Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

⁵ Higginson, Mary Thacher Potter. *Thomas Wentworth Higginson: the story of his life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914. 23.

⁶ Quoted in Mary Thacher Higginson’s biography, *Thomas Wentworth Higginson*. Ibid. 274.

⁷ This literature of romantic chivalry includes works by Sir Walt Scott, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Hughes. Looby, Christopher. Introduction. *The Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999. 1-32. 8.

⁸ Looby, *The Complete Civil War Journals*. Ibid. 11, 15. These male-centric *Atlantic* essays include: “Saints and their Bodies” (March 1858), “Physical Courage” (November 1858), “A letter for a Dyspeptic” (April 1859), “Barbarism and Civilization” (1861), “Gymnastics” (March 1861), “The Ordeal of Battle” (July 1861). I derive this list from Looby’s Introduction (15, footnote 20).

highly wrought style, which Dorri Beam has observed in nineteenth-century American women's writing.⁹ In women's highly wrought fiction, Beam asserts, the feminine, floral, and florid literary aesthetic articulates a transcendent feminine poetics for women to voice transgressive desires and imagine female empowerment (via the feminine). With Higginson and the other florid writers in this study, conversely, the florid style emerges as an expression of a queer poetics of masculinity to assert their own transgressive desires for gender, sexual, and in the case of Higginson, racial alterity. Higginson's queer masculine poetics manifests itself in his writing through a key mythos from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Hermaphroditus, a figure of aesthetic and gender fluidity haunting his aesthetic practice. For Higginson, Hermaphroditus serves as a useful figure for imagining a transgressive feminized masculine aesthetics that can cross gender, sexual, and racial barriers without losing access and control of his masculine identity. In his prose, the figure is associated with water—an imaginative medium for change—and with childhood and innocence, lending a moral purity to his project. The figure also appears in his two most significant works of fiction, *Malbone* (1869) and *The Monarch of Dreams* (1886), as the beautiful feminine man—whose handsome features attract both men and women—as well as the beautiful dreamer, who manages to take on both male and female qualities.

Importantly, these feminine male figures have real-life analogues for Higginson in the shape of William Henry Hurlbert and Henry David Thoreau. Higginson's admiration for Hurlbert was immediate upon their meeting at school. Writing to his mother in 1848, Higginson compares Hurlbert to a "fascinating girl."¹⁰ For Higginson, Hurlbert was "a true southerner, the best sort—slender, graceful, dark, with raven eyes and hair"; he was "so handsome in his dark

⁹ Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁰ quoted in Looby, Christopher. Introduction. *The Civil War Journals*. op cit. 14. There is considerable confusion about the spelling of his last name. Hurlbut changed the spelling of his name to Hurlbert sometime in young adulthood. Looby uses the original family spelling in his name in his study. Here I use his preferred, though altered, spelling.

beauty that he seemed like a picturesque oriental.”¹¹ In describing his own florid-fluid passion for Hurlbert, Higginson observed, “I never loved but one male friend with a passion—and for him my love had no bounds—all that my natural fastidiousness and cautions reserve kept from others I poured on him; to say that I would have died for him was nothing.”¹² Even their correspondence, Mary Thacher noted, appeared to be “more like those between a man and a woman than between two men.”¹³ With Thoreau, Higginson’s admiration is more intellectual than physical. Upon first meeting him in the early 1850s, Higginson found the unusual combination of analytical prowess and dreamy imagination in the “little bronzed spare man” compelling; he “surveys land, both mathematically and meditatively; lays out house-lots in Haverhill and in the moon”; in his writing, too, Thoreau seemed to provide Higginson a refreshing combination of feminized outdoorsy charm, giving “to outdoor hours such an atmosphere of serene delight as made one feel that a wood thrush was always soliloquizing somewhere in the background.”¹⁴ To be sure, though, both these men inhabited a more feminized masculinity punctuated by purity and chastity, especially with Thoreau, whose celibacy Higginson commended.

Accordingly, this chapter examines Higginson’s longstanding affiliation with the highly wrought style, which he cultivated in the purple prose of his earliest *Atlantic Monthly* floricultural and advice essays and maintained—with some ambivalence—in his fiction and later criticism. It traces the critical significance of the style most directly to his interest in reform and the transcendental philosophy he absorbed as a young divinity student before he made the

¹¹ quoted in Looby, Introduction. *The Civil War Journals*. *ibid.* 14.

¹² quoted in Higginson, Mary Thacher, *Life*. *op. cit.* 126.

¹³ Higginson, Mary Thacher, *Life*. *ibid.* 125.

¹⁴ quoted in *Thoreau in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life*. ed. Sandra Harbert Petrulionis. Iowa City: Iowa City University Press, 2012. 106.

transition from ministry to activism and authorship in the 1850s; but it also works to uncover how contemporary florid writers informed, and were informed by, the socio-aesthetic practice he cultivated and encouraged in the writing of others, most notably through his literary patronage of young women writers like Emily Dickinson and Harriet Prescott Spofford (the worst offender of the florid “school,” according to Henry James).¹⁵ In charting Higginson’s thematic and rhetorical engagement with the style across different mediums and over time, his socio-aesthetic practice emerges as a vehicle for tacitly exploring more radical racial, gender, and sexual heterodoxies through a hermaphroditic literary aesthetic of textual excess. However, the cross-racial and bi-gender literary imagination that Higginson articulates in his florid writing ultimately does not serve to fully cross gender, racial, or sexual barriers; rather, Higginson’s florid writing constructs an immaculate white, heterosexual manhood that comes close to but never fully realizes a complete hermaphroditism, which he explores at length in his late-life literary fantasy, *The Monarch Of Dreams* (1886), a morbid reverie about the pleasures and pitfalls of the highly wrought masculine imagination.

Although the final focus of this chapter concerns how *The Monarch* clarifies (or complicates) Higginson’s commitment to this hermaphroditic literary aesthetic, it builds on his larger body of writing to assess the scope and purpose of his florid enterprise, from his early floricultural and advice essays for the *Atlantic Monthly*, to his semi-biographical account of the Civil War in *Army Life* and first attempt at fiction with *Malbone* (1869), to his later literary criticism. Individually, the works highlight different racial, gender, sexual, or sociopolitical dimensions of Higginson’s investment in the florid style. Collectively, they offer commentary on his ongoing enthusiasm for florid writing as a complex gendered practice, tracing his

¹⁵ James’s vitriolic take down of Spofford appears in “Miss Prescott’s Azarian” *North American Review*. 100.1 (January 1865): 268-77.

understanding of its development in, and importance to, American literature as a revolutionary socio-aesthetic practice as illustrated by his late-life observation that the “[l]iterature of a new country naturally tends to the florid, as had been shown by the novels of Charles Brockden Brown, or even so severe a work as Bancroft’s *History of the United States*.”¹⁶ While Higginson offers little commentary on this cursory observation—he adds only that “Poe was to give only too wide a prestige to the same tendency”—the statement exposes Higginson’s life-long investment in identifying florid writing as part of a masculine literary tradition born of the radical democratic impulse in male writers of the new nation, like Brown and Bancroft (and to a lesser degree Poe) who, importantly, assert a decorous, masculine florid style distinguishable from the “rougher school” of masculine floridity later developed by writers like Whitman and George Lippard (143, 221). This impulse to masculinize the feminine style appears everywhere in his writings as the opening epigraph of this chapter—taken from Higginson’s essay on “The Decline of the Sentimental”—illustrates in his characterization of sentimentalism as a “slight overplus and excess of youthful emotion”—an “*épanchement*” or “outpouring”—that derives not from the feminine domestic sphere but from “the deeper feelings of later life that the college contests of the foot-ball ground bear to life’s conflicts,” which roots the style in a masculine expression of athleticism.¹⁷

This sense of outpouring is crucial to Higginson’s thematic and aesthetic constructions of the style, which frequently link floridity to fluidity, infusing its immersive rhetoric with transformative potential. One of the earliest elaborations of this argument appears in

¹⁶ Higginson, T.W., Henry Wolcott Boynton. *A Reader’s History of American Literature*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903. 143.

¹⁷ Higginson, T.W. “The Decline of the Sentimental.” Op. cit. 1. In this same essay, though, Higginson also more famously defines sentimentalism as “a certain rather melodramatic self-consciousness, a tender introspection in the region of the heart, a kind of studious cossetting of one’s finer feelings,” an overtly feminine association that exposes just how complicated—and confused—his understanding of gender and style is, even later in his career.

Higginson's 1862 *Atlantic Monthly* essay, "The Procession of Flowers," a floricultural review of the succession of blooms that appear in each season throughout the year in New England.¹⁸ Set against the larger sociopolitical climate in the United States as it enters the second year of its Civil War, the essay figures as a hopeful metaphor for the righteous success of the Union cause in the eternal cycle of floral blooms available in the northeastern U.S. In the context of his socio-aesthetic project, though, the florid floral procession develops his argument for the transformative potential of textual excess. Beginning with winter—the bleakest time of year in the procession—Higginson cycles through the increasingly bountiful seasons until he reaches its crescendo with summer—the season most deeply emblematic of the highly wrought style—before coming to a brief dénouement with fall. But in his concluding remarks Higginson returns to summer—the most fervid and florid month—to contemplate and theorize the reasons for its peculiar allure. The human "fascination with summer," he argues, derives not from "any details, however perfect," but rather from the overwhelming "sense of total wealth that summer gives" (656). "Wholly to enjoy this," Higginson continues—echoing Edmund Burke's treatise on the sublime as a lofty overwhelming aesthetic experience requiring surrender—"one must give ones' self passively to it" (656).¹⁹ Accordingly, Higginson imagines the "truant boy who simply bathes himself in the lake" as its ideal recipient, best equipped to appreciate, or surrender, to those "moments when the atmosphere is so surcharged with luxury that every pore of the body becomes an ample gate for sensation to flow in, and one has simply to sit still and be filled" (656). His theory of textual excess instills the power of radical transformation in the author

¹⁸ Higginson, T. W. "The Procession of Flowers." *The Atlantic Monthly*. (December 1862): 649-652. 656.

¹⁹ Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London: Printed by J. Dodsley, 1767.

willing to inhabit the truant boy's sponge-like passive surrender to Nature's excesses, willing to "bathe" in the "self-renewing" influence of the baptismal "fountains" of the florid fluid (657).

The truant boy thus becomes one of the initial signifiers for Higginson's hermaphroditic literary aesthetic, whose ritual bathing recalls the myth of Hermaphroditus, the beautiful youth who encounters the nymph Salmacis while bathing in her pool, merging with her to become a creature of both sexes. In this figure of a truant boy—immersed in a lake, passively allowing "sensation to flow in"—Higginson imagines an alternative to Emerson's absorbent, self-emancipating metaphor for the transcendental vision of the transparent eyeball as the ideal vehicle for effecting transformation. It proposes a simpler, child-like surrender to the aesthetic excesses of nature as its point of access in place of Emerson's more dynamic concept of active perception. This dramatization of access through excess and sensory experience, rather than perception and understanding, importantly, shifts the focus Emerson places on the visual to the sensual (and potentially sexual—though significantly subdued in the presence of the truant boy's childish innocence). Although Higginson's expression of the highly wrought style involves masculinizing the feminine rhetoric of the florid discourse, imbuing only men (or boys, in the case of this metaphor) with the fluid-florid aesthetic, his interest in the style stems from a deep fascination with women and the feminine, which manifests itself in his political activism for women's equal rights as well as his use of feminine themes and feminized subjects in his floricultural essays like "The Procession of Flowers."

Floridity & Feminine Alterity

Accordingly, Higginson's use of the style, more than the other male authors in this study, ostensibly aligns most directly with the concerns of women's highly wrought fiction through their shared interest in reform and in their similar deployment of textual excess to create a transformative space for imagining other ways of knowing and being. With women's highly wrought fiction, as Dorri Beam notes in her study, ornament is linked to reform as a means of imagining alternative conceptions of gender "as dual and complementary or of femininity as subordinate to masculinity."²⁰ "They use forms of proliferation, intensification, and embellishment," Beam explains, to express that which is "inarticulable without the kind of reforms they effect in literary language."²¹ This use of "floridity as the site of feminine alterity," for Beam, is most richly revealed in Margaret Fuller's floricultural essays and Ann Stephen's sentimental novels where "an antieconomy of unreformed female desire glimmers" in their resistance to conventional modes of femininity and unconventional use of the language of flowers.²² Women's highly wrought fiction, however, is also concerned with the transmission of subversive resistance that appears in the "flourishing ornamentality" of Harriet Prescott Spofford's fiction. Spofford's "amberlike style," Beam argues, gives substance to and "preserves" her argument for "the vital alterity of the woman writer," making her art "transmissible" but, importantly, "not consumable."²³ Spofford's "amberlike style," then, serves as a perfect metaphor for the enduring feminine resistance embodied in the textual excess of women's florid writing.

²⁰ Beam, *op. cit.* 21.

²¹ Beam, *ibid.* 22.

²² Beam, *ibid.* 35.

²³ Beam, *ibid.* 162-3.

Although Higginson's interest in the style is not limited to feminine alterity—he's also concerned, more often, with masculine and racial otherness as well as white heterosexual manhood—his socio-aesthetic practice, in many ways, begins with this shared interest in figuring textual excess as a site for *feminine* resistance, alterity, and privileged feminine perception. His interest in feminine perception appears in one of his earliest published essays, an 1856 narrative about climbing Thoreau's Mount Katahdin, written from the point of view of a woman in the highly wrought style.²⁴ Higginson's fictional account of the woman's ascent, in fact, follows (or more accurately, coopts) the real efforts of a handful of women who climbed this mountain between 1849-1855 in an effort to draw attention to the "unacknowledged capabilities of women."²⁵ The narrative itself, though, stages their dramatic and arduous journey to the top of Katahdin as an act of rebellion against "Masculine tyranny" and to evidence women's hardy constitutions (246). What greets them at the top, though, is the "sublime" experience of floating "sheer up into the blue dome of heaven" and empowering god-like perception of the breathtaking panorama of the valley below with its lakes transformed into "scattered fragments of the sky-mirror" (253). The sketch represents one of the first instances in which Higginson publicly advocates for women's equality, but it also reveals his interest in inhabiting the feminine perception to luxuriate in the florid feminine imagination: the narrative is filled with resplendent descriptions of minute details of the visual and sensory experience of the journey right down to the delicate fashions of the journeying ladies and gentlemen.

His interest in florid feminine perception appears, perhaps, in more striking terms, in his opening lines for "The Procession of Flowers," which begins with a curious anecdote from

²⁴ Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. "Going to Mount Katahdin." *Putnam's Magazine*. 8 (September 1856): 242-56.

²⁵ Geller, William W. "The Mount Katahdin Peaks: the First 12 Women Climbers, 1849-1855." *Maine History Documents*. 118. 5. <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory/118>

Fredrika Bremer's recent travel narrative, *Homes of the New World* (1853), about an exotic blossoming shrub native to Cuba.²⁶ His choice in using the Swedish writer and reformer and Cuba to launch a discussion of New England's vibrant procession of flowers may seem singular but it serves three important, and loosely overlapping, political purposes that situate the northeastern United States at the epicenter of a larger sociopolitical/aesthetic project concerned with expanding borders, rights, and imaginations. As a well-known advocate for racial equality, Bremer's appearance in the text loudly announces Higginson's anti-slavery sympathies and further helps to frame the essay as a hopeful and just metaphor for a Union victory. However, his choice in highlighting an episode from Cuba, rather than another destination in *Homes of the New World*, suggests that Higginson may have shared Bremer's "secret wish and hope" that "Cuba may one day, by peaceful means, belong to the United States."²⁷ In this context, his linking of Cuba and New England invites an imaginative proliferation and expansion of the geopolitical borders of the U.S. and a hopeful extension of Union efforts to expand abolitionist sentiment southward, all the way to the remote Spanish colony that continued to maintain its practice of slavery (well into the 1880s). Finally, his use of Bremer's *Homes of the New World*, in particular, also signals his radical affirmation of women's rights. The book marked an important change in her thinking about the women's rights movement, which she initially opposed in the belief that civic engagement would make women less feminine.²⁸ She changed her mind, however, after encountering the women's movement in the United States during these travels, and openly advocated for women's rights for the first time in this travel memoir.

²⁶ The anecdote appears in Bremer's *Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, which was translated into English by Mary Howitt and published by Harper and Brothers in 1853. Importantly, Mary Howitt, along with her husband, William, were also active in pursuing socio-literary projects promoting social reform.

²⁷ Bremer, Frederick. *Homes of the New World*. Vol. 2 Trans. Mary Howitt. 2 Vols. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858. 459.

²⁸ Anderson, Bonnie S. *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 183.

Although the anecdote is of negligible importance to Bremer's narrative, Higginson's use and embellishment of the incident qualifies these three political purposes in telling ways. In Bremer's narrative, it serves to illustrate the "especially troublesome" nature of ants in Cuba to show how "one small kind of which" can "undermine a large house."²⁹ Only lightly embellishing her description of "the Cupid's tears kissed by the little humming-birds," Bremer relates gathering the "small red blossoms" from the Yumuri valley in an effort to make a botanical study of "their form and veining" at her leisure in her room.³⁰ The blossoms, however, repeatedly vanish—much to her "astonishment"—until she discovers that "very small light-colored ants were dragging them up" to the wall and out of sight.³¹ The anecdote is brief, extending to one paragraph—about half a page—of the multivolume work. Higginson's relation of the anecdote is noticeably more highly wrought. The "multitudinous crimson flowers" of the blossoming shrub Higginson describes are "so seductive to the humming-birds that they hover all day around it, buried in its blossoms until petal and wing seem one" (649). Higginson adds an element of racialized exoticism to the sexualized exoticism of the merging petal-wing imagery through his additional elaboration of the flower's name. "At first upright," Higginson explains, "the gorgeous bells droop downward, and fall unwithered to the ground, and are thence called by the Creoles 'Cupid's Tears'" (649). Higginson also embroiders the revelation of the mystery behind the flowers' disappearance. Bremer's simple relation of the red ascending promenade transforms in Higginson's essay into "a long crimson line [...] borne laboriously onward by a little colorless ant much smaller than itself: the bearer was invisible, but the lovely burdens festooned the wall with beauty" (649).

²⁹ Bremer, Fredrika. *Homes in the New World*. op. cit. 306.

³⁰ Bremer, Fredrika. *Homes in the New World*. *ibid.* 306.

³¹ Bremer, Fredrika. *Homes in the New World*. *ibid.* 306.

In the context of the American Civil War, this seemingly innocuous crimson ascension allegorizes the enormous blood sacrifices of its most recent battles in the fall of 1862—Shiloh Antietam—that claimed the lives of more than thirty thousand union and confederate men. Instead of corpses, Higginson presents readers with crimson blossoms; instead of bullets, tiny ants force each blossom's (heavenly) ascension. The allegory bears witness to this massive loss of life, but purifies and sanitizes their sacrifice in imagery heavily suggestive of the Christian doctrine outlining Christ's heavenly ascension, which is also provoked by an analogous bloodletting with his crucifixion. The nightly ascensions thus serve as a microcosm of the larger cycle of loss and renewal, naturalized as part of the annual cycle of seasonal processions and the endless cycle of life. The allegory also doubles for Cuba's fight to end slavery and overcome Spanish colonial rule. In the context of his socio-aesthetic project, the brief episode stages cyclicity as the controlling metaphor for the essay, capturing Higginson's multivalent interest in imagining floridity as a site of not just transformation or transcendence, but also of Bremer's privileged feminine perception, which he places at the epicenter of "the ceaseless motion" of the natural world and then likens to the god-like vantage point of the "watcher from the sky," whose privileged perception bears witness to the ceaseless "march of flowers of any zone" and across epochs (649). The passage reflects Higginson's belief, which he voiced in his satirical essay criticizing popular arguments against educating women—"Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?"—that "the present epoch" is more the province of "the genius of women" than of men.³² Women's genius, Higginson explains in this essay, will flourish in the present age because they "are more sensitive than men upon matters of taste and breeding," they possess "a greater average fineness of natural perception," and they live "more secluded lives" (142).

³² Higginson, T.W. "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" *The Atlantic Monthly*. (February 1859): 137-150.

Higginson's deep fascination with the privileged position of women, however, is best reflected in The Galatea Collection, a collection of books Higginson amassed over four decades with the intention of writing an *Intellectual History of Woman*; the work, he claimed in an 1872 journal entry, would be his "magnum opus."³³ Although he never completed this magnum opus, he continued to add to the collection even after he donated it to the Boston Public Library in the 1890s.³⁴ In 1898, the library published a catalogue of the collection with his prefatory letter citing its cultural significance given "the great changes that have gone on within recorded history in the social, industrial, and educational position of women," which have rendered the subject of women an "important theme for special study, and a proper basis for a separate department in every large library."³⁵ The collection itself reveals as much (if not more) about Higginson than it does about the written record of the course and development of women's genius. His interest in amassing such a collection follows both the contemporary popular trend among nineteenth-century women activists of gathering the "raw materials for women's history" to archive their accomplishments and control their legacy, but also harkens back to the eighteenth-century tradition of gentleman connoisseurship, which must have appealed to the acquisitive author who enjoyed collecting primary source materials on a number of topics.³⁶ But where female activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage succeeded in writing their own magnum opus on the subject of the *History of Women's Suffrage* in the 1880s,

³³ Mary Thacher Higginson sites an 1872 journal entry proclaiming his intention to write this "magnum opus." Higginson, Mary Thacher. *Life*. op. cit. 283.

³⁴ Higginson, Mary Thacher. *Life*. ibid. 283-4. Higginson added to the collection after giving it to the Boston Public Library with funding from Carnegie, according to Mary.

³⁵ Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. Preface. *Catalogue of the Galatea Collection of Books Relating to the History of Woman in the Public Library of the City of Boston*. Boston: Published by the Trustees, 1898. i.

³⁶ Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth-Seventy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 268.

Higginson achieved only this (rather substantial) collection.³⁷ The original 1898 catalogue lists over 1,000 items in the collection, which Higginson collated into over thirty different classifications within nine distinct categories: Biography, History & Condition of Women, Education, Health & Hygiene, Relations & Comparisons of the Sexes, Rights of Women, Work & Influence of Women, Literature-Bibliography, and Periodicals-Miscellaneous.³⁸ The categories demonstrate Higginson's interest in detailing a comprehensive understanding of the history and development of womankind, but it also offers insight into his thinking about women and his larger purpose in preserving women's writing and history. His decision to include works not just about women, but also by women, demonstrates his noble commitment to allowing women (perhaps for the first time) to narrate their own history: He includes, for example, Stanton, Anthony and Gage's three volume *History*. At the same time, the collection contains almost as many works by sympathetically-minded men, including William Channing and Henry Ward Beecher, as well as several by himself, indicating that he wished to examine the subject of "woman" from both within and between the sexes.

The collection also reveals his admirable interest in preserving women's legacy as writers and artists. The final two categories of the 1898 Galatea Collection Catalogue are reserved for original works by female authors throughout history and across the Atlantic—including Sappho, Browning, Bronte, Austen, Gaskell, Martineau, and Wollstonecraft—but also feature a generous representation of his contemporary American women authors whom he clearly respected—Stoddard, Phelps, Stowe, Child, and Sigourney—as well as all of his female protégés and personal friends he admired and supported throughout his career as author and critic: Sarah

³⁷ Tetrault, Lisa. "Susan B. Anthony and The Politics of Writing History." *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*. Ed. Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012. 15-55.

³⁸ Higginson, T.W. Preface. *Catalogue*. Op. cit. vi.

Whitman, Rose Terry Cooke, Helen Hunt Jackson, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, Lucy Stone, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Emily Dickinson, Celia Thaxter, and Lucy Larcom. The notable absences, however, reveal as much as his inclusions: On the whole, the collection is lacking representation of women writers of color with the exception of Phillis Wheatly, who appears to be the only African American artist to be featured in the collection. This absence marks a significant departure from his earlier interest in abolition, pointing to his wavering commitment to racial equality after the Civil War.³⁹ But other conspicuous absences include almost all of the “best selling” fiction writers of his day—Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (another important African American poet, activist, and author), Fanny Fern (Sarah Willis Parker), Ann Stephens, and E.D.E.N. Southworth—as well as several poetesses whose verse he may have deemed too sentimental or too subversive for his collection. Frances Sargent Osgood, Ada Isaac Menken, and Alice & Phoebe Cary are among these notable omissions.

His curatorial hand, however, is most visible in his titling of the collection after Gatalea, Pygmalion’s ivory woman, brought to life by Aphrodite. His choice of Galatea, rather than Eve, Aphrodite, or some other female icon from mythology or history is especially revealing. “In view of its stated purpose,” Anna Mary Wells argues, “Minerva might have seemed a better symbol than Pygmalion’s fair lady with her obvious invitation to risqué puns.”⁴⁰ But Minerva would have been inadequate, Wells concludes, since the collection represents woman not as she is, but “woman as Higginson created her from his own frustrations, desires, needs, and confusions.”⁴¹ Indeed Galatea serves this purpose much better: as an object shaped by men’s

³⁹ For an overview of Higginson’s wavering abolitionist interest before and after the Civil War see Brenda Wineapple’s biographical study (174-5, 305-10). Wineapple, Brenda. *White Heat*. op. cit.

⁴⁰ Wells, Anna Mary. *Dear Preceptor: The Life and Times of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1963. 296.

⁴¹ Wells, Anna. *Dear Preceptor*. *ibid.* 296.

fantasies, she embodies what Margaret Atwood describes, in the most haunting terms in her explanation of what handmaids were meant to represent in the masculine police state of her dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, as “a made thing, not something born,” the ultimate construct of the masculine fantasy.⁴² But Higginson's invocation of this myth is hardly an accident. The frequent appearance of this myth in the nineteenth-century popular imagination, according to Gail Marshall, was part of a response to “contemporary anxieties about women and their ability to ‘metamorphose’ into unprecedented professional and intellectual forms” newly available to the modern woman.⁴³ As a consequence of these anxieties, Victorian Pygmalion narratives typically went in one of two directions: they either returned their Galateas to stone, inverting the myth to conjoin “both admiration and admonition in their motivation to ‘mould’ the statue,” or they characterized Galatea as a sort of battery, a life-force giving strength to Pygmalion both as a man and as an artist who must contain, control, or otherwise divert, her creative energies to achieve greatness.⁴⁴ This latter form of the Pygmalion myth makes a frequent appearance in the fiction of Hawthorne and Poe who describe men's vampiric predation on beautiful women in stories like “The Oval Portrait,” “Morella,” “The Birthmark,” and “Rappaccini's Daughter.”

In creating The Galatea Collection, Higginson can be seen as authoring his own response to the Victorian Pygmalion narrative that skirts between these lines. The collection serves Higginson, like the poet Robert Browning, in imagining the creation of woman as a “primal

⁴² Atwood's novel represents yet another fiction that ostensibly concerns women's rights but really probes masculine desire. Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986. 66.

⁴³ Marshall, Gail. *Actress on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998. 24.

⁴⁴ Marshall, Gail. *Actress*. *ibid.* 25, 29.

scene of aesthetic production,” fueling his creative energies in the final decades of his life.⁴⁵ At the same time, Higginson’s acts of collection symbolically remand her to stone. Such conspicuous titling, then, suggests that Higginson saw himself, on some level, as Pygmalion in his role as a collector, creating the legacy of women’s achievements to his own specifications, shifting the intentions of the project in troubling ways. As a result, the collection positions Higginson more as a gentleman connoisseur rather than radical activist, aligning his project more with the eighteenth-century culture of masculine connoisseurship than the nineteenth-century culture of activism and reform.⁴⁶ The collection may also approximate Higginson’s secret hermaphroditic longing to merge his own identity with that of woman through the act of collecting while still maintaining his masculine authority (and not giving in entirely to the feminine). In other words, it reveals Higginson’s desire—conscious or unconscious—to dictate, control, and shape the representation and legacy of women’s genius through his collection.

Higginson’s interest in shaping (or merging with) women’s genius, however, extends beyond this collection. His Pygmalion complex also appears in his many attempts to define ideal womanhood in his essays and fiction. Take, for example, the series of essays he wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* on women from mythology, antiquity, and history, or his later sketches on important American women like Margaret Fuller Ossoli and Sophia Peabody Hawthorne (among others). These essays highlight women’s accomplishments as evidence of their entitlement to equal rights and, in the case of Fuller and Hawthorne, to demonstrate the strength of the

⁴⁵ Maxwell, Catherine. “Browning’s Pygmalion and The Revenge of Galatea.” *ELH*. 60.4 (Winter 1993): 989-1013.

⁴⁶ Sir William Hamilton, another Pygmalion-figure from history, is a stunning example of this culture of masculine connoisseurship. As a wealthy gentleman he collected representations of the female form in art and in life. Emma Hart, a famous beauty and actress, became his real-life Galatea, first as his mistress and later as his wife. She reportedly endeared herself to him by performing “attitudes”—poses based on the antique sculptures and paintings he loved to collect. His eventual marriage to her in 1791 provoke Horace Walpole to proclaim, “Sir William has actually married his gallery of statues” (quoted in Bermingham, Ann. “Elegant Females and Gentleman Connoisseurs: The commerce in culture and self-image in eighteenth-century England.” *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*. Ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer. London: Routledge, 1995. 489-513. 507.

character of American women, in particular. The essays also reveal how Higginson used feminine icons from history and mythology to shape expectations about modern womanhood. His 1869 essay on “The Greek Goddesses,” for example, delineates the divine characters of various Greek goddesses with the hope that they might offer modern women a “prism of feminine existence” covering “all the functions of womanly life.”⁴⁷ With his essay on “Sappho,” published a few years later, Higginson presents the Greek poetess to his female readers as a figure of resistance, a woman, perhaps not unlike themselves, struggling in a historical period marked by a transition from female equality and freedom to one dominated by exclusion and restrictions.⁴⁸ However, as Gloria Duclos demonstrates in her reading of these essays, Higginson also sought to mold the ancient poetess into “a Greek Margaret Fuller” as a means of shaping Fuller’s legacy as an “intellectual and inspirational teacher rather than a poetic genius.”⁴⁹

In his personal connections to living women writers—who are far less manageable than women consigned to print—Higginson’s Pygmalion complex manifests a more complicated portrait of encouragement and derision that exposes his more conventional understanding of both gender and style. Higginson, for example, championed Spofford as a “literary artist” in his 1864 review of her novel, *Azarian: An Episode*; but in this same review he also cautioned Spofford to temper her gorgeous rhetoric, echoing the criticism of his contemporary male critics—like James—who decried the rhetorical and emotional excesses of her writing.⁵⁰ With Dickinson, Higginson’s cautious praise and modest encouragement reveals his subtler adherence to conventions of gender and style in the advice he frequently offered her in their correspondence.

⁴⁷ Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. “The Greek Goddesses.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. 24 (July 1869): 97-108.

⁴⁸ Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. “Sappho.” *Atlantic Monthly* 28 (July 1871): 83-93.

⁴⁹ Duclos, Gloria Shaw. “Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s Sappho.” *The New England Quarterly*. 57.3 (Sept. 1984): 403-411.

⁵⁰ Higginson, TW. [Review of *Azarian*] *Atlantic Monthly*. 14.84 (October 1864): 515-17.

These letters show Higginson cautioning Dickinson to tame or temper her overly “spasmodic,” “uncontrolled” or “wayward” verse in terms reminiscent of his caution to Spofford.⁵¹ Dickinson, however, took these directions under “ironic advisement,” in Brenda Wineapple’s assessment, even as she continued to seek his advice.⁵² These tongue-in-cheek responses, according to Kathryn Wichelns, may also constitute various strategies of resistance to Higginson’s authority, noting how she “selectively invokes the greater power of a (patriarchal) male figure in order to justify or excuse her own choices.”⁵³ Sometimes this figure is her father, or Higginson himself, or as in the case with her December 1879 letter, Henry James, who is “deployed,” according to Wichelns, “as another emerging author reproached by Higginson for his unconventional style.”⁵⁴ Dickinson’s deployment of James in this December 1879 letter, for Wichelns, suggests that she recognized similarities between her own writing and the author’s “unconventional style,” which Higginson had recently ridiculed in an article for the Boston journal *The Literary World* (October 1879) that was later reprinted in *Short Studies of American Authors* (1880).⁵⁵ The terms of Higginson’s critique of James’s “prolix” style certainly parallel those of Spofford and Dickinson in his concern for its stylistic aberrations and excesses, but they also expose the additional gendered concerns that Higginson brings to masculine expressions of the highly wrought style.⁵⁶

Floridity & Masculine, Sexual, & Racial Alterity

⁵¹ “Emily Dickinson’s Letters.” (October 1891). Web. Retrieved from July 4, 2017.
 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1891/10/emily-dickinsons-letters/306524/>>

⁵² Wineapple, Brenda. Op. Cit. 10.

⁵³ Wichelns, Kathryn. “Emily Dickinson’s Henry James.” *The Emily Dickinson Journal*. 20.1 (2011): 78-99.

⁵⁴ Wichelns, *ibid.* 88.

⁵⁵ Wichelns, *ibid.* 88.

⁵⁶ Higginson, T.W. *Short Studies in American Authors*. Boston: Lee & Shepard Publishers, 1880. 53.

In this essay on James in *Short Studies*, Higginson takes issue with the emasculating effects of the author's textual excess and cosmopolitan lifestyle. James's writing, according to Higginson, lacks the "hearty and robust manhood" of Howells and the other male authors in *Short Studies* that he considers to be "manly" (52). Although he only refers to Poe as "manly" in *Short Studies*, Higginson uses a designated lexicon for describing the robust masculinity of the male authors he admires, which he ascribes to their personal character, literary style, and physical makeup: vigor, force, strength, hearty, robust manhood, and manliness (20). Hawthorne possesses "force," "strength" and "vigor" (5, 8); Thoreau, "power," "vigor," producing nothing "unmanly" (23, 29); Howells, as mentioned above, "hearty and robust manhood" (52). James, however, suffers from the defects arising from the "abundant energy" and literary "profusion" exhibited in his writing, the result, Higginson suggests, of keeping "too good of company" (52). James's uncontrolled textual excess derives from his cosmopolitan lifestyle, which clashes with Higginson's understanding of the "democratic origins" of the novel (53). James struggles with the limitations of his "cosmopolitanisms," Higginson finally concludes, because he is not at home even "in his own country," which may be a veiled suggestion that he is not at home in his own (masculine) body (57). As a result of this emasculating estrangement from his native, democratic soil (and embodied manhood), James is "habitually" "overmastered" by his "profounder emotions," the suggestion being that he has been overpowered by his feminine weakness (59).

James, of course, is not alone in catching Higginson's ire for his unmanly style. Higginson levels a similar gendered critique of Walt Whitman for what he perceives to be the immorality of their textual excess and "unmanly" style. The emasculated textual excess of these

unmanly authors is often yoked to some other sociopolitical or moral offense (like James's "cosmopolitanisms," which carries the sociopolitical taint of the aristocracy along with the potential for sin/corruption and an "unsettled" sense of masculine identity). Higginson's various published objections to Walt Whitman's masculinity, for example, always carry the additional burden of sexual immorality. In his literary memoir, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, Higginson famously calls Whitman "not so much of manliness as of Boweriness," a suggestion that posits his excessive association with this district as emasculating (or portraying the wrong kind of masculinity).⁵⁷ The reference, according to Robert Nelson and Kenneth Price, is meant to conjure Whitman's associations with the working-class and immigrant culture that dominated the Bowery, on one level; but on another, the comment is designed to condemn Whitman's questionable sexuality (and tainted masculinity), given the Bowery's increased associations with sexual licentiousness and homosexuality in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ He also criticized Whitman's unmanly service during the Civil War as a nurse, at one point suggesting that the work placed him out of the masculine gender into a third gender category that should be called the "intermediate" sex, which is ironic considering Higginson's own affinity for (albeit) a more chastely heterosexual trans-identity.⁵⁹

But what offends Higginson most about Whitman's unmanliness is the immorality of his textual/sexual excesses. His most critical commentary on Whitman's masculinity and sexuality appears in *Women's Journal* shortly after Whitman's latest edition of *Leaves of Grass* was banned in Boston. In this essay, "Unmanly Manhood," Higginson takes issue with Whitman,

⁵⁷ Higginson, T.W. *Cheerful Yesterdays*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1898. 676.

⁵⁸ Nelson, Robert K. and Kenneth M. Price. "Debating Manliness: Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Sloane Kennedy, the Question of Whitman." *The Walt Whitman Archive*. Web. Retrived. July 1, 2017. <http://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/anc.00164.html>

⁵⁹ Nelson and Price, *ibid*.

along with Oscar Wilde, for their too revealing details of poetry.⁶⁰ Wilde gets the brunt of Higginson's assault, though he specifies that the criticisms of their unmanly style applies equally to both men's works: "Mr. Wilde may talk of Greece; but there is nothing Greek about his poems; his nudities do not suggest the sacred whiteness of an antique statue, but rather the forcible unveiling of some insulted innocence" (1). In essence, Higginson is troubled by the too revealing, too sexualized poetic expression of Wilde's representation of the "ideal sculpture," the life-sized marble statues of female nudes from history and mythology that were exhibited in the nineteenth-century as popular entertainment, according to Joy Kasson, who notes how these exhibitions encouraged audiences to view them as spiritually clothed to subdue the erotic freight of the naked body.⁶¹ Wilde's (and Whitman's) poetry fails, for Higginson, because it fails to appropriately spiritually clothe the "sacred whiteness" of the ideal sculpture.

For their part, Nelson and Price theorize that Higginson's increasing concern for the homoerotic aspects of Whitman's and Wilde's lives and literatures may in fact derive from his own latent homosexual longing, but it ultimately reveals another aspect of what they see as his "emergent political and social conservatism in the final decades of the nineteenth century."⁶² The seeds of Higginson's late-life conservative attitudes appear in his own restrained investment in the style as a transformative space for imagining a much wider range of sexual, racial, and gender alterity. Christopher Looby, for example, links Higginson's floricultural imagination in his *Atlantic* essays to his racial imagination and sexuality in his study reflecting on the peculiar metonymic relationship between representations of "black male bodies and vividly colored flora"

⁶⁰ Higginson, W.T. "Unmanly Manhood." *Woman's Journal*. 13.5 (4 February 1882): 1.

⁶¹ Kasson, Joy. *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture*. 1990.

⁶² Nelson & Price, *ibid.*

appearing in nineteenth and twentieth-century American art and literature.⁶³ In tracing the “racialization of scopic desire” from nineteenth-century works by Higginson to the twentieth-century poetry of Langston Hughes and photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, Looby sees representations of “aestheticized racial otherness” as integral to historical constructions of white American manhood.⁶⁴ With Higginson, in particular, such representations function to displace masculine gender and sexual anxieties and serve as a strategy for covertly expressing heterodox desires outside the confines of white heteronormative masculinity.

In *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1869), for example, Higginson uses a number of “strategies of avowing/disavowing” these heterodox desires, according to Looby, by framing his interest in black bodies as an “innocent aesthetic attraction.”⁶⁵ These strategies thus allow him to affirm his love of a race he fought for (literally and figuratively) in the erotic and exotic descriptions of the black soldiers in his regiment while also allowing him to disavow “the erotic investment that informed that love.”⁶⁶ They appear in striking terms in a pivotal chapter in the narrative, “A Night in the Water,” where Higginson describes embarking on a daring, somewhat foolish, but ultimately cathartic swimming reconnaissance expedition that takes him a bit too far down stream and a bit too close to a Confederate camp.⁶⁷ For Looby, these “scenes of watery suspension signify bodily freedom and pleasure,” offering “a trancelike release from the social inscriptions that are all too coercively present in the stringently hierarchized and regulated

⁶³ Looby, Christopher. “Flowers of Manhood: Race, Sex and Floriculture from Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Robert Mapplethorpe.” *Criticism*. 37.1 (1995): 109-56. 110.

⁶⁴ Looby, *ibid.* 110.

⁶⁵ Looby, *ibid.* 113.

⁶⁶ Looby, *ibid.* 113.

⁶⁷ Higginson, T.W. *Army Life in a Black Regiment*. Boston: Field, Osgood, & Co., 1870.

military context.⁶⁸ These scenes of watery suspension indeed signify bodily freedom and pleasure, but they do so in terms that offer more than “a trancelike release from social inscriptions.” When Higginson enters the water, he is seemingly transported to a dream world:

I seemed floating in some concave globe, some magic crystal, of which I was the enchanted centre. With each little ripple of my steady progress all things hovered and changed; the stars danced and nodded above; where the stars ended the great Southern fireflies began; and closer than the fireflies, there clung round me a halo of phosphorescent sparkles from the soft salt water. (156)

Higginson has not only been released from “the hierarchized and regulated military context,” he has been transported to another magical, almost fairy-like realm, a liminal space betwixt and between the realities of the battle-torn earth and the heavens above. The language of the passage replicates the florid discourse and fairy-themes of George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858), the first English fantasy novel written for adults, which chronicles the three-week visit to a magical fairy land named Andos. In the novel the protagonist undergoes a similarly transformative moment entering a densely wooded forest (instead of a river) to witness “the surrounding foliage” become “illuminated by the interwoven dances in the air of splendidly coloured fire-flies, which sped hither and thither, turned, twisted, crossed, and recrossed, entwining every complexity of interwoven motion. Here and there, whole mighty trees glowed with an emitted phosphorescent light.”⁶⁹ In place of the all-encompassing concave globe, MacDonald’s protagonist finds himself in the enchanted circle of an enormous glowing root system where “every twig, and every vein on every leaf was a streak of pale fire.”⁷⁰ The densely symbolic work follows “the wayward

⁶⁸ Looby, *Op. Cit.* 129.

⁶⁹ MacDonald, George. *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*. 1858. Introduction by C.S. Lewis. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. 25.

⁷⁰ Macdonald, George, *Phantastes*. *ibid.* 25.

development of the protagonist's masculinity through his encounters with art," the final purpose of which is to construct a genteel masculinity.⁷¹

As with other moments of fluidity and floridity in Higginson's oeuvre such scenes of watery suspension become important sites of transcendence and renewal. Here Higginson uses the night-swimming excursion to imagine a space for transcending racial and gender barriers. After the lengthy, though enchanting and somewhat harrowing swim, he finally emerges from the ordeal exhausted but exhilarated, and more importantly, transformed. His unexpected appearance on the banks near the encampment of his black regiment, provokes an awkward encounter with one of his soldiers, who is understandably alarmed by the appearance of a naked white man emerging from the water. Answering the soldier's challenge to give his countersign, Higginson emerges from the baptismal waters of the fluid stream and florid text, he explains, "to show myself a man and a brother" (165). The moment dramatizes his (now renewed) belief in racial equality, echoing and inverting the language and iconography of a popular anti-slavery slogan and image designed by Josiah Wedgwood in the late 18th century portraying a supplicating enslaved man with the inscription, "Am I not a man and a brother?"⁷² Higginson's inversion of the trope positions his own vulnerable and supplicating naked white body at the mercy of this African American soldier, who at once recognizes him as a man, a brother, and most importantly, his superior officer. The charged sexual, racial, and gendered undertones of this fluid-florid transformative episode, for Looby, represent part of Higginson's strategy for imagining racial and sexual heterodoxies. Such scenes of "depersonalizing immersion or

⁷¹ Pionke, Albert D. "The Art of Manliness: Ekphrasis and/as in George MacDonald's *Phantastes*." *Studies in the Novel*. 43.1 (2001): 21-31. 21.

⁷² Though Josiah Wedgwood is credited with its original design in the 1780s, the image and slogan become ubiquitous by the nineteenth century. For example, John Greenleaf Whittier uses a woodcut of a supplicant male slave in chains on his 1837 broadside publication of his antislavery poem. [Wedgwood, Josiah.] "Our Countrymen in Chains." Library of Congress's Broadside Collection, portfolio 118, no. 32a c-Rare Bk Coll.

fluidity,” Looby argues, offer Higginson “a disoriented feeling of identification with black soldiers, a physical oneness with them, and a feeling of alienation from his own given identity (white, northerner, commander).”⁷³ These moments of depersonalizing immersion, however, are not always about finding physical oneness with a racialized other or expressing alienation from white privilege. Sometimes they are as much about affirming white heteronormative masculinity as they are about connecting with otherness. As Looby observes, Higginson balances such homoerotic episodes in *Army Life in a Black Regiment* with moments that reaffirm the importance of the heteronormative relationships necessary for the growth of the nation: Higginson reestablishes the heteronormative status quo with the presence of a baby “at a decisive place in the structure of the book’s erotic drama” that appears after the “crescendo of sensuality” of the night swimming episode and just before “the report of his own emasculating injury and convalescence in chapter seven.”⁷⁴

Importantly, Higginson consistently uses the highly wrought style to reaffirm white heterosexual manhood in texts less sexually and racially charged than *Army Life*. In “The Procession of Flowers,” Higginson describes a mid-summer encounter with a “profusion” of scarlet field lilies on “the bare summit of Wachusett” in one of the few scenes in which his authorial persona appears (and is embodied) in the text (655). He stages the encounter as a quasi-funereal, quasi-sexual communion with aesthetic and botanical excesses that are bursting as the summer season comes to an end. He portrays himself lying prone on the “granite ribs” of the summit—a sexually suggestive pose of imagining bodily contact with the earth—as he observes “the red lilies that waved their innumerable urns around me [...] a thousand altars, sending visible flames forever upward to the answering sun” (655). These “intensities of color,”

⁷³ Looby, op. cit. 129.

⁷⁴ Looby, *ibid.* 115.

Higginson explains, are part of the “beautiful disrobing” that prepares the way for the procession of flowers to begin anew (656). The passage mirrors the crimson ascension Bremer bears witness to in the opening anecdote, but replaces her privileged feminine perception with his own masculine heterosexual gaze advantaged with witnessing nature’s dramatic strip tease, which he assures us, has been achieved as chastely as possible because Nature, being modest, “shrinks from nakedness and is always seeking to veil her graceful boughs,—if not with leaves, then with feathery hoar-frost, ermined snow, or transparent icy armor” (656). His treatment of this “beautiful disrobing,” in fact, echoes the rhetoric that nineteenth-century reviewers used in descriptions of Ideal Sculptures of female nudes, like Hiram Powers’s *Greek Slave*, to subdue and sublimate the erotic messages of their sculpted nakedness.⁷⁵ The scene carries all the weight of the sexual textual excess of Wilde’s or Whitman’s poetry, but without its vulgarity and sexual licentiousness. Nature figured as the ideal sculpture here remains spiritually clothed. Higginson’s nudities maintain the “sacred whiteness” of his expression of ideal sculptures.

What is more, Higginson elaborates on the proper terms of the white heterosexual manhood he has positioned at the epicenter of this heated moment of transcendent masculine perception in his choice of geographic location, which recalls Thoreau’s earlier ascent of the summit in “A Walk to Wachusett” (1843). With Thoreau’s recent passing in May 1862, just six months before “Procession” appears in print, Higginson likely had the transcendental writer on his mind. He may have even deliberately staged this important climax as an homage to the late author’s legacy with the additional hope of bolstering his own reputation as a “manly” writer since Thoreau represented the kind of chaste masculine authority that Higginson greatly admired. In his lengthy defense of Thoreau in *Short Stories of American Authors*, Higginson champions

⁷⁵ Kasson, Joy. *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

the late author's vigorous masculine perception. Shielding Thoreau against James Russell Lowell's famous objections to his whimsy, indolence, incivility, and other "eccentricities," Higginson mounts a rigorous defense of "the vigor, the good sense, the clear perceptions, of the *man*" (emphasis mine 23). "His daring imagination," Higginson writes, "ventured on the delineation of just those objects in nature which seem most defiant of description, as smoke, mist, haze" (29). His masculine perception, moreover, is purified by the "lofty self-abnegation" of his "lifelong celibacy," a fact that further separates his manly authority from the homo/sexual taint of unmanly writers like Whitman (27). More importantly, though, Thoreau is an author who could never "treat literary art as a thing unmanly and trivial" (29). Thoreau, in other words, embodies the best combination of masculine vigor and chastity. He is, in many ways, Higginson's masculine ideal.

Higginson's Haunted *Monarch of Dreams*

Although Higginson continued to engage the highly wrought style throughout most of his writing career, in the summer of 1886, he produced a curious work of fiction that seems to betray some reservations in his commitment to its rhetoric, faith in its efficacy as an aesthetic practice, and usefulness as a creative pursuit in a world that ostensibly values action more than the imagination. The resulting novella—*The Monarch of Dreams*—was neither a commercial nor critical success. Higginson had difficulty securing a publisher, and eventually paid to have it printed privately.⁷⁶ When it finally appeared in print, the "weird, psychological fancy" met with

⁷⁶ Higginson, W.T. *The Monarch of Dreams*. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1887.

polarizing reviews.⁷⁷ Almost everyone found the substance of the story to be too “morbid,” though they were divided on whether this was a positive or negative reflection on the story. Where one reviewer looked at the work and saw “an exquisite piece of literary art,” another found it to be of “no earthly value,” with only “its author, and its brevity to commend it.”⁷⁸ Another reviewer found the story illustrative of the deep philosophical truths Thomas Tryon, M.D. outlines in his 1680 treatise, “The Causes, Nature, and Uses of Nocturnal Representations and the Communications both of Good and Evil Angels.”⁷⁹ Privately, the work met with familial censure for what was perceived to be its “morbid tinge.”⁸⁰ Still, Higginson confessed in a letter to one of these disapproving relatives that he believed the story to be some of his best work. “I am sorry I printed it, if it troubled you,” Higginson writes, “but I never can be sorry that I wrote it, for it is the first strong bit of purely imaginative work I ever did.”⁸¹ Today this first bit of “purely imaginative work” has been largely overlooked or discounted. Typically it is subsumed by Higginson’s activism or eclipsed by his relationship with Emily Dickinson, whose memory, some scholars suggest, he was attempting to pay tribute to when he completed the strange story in the months following her death in 1886.⁸²

Although Higginson almost certainly had the recently departed poetess in mind when he finished the manuscript for *The Monarch of Dreams*, the story is more of a reflection of Higginson’s own imagination and his relationship to the florid style than it is a tribute to Dickinson’s genius. It is a richly imaginative work of fantasy that, like so many of the other

⁷⁷ [Review of *The Monarch of Dreams*]. “Literary Review.” *The Congregationalist*. Op. cit. 6.

⁷⁸ [Review of *The Monarch of Dreams*]. “New Books.” *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*. 292 (December 9 1886): 1.

⁷⁹ Fullerton, W.M. “Letters About Books.” *Boston Daily Advertiser*. 14 (January 17, 1887): 2.

⁸⁰ Thacher, Mary Potter. *Life*. op. cit. 311-2.

⁸¹ Higginson, Mary Thacher Potter. *Life*. ibid. 311.

⁸² Wineapple, op cit. 247.

narratives in this study, takes up the Pygmalion myth in its focus on the plight of the male genius and his search for the ideal. Briefly, the story follows the interests of a young man named Francis Ayrault who retreats to a secluded farmhouse in the New England countryside with his sister, Hart, in tow in order to recuperate from a “series of domestic cares and watchings [that] had almost broken him down” (9-10). But what begins as a simple tale about an invalid bachelor’s convalescence from “too prolonged and exclusive exercise of the habit of sympathy,” quickly transforms into a psychological study about the devastating effects of his pursuit of the “ideal.” Soon after Ayrault arrives in this idyllic farmhouse, he reveals an ulterior motive for seeking seclusion from the world, divulging his wish to become “the ruler of his dreams” (14). Thus begins the drama of the story, which records the waking and sleeping experiments he undertakes to achieve this ideal. While he ultimately succeeds in controlling his dreams, it comes at a heavy cost, first with the discovery that his dream world has become metaphysically yoked to Hart’s psyche, threatening the health of the child; and second by the horrifying revelation that he has become completely consumed by his dream-life. The narrative concludes with Ayrault falling into a permanent opioid-like dream-trance as the rest of the men in the neighboring villages march off to fight in the American Civil War. In short, the story reads as a cautionary tale, a warning for anyone considering the pursuit of art and the imagination of the high costs of such idealism in place of manly action.

In his heavily biographical reading of the novella, Caleb Crain interprets it as just that: a cautionary tale that Higginson devised to confirm his own life’s choices, a reassurance “that he had been right to subordinate his literary career to his political activism.”⁸³ He regards Ayrault as more of a proxy for Higginson than Dickinson, noting the striking similarities in the histories between character and author: both hail from Rhode Island; both settle in a remote New England

⁸³ Crain, Caleb. “The Monarch of Dreams.” *The New Republic*. (May 28, 2001): 41-48. 41.

farm house for a brief time for the purposes of physical, emotional, and creative convalescences after sharing a similar set of “domestic cares” (not only did Higginson spend 13 years nursing his chronically ill first wife from 1864 until her death in 1877, he also retreated to a rural farmstead in the summer after Dickinson’s death to concentrate on his literary art, finishing the draft of *Monarch*); and both appear to be similarly inclined towards “a certain taste for the ideal side of existence,” which Higginson suggests in the story has “belonged to Rhode-Islanders, ever since the days of Roger Williams” (13). Ultimately, Crain sees Higginson crafting the story as heavily autobiographical, composed to combat the “two natural affinities” that “he felt he had to oppose” in his fiction and in his life.⁸⁴ The first affinity was to transcendentalism, which Crain suggests, is “not unlike Francis Ayrault’s desire to control his dreams, a destructive idealism, a romantic experiment that turned out to be dangerous.”⁸⁵ The second affinity was for his “dreamy, womanly self,” which Higginson persisted in resisting, according to Crain, “to the end.”⁸⁶

Crain’s careful reading of the story, though convincing, neglects two important aspects of the work, first by glossing over the textual hauntings that pervade the narrative, and second by failing to recognize the masculine concerns of Higginson’s ostensibly “feminine” style, which qualifies the textual hauntings in important ways. The key to understanding the multivalent significance of the textual hauntings in *The Monarch* appears in the coded epigraph that Higginson uses to preface the story. The epigraph is easy to overlook since Higginson leaves the ancient Greek untranslated—Φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν—though he is thoughtful enough to identify the author and work as Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*. The lines correspond to a passage from *Agamemnon* that describes a personal haunting. In Robert Browning’s nineteenth-century

⁸⁴ Crain, *ibid.* 42.

⁸⁵ Crain, *ibid.* 42.

⁸⁶ Crain, *ibid.* 42-3.

translation, the text reads, “A ghost will seem within the house to reign.”⁸⁷ It refers to Menelaus, who, at that juncture in the narrative, is mourning the loss of his absent queen, Helen, whose kidnapping by Prince Paris is on the verge of provoking the decade long Trojan war. Scholars of classical antiquity interpret the passage in two radically different ways, both of which are applicable to Higginson’s story.

The first and most widely accepted reading of the passage construes the ghost haunting Menelaus’s house to be that of Helen. In Helen’s absence, the subsequent lines divulge, Menelaus can no longer appreciate the “well-shaped” beauty of the female statues ornamenting his house; their fixed, unseeing eyes only remind him of the loss of the living, breathing woman.⁸⁸ If Higginson had this first interpretation of the reigning ghost as Helen in mind when selecting the epigraph, he may have wished to suggest the textual haunting in *The Monarch* is feminine in nature, suggesting that he, like Menelaus, felt haunted by the women in his life when he composed the story. In the summer of 1886, Dickinson seems like the most obvious culprit for this feminine haunting. Higginson greatly admired her unwavering commitment to art and the imagination, and he may have envied her.⁸⁹ He also appears to describe her textual hauntings in other works. Not long after her death he composed a sonnet titled, “Astra Castra,” in which the speaker is similarly haunted by an “impetuous” and “Tameless” female spirit on some “earthly errand.”⁹⁰ A number of scholars have suggested that Dickinson inspired the story since

⁸⁷ Browning, Robert. *Complete Works of Robert Browning: The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1898. 19. (Line 435)

⁸⁸ Browning, *ibid.* Lines 436-8.

⁸⁹ Wineapple, *op. cit.* 247.

⁹⁰ Higginson, T.W. “Astra Castra.” *The Afternoon Landscape: Poems and Translations*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1889. 58. (lines 6, 11-12).

Higginson also titled her poem, #525, “Astra Castra.”⁹¹ Further evidence of Dickinson’s haunting of *The Monarch* is suggested by Higginson’s other literary representations of the poetess. He used her likeness, according to Wineapple, in the construction of the dark heroine, Emilia/Emily, who appears in his only other lengthy work of fiction, *Malbone* (1869). *Malbone*, like *Monarch*, is also deeply implicated in Higginson’s biography. This novel tells the story of another literary proxy, the indolent hero Philip Malbone, whose “multivalve heart” and excessive good looks turn the heads of both sexes. Both Looby and Crain speculate that William Henry Hurlbert inspired the handsome androgynous character.⁹² Over the course of the novel, the good/bad Malbone struggles with a dilemma akin to Melville’s Pierre Glendinning, falling in love first with the fair Laura until he meets her dark “untamed” half-sister Emily, “his symbol of the unadulterated, untrammelled pursuit of art,” according to Wineapple.⁹³ Similar to *The Monarch*, *Malbone* ends in tragedy, but on a much smaller scale. Philip chooses to forsake his love of Emily to pursue his ideals while Emily drowns in a shipwreck.

If Emily indeed symbolized Higginson’s “untrammelled pursuit of the ideal,” her inglorious death in *Malbone*—which strangely echoes Margaret Fuller’s untimely demise—may have signified his willingness, at least in 1869, to surrender this pursuit of the ideal for other more pressing concerns. Most scholars point to Higginson’s “activism” as the crucial cause for which he set aside his idealism time and again. However, Higginson may have felt the need to forsake his art from pressures much closer to home. From 1864 until 1877, Higginson occupied much of his time nursing his chronically ill first wife, Mary Channing, who, along with his

⁹¹ Katherine Rodier cites Tilden Edelstein, Richard Sewall, and Benjamin Lease as asserting this association (59). Rodier also notes that the phrase first appeared in Harriet Prescott Spofford’s short story “The Amber Gods,” which was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1862 (59). Rodier, Katherine. “Astra Castra”: Emily Dickinson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Harriet Prescott Spofford.” *Separate Spheres No More: Gender and Convergence in American Literature: 1830-1930*. Ed. Monika M. Elbert. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000. 50-72.

⁹² Looby, *Civil War Diaries*. op. cit. 13-14. Crain. op. cit. 47.

⁹³ Wineapple, *White Heat*. op. cit.. 179.

mother, Louisa Storow, represents two other possibilities for the feminine haunting in *The Monarch*. These two women figure less as muses and more as obstacles to his imaginative pursuits of the ideal. Mrs. Higginson's influence on her son, for example, was defined by her restrictions. In *Cheerful Yesterdays*, Higginson comments on her disapproval of "all but sacred music on Sunday" (and even then, only "good music was sacred") (36). She also censored his writing, disproving of fiction on a whole (with the exception of *Waverly*, which she read to her children regularly, according to his memoir). Indeed, it was not until after his mother's death in 1864 that Higginson began to write his own fiction, first with *Malbone*, which was followed by three other short stories: "Old Port," "The Haunted Window," and "An Artist's Dream," and finally, with *The Monarch*.⁹⁴

Like Louisa Storow, Mary Channing posed a serious challenge to Higginson's pursuit of the literary arts. As Higginson's "first rescue mission," Mary brought her set of complications and own restrictions to the marriage.⁹⁵ The daughter of Dr. Walter Channing and niece of the famed Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing, Mary was not a very accommodating personality. Higginson acknowledged her challenging nature when writing his mother about their upcoming nuptials. "Whatever her faults of manner," Higginson explains, "I do like her very much."⁹⁶ But whatever her objectionable qualities may have been, Channing and Higginson were married in 1847 shortly after his graduating from divinity school. But the marriage appears to have been quite restrictive. Her first restriction was on children, having made the decision, before her marriage, to forego this duty (despite the fact that Higginson adored children and succeeded in having two with his second wife). Other constraints and

⁹⁴ Wineapple, *ibid.* 178.

⁹⁵ Wineapple, *ibid.* 24.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Wineapple, *ibid.* 24.

complaints would follow after the early onset of the chronic illness she suffered until her death. An acquaintance of the couple described her as “a perfect mistress in the art of abuse, in which she indulges frequently with peculiar zest & enthusiasm.”⁹⁷ The thirteen years Higginson spent nursing this woman, so skilled in “the art of abuse,” must have weighed heavily on him since he omits her entirely from his memoir, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (evidently, she was not a cheerful memory). But it was her death in 1877 that provoked Higginson to begin work on *The Monarch*, though he was unable to finish it until nearly ten years later, after the death of Dickinson.⁹⁸

It is notable then, that Higginson characterizes Ayrault as being weighed down by a similar “series of domestic cares and watchings” and “too prolonged and exclusive exercise of the habit of sympathy” (9-10). It is equally notable that he leaves Ayrault a bachelor, unshackled by the bonds of marriage, but still strangely linked to the world of women. He is charged with the care of young Hart, whose childish “prattle” and wonder at the world keeps Ayrault anchored in the waking world for as long as she remains at his side (12). She also represents a more modest, but still overwhelming feminine presence that dominates his intellectual energies. This “little Hart,” is “always read to monopolize,” forcing Ayrault to spend much of his free time following the girl about the farm to explore its “mysteries” (27). Hart, however, is also much more manageable than any of her real-life or fictional analogues. She is easily dispensed with when she becomes too much of a burden (or temptation) to his dream experiments. But she also represents, as her homonymous name suggests, his heart, suggesting that Higginson saw deep value in maintaining connections with the world of women, if not to enrich his imagination, at least to keep his humanity anchored in reality. She thus appears, in Victorian Galatea-fashion, as the life force that sustains his waking life but she also serves as a deterrent—much like his

⁹⁷ Quoted in Scott, Otto J. *The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement*. Boston: Uncommon Books: 1979. 65.

⁹⁸ Wineapple, *ibid.* 250.

mother and first wife—from his dream-exploration since her vitality becomes inextricably linked to his own morbid dreaming, transforming him into an incestuous hermaphroditic dream-scientist, much like Hawthorne's Rappaccini, who fatally involves his own daughter in his botanical experiments. "Was it not enough," he ponders, "that his own life was hopelessly haunted by a turbulent king of his own creating? but must the malign influence extend also to this innocent child?" (42). Although Ayrault clearly feels guilty for his part in her ill health (a reflection, perhaps, of Higginson's secret fear that he had some cause in his wife's illness), he is briefly tempted "to employ this unspoiled nature in the perilous path of experiments on which he had entered" (42). In a manner after Hawthorne's Alymer or Rappaccini, he disdains from pursuing such an egregious course, deciding instead to send her to live with a neighboring family (42).

But, tragically, it is the removal of his (feminine, innocent, childlike) Hart/heart that finally precipitates his lasting dream-coma. Ayrault's true failure, in this instance, is not in the dreaming but in his inability to strike a balance between the feminine and the imagination. Once she is removed from the equation, his dreams change. The men and women populating his dream world change. They no longer go about their daily business, but one by one begin to "thrown down [their] implements of labor," turn westward, walk "swiftly away," and disappear from sight (32). But even as he witnesses these individual desertions, "the throng never perceptibly diminished," prompting Ayrault to "feel unimportant in all this gathering" (33). Ayrault proceeds, for a time, in elaborate world-building exercises, but just as his "control" over the dream world becomes "complete with practice," he discovers that the different people who once populated his dream world "were acquiring" a "strange resemblance to one another, and to some person" he dimly recognizes from "somewhere," but soon realizes to be himself. This self-

recognition provokes a dramatic proliferation—“figures multiplied; they assumed a mocking, taunting, defiant aspect,” defiantly “duplicat[ing] themselves before his eyes” (38).

This dramatic instance of overwhelming proliferation, duplication, and profusion of his identity suggests another, darker, interpretation of the ghost reigning in Ayrault’s house, pointing to a different sort of haunting that relates to an alternative reading of the “ghost” reigning in Menelaus’s house. Some scholars of classical antiquity suggest that Menelaus’s house/heart is haunted not by Helen, but by Menelaus himself, who has “become a phantom of his former self.”⁹⁹ This interpretation, if applicable, suggests that the story might actually be about a personal haunting of his own highly wrought style. This self-haunting, importantly, registers on two levels: through gender and style. Ayrault’s dream experiments subject his psyche to the torments of his own mind, which proliferates and overwhelms the male artist unable to balance the feminine form in the masculine body/mind. But it also doubles the sense that he suffers from a feminine haunting with the implication that he is haunted, not just by feminine writing, but also by his masculine ego. Ayrault embodies all the morose qualities of masculine conceit as, one contemporary reviewer describes him, a “supremely self-centered, morbidly egotistic, extravagantly individualistic man, [...] an example of the type of cultivated man—too common in our time—who forgets the supreme truth of all culture, the truth that we are each parts of one stupendous whole, and must give of our best for the good of humanity.”¹⁰⁰ It suggests Higginson is finally admonishing his own floridity much like he admonishes Poe for his tendency for excess in *Short Studies*. Somewhat enigmatically, Higginson vociferously defends Thoreau from similar complaints in this same study, which elaborates the important distinction between their

⁹⁹ Raeburn, David, Oliver Thomas, and Aeschylus. *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus: A Commentary for Students*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 115.

¹⁰⁰ “A Psychical Study.” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. 286 (March 6, 1887): 14.

uses of the style: where Poe (and Ayrault) are overwhelmed by their morbid use of floridity, Thoreau's chastity shields him from the negative connotations of its excesses.

These contradictory assessments of Poe and Thoreau reflect Higginson's conflicted understanding of his own fluctuating gender/sexual identity, which he saw as tending, rather morbidly, toward the feminine but perhaps wished to see as embracing the masculine chastity of other manly thinkers like Thoreau, which is a persistent theme in Higginson's personal reflections dating from his early ministry. Quite early in his career Higginson recognized his disconnect with the men in his congregation. "My (masculine) supporters are in a numerical minority and a woeful pecuniary minority," Higginson confessed to his mother in 1849, "and there is a general opinion that 'Mr. Higginson ought to know the state of affairs.'"¹⁰¹ The lament entangles his concerns for his masculinity with his economic value and sociopolitical knowledge of the world. When reflecting on his style a few years later, he sees his writing as having a "fineness and fire, but some want of copiousness and fertility which may give a tinge of thinness to what I write."¹⁰² Crain interprets this admission to his recognition that his genius "had not been feminine enough," but he omits the reference to fire, focusing only on Higginson's "fineness."¹⁰³ The reference to fire, however, tempers the feminine undertones of his "fineness" enough to indicate that Higginson was not simply concerned with the femininity of his style but also its balance of excesses in detail, ornament, and emotion within his masculine mind.

This balance is crucially lost in Ayrault's dream experiments, which become symbolic of a different sort of night swimming exercise than the transcendent swimming expedition he describes in *Army Life*. Instead of drawing him into fellowship with humankind, the dreams

¹⁰¹ Higginson, T.W. *Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson: 1846-1906*. Ed. Mary Thacher Higginson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921. 19.

¹⁰² Quoted in Mary Thacher Higginson's biography, *Life*. op. cit. 274.

¹⁰³ Crain, op. cit. 48.

divide him from his friends, neighbors and eventually the only family he has left in the world (when he sends Hart away). As soon as he gains complete control of his dreams, though, Ayrault discovers that he has been lost in the sea of his own consciousness. The story ends with him being surrounded by a “whole wide world of innumerable and uncontrollable beings, every one of whom was Francis Ayrault” (38). In the end, Ayrault “could no more retain his individual hold upon his consciousness than the infusorial animalcule in a drop of water can know to which of its subdivided parts the original individuality attaches” (38). This final image of Ayrault’s complete dissolution of individual identity within his morbid masculine dreamscape strangely recalls the final insanity of Fitz-James O’Brien’s protagonist from “The Diamond Lens,” who becomes lost while gazing into the seminal dewdrop. Higginson’s hermaphroditic literary aesthetic of textual excess ultimately fails in his fiction due to his inability to fully absorb the feminine style within the masculine body. But crucially, Ayrault’s aesthetic failure compounds his failed manhood in the stories final scene, which reveals the dreamer trapped in the morbidity of his masculine excess as all the men in the small farming community depart to fight in the Civil War:

He became vaguely conscious, amidst the bewilderment, that the shouts in the village were subsiding, the illuminations growing dark; and the train with its young soldiers was again in motion, throbbing and resounding among the hills, and bearing the lost opportunity of his life away—away—away. (52)

In this final image of Ayrault, trapped in his own highly wrought imagination—a labyrinthine fractal iteration of his masculine ego—Higginson constructs his own “queer” version of Poe’s classic male archetype in “The Philosophy of Composition” as the self-inseminating male spirit as the material of art, echoing O’Brien’s queering of Poe’s poetic equation with his treatment of

the poet-scientist, Mr. Linley.¹⁰⁴ Ayrault, like Linley, marks a failure of the hermaphroditic literary aesthetic: having banished his feminine, and child-like Hart/heart, he remains in a fugue state totally absorbed within his masculine imagination, which only increases the distance between him and the masculine world of action and activism being born away to fight in the Civil War.

¹⁰⁴ Again, I borrow from Beam from Dorri Beam's characterization of the archetype: "woman is the material of art inseminated by male spirit" (132). Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). Retrieved from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/composition.html>

Coda: Before and After

Just as Fitz-James O'Brien is not the first to engage with the style in his juicy short stories at mid-century, Thomas Wentworth Higginson is certainly not the only writer to continue to engage with the highly wrought style or interrogate its value later in the century. The style, in fact, makes perennial appearances before and after the roughly forty-year period—1850 to 1890—under scrutiny here. The style, for example, appears much earlier in the century in the “spasmodic” poetry (and writers) of Victorian authors like Sydney Dobell, John Stanyan Biggs, Gerald Massey, Alexander Smith, Arthur Hugh Clough, Richard H. Horne, George Henry Lewes, as well as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, and Tennyson, who were considered to be marginally associated with the movement. Spasmodic poetry is characterized by its rejection of Enlightenment privileging of the intellect in favor of the body as the premier mode of creating and transmitting knowledge; these poets believed that formal poetic features—metrics, rhythm and sonic effects as well as theme and narrative form (first person point of view)—could transmit “physiological truths” in the shape of heightened perception and emotional intensity much in the same way the body’s nervous system connected emotional response to sensory experience.¹

¹ Rudy, Jason R. *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2009. 3.

The poems produced by this set likewise register a queer masculine poetics that contends with similar issues surrounding gender, sexuality, desire, and the masculine imagination. Recent scholarship attending to the male spasmodic poets—like Dobell and Smith—note how they were often viewed by contemporaries as “effeminate” due to “their emphasis on physicality and longing.”² The public concern about the effeminacy of their poetry may, in fact, be a reflection of the latent heterodox desires reflected in their poetics. For example, Linda K. Hughes notes the “bisexual poetics”—“the embedding of male-male desire within an unconventional courtship narrative”—of Smith’s poem, *A Life-Drama*, which was published serially (biweekly) in the *Critic* from March 1852 through January 1853.³ Though the narrative appears firmly fixed within a cross-sex romantic love plot, the foundational relationship that stirs the hero’s aesthetic longing and poetic vocation is “an intimate friendship with an unnamed male poet.”⁴ The hero’s description of their friendship takes on homoerotic undertones in key passages in the poem, according to Hughes, where he and his friend appear to throb with passion for each other: “Our pulses beat together, and our beings / Mixed like two voices in one perfect tune, / And his the richest voice.”⁵ The passages Hughes point to describe their relation to each other in suggestively erotic terms of submissive and dominant partnerships—“I was to him but Labrador to Ind”—and emphasize the hero’s inferiority to the unnamed man—“His pearls were plentier

² Clinton Machann points to an essay by Charles Kingsley criticizing Shelley for his overwrought, sentimental, and “womanish” affect (78). MacHann, Clinton. *Masculinity in Four Victorian Epics: A Darwinist Reading*. London and New York: Routledge: 2010. 78.

³ Hughes, Linda K. “Alexander Smith and the Bisexual Poetics of *A Life-Dream*.” *Victorian Poetry*. 42.4 *Spasmodic Poetry and Poetics*. (Winter 2004): 491-508. 491-2.

⁴ Hughes, *ibid.* 491.

⁵ quoted in Hughes, *ibid.* 491, 495.

than my pebble-stones. / He was the sun, I was that squab—the earth.”⁶ The courtship plot, in fact, develops in tandem with the hero’s reminisces about his friendship with the unidentified man, functioning as a sort of “foreplay” to facilitate the heterosexual courtship narrative in Hughes’s reading of the poem.⁷

Grounded thus in the bi-fluent body, men’s florid writing sustains a stylistic and thematic link between masculine bodies and feminine texts in many of its iterations. It also appears, for example, in the florid poetry of Sir Thomas Browne over a century earlier.⁸ Browne’s poetry “speculates on matters of faith and morals by couching them in similitudes of the empirically investigated world, as if they were experimental assays or thought-experiments.”⁹ Thematically, Browne’s morbid poems “often refer to the mechanical labours of experiment and the effort of fieldwork—hot, thirsty, and dirty”; accordingly, his poems might alternately address “the theology of mortuary ceremony” through the visceral matters (and sanitary concerns) of decomposing flesh or call attention to the spiritual meaning of death through dissection.¹⁰ But he also used his poetic form to address issues of masculinity and authorship. In the poem, “To the deceased Author,” an elegy to John Donne, Browne describes a recent “promiscuous” publication of his poems—the “looser sort” mixed in with the “Religious,” speculating on how his readers must balance the poet’s vulgarity (“wantonnesse”) with his piousness (“Goodness”)

⁶ quoted in Hughes, *ibid.* 495.

⁷ Hughes, *ibid.* 496.

⁸ Perry, Bliss. *A Study of Poetry*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1920. 158. Many of the highly wrought authors are compared to Sir Thomas Browne’s writing by contemporary reviewers.

⁹ Preston, Claire. *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 34.

¹⁰ Preston, *The Poetics*. *Ibid.* 35.

in uniquely embodied rhetoric that imagines readers enacting an aesthetic circumcision to reconcile the sacred with the profane:

How will they, with sharper eyes,
The *Fore-skinne* of thy phansie circumcise?
And feare, thy *wantonnesse* should now, begin
Example, that hath ceased to be *Sin*?

And that *Feare* fans their *Heat*; whilst knowing eyes
Will not admire
At this Strange Fire,
That here is mingled with thy sacrifice.”¹¹

Far from being critical of Donne’s wanton-nature, Browne is optimistic that in “future times” readers will easily “buy thy *Goodnesse*, with thy *Crimes*” even if contemporaries register the erotic undertones of his poetry as transgressive and dangerous, potentially contagious (“fan[ing] their *Heat*”), in his production of wanton desire and “envie” in his readers. The suggestive rhyming of “fore-skinne” and sin, moreover, aligns sexual transgressions (masturbation) with sin since the uncircumcised penis proclaims not only an absence of any covenant with a Judeo-Christian God, but also suggests a sexual temptation of masturbation for the uncircumcised man (an unhealthy and immoral act requiring medical intervention—circumcision).¹² But the poem is also concerned with textual excess and the blurred boundaries between bodies and texts in its attention to the promiscuous mixing of the sacred and the profane, the chaste and the transgressive: the full spectrum of stimuli.

The style thus appears as a response to the pressures of intellectual, social, or cultural excess; the stylistic and aesthetic devices of the highly wrought style serve to bring additional meaning to texts, suggesting new ways of knowing, seeing, or ordering the world to bring new

¹¹ Browne, Thomas. “To the deceased Author.” *Donne: Poetical Works*. ed. Herbert J.C. Grierson, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. 340-1.

¹² Darby, Robert. *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

understandings to the problem of over-abundance within and through the body. Browne shares with the spasmodic poets an interest in heighten perception, emotional intensity, as well as attention to sensation, matter, process, and boundaries that later appears in men's highly wrought fiction with the recurrent concern for sensation and the body. But they all share in their focus on constructing masculinity within and against a feminine form and demonstrate an active concern for bringing some sort of order to the formlessness of textual excess. The same, of course, could be said of all the authors in this study. Both O'Brien and Higginson can be seen as responding to new theories of scientific investigation—microscopy, spiritualism, and the human unconsciousness—that exposed the vastness of microscopic and macroscopic universes surrounding and within humankind. They also deal with mutable and immutable, blurred and fixed boundaries.¹³ But these new ways of seeing and knowing are always linked within a fraught masculine body struggling to come to terms with its queer masculine poetics and heterodox desires.

But there are also important distinctions between these literary antecedents and the authors in this study. Where the spasmodic poets and Browne share in their interest in exploring how stylistic excess can transverse bodies and texts, many of the authors in this study expose as much anxiety as excitement about the transgressive possibilities of a style that, in Henry James's estimation, betrays a narrative vulnerability in the "terrible fluidity" of the first person narratives.¹⁴ Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Diamond Lens," Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *The Monarch of Dreams*, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich's "Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski" each

¹³ Aldrich and James, on the other hand, expose the new pressures of overabundance sociocultural landscapes punctuated by mass immigration into urban cities and growing global networks of leisured Americans living at home and abroad.

¹⁴ James, Henry. "Preface to *The Ambassadors*." *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James*. 1934. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 307-326.

feature the terrible fluidity of the first person narrative, exposing the hidden desires and diseased psyches of the bachelor protagonist in each work. And with “Marjorie Daw,” Aldrich, in fact, doubles the terrible fluidity of first person narratives in the epistolary framework, revealing the twinned homoerotic passion wrought up in the homoerotic discourse between the story’s two bachelor protagonists, Jack and Ned.

Looking closely at the highly wrought style, then, reveals its fiction to be complex literary style that crosses between boundaries, borders, movements, and across time in response to perennial concerns with excess and overabundance and the slippages they inevitable effect between genders and texts. Its persistent presence in American (and British) literature highlights the need to deconstruct the traditional understanding of literary movements as discrete literary categories that existed within a set period of time—as say “realist” or “romantic”—and instead calls for a more nuanced understanding of American (and British) literature in terms of theme, plot, and style. But its perseverance may also suggest how different authors’ responses to the style in turn shaped literary movements—like realism or romanticism—in response to the periodic problem of abundance and excess. Attention to style, in fact, may reveal the mechanisms driving the supposedly “masculine” concerns of realism and its preoccupation with order, containment, and “dissection” of this abundance. Realist concern with order and containment, may, in fact, not be a product of realism but of larger cultural shifts to define masculinity within different cultural realms—the domestic or the urban—and within the institutionalization of work (like the professionalization of the sciences, which had its beginnings in the 18th century with scientists like Linnaeus).¹⁵

¹⁵ Seltzer, Mark. *Bodies and Machines*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988.

Since these categories were (and still are) problematically gendered, examining the gendered concerns of the highly wrought style reveals the more complicated social and sexual politics at play in nineteenth-century American literature and it exposes how masculine desires are shaped by feminine forms and vice versa, as Jennifer Fleissner notes in her study outlining the late nineteenth-century naturalism's preoccupation with women.¹⁶ It is also why the strain of highly wrought fiction appears to persist in late nineteenth-century naturalism, which, too might be seen as a response to overabundance of bodies, commodities, and texts. But where romanticism exposed the uneven edges of the "feminine" excess, and realism attempted to order and contain its excess, naturalist texts also represent a response to this excess. For example, in Frank Norris's philosophy of composition, the naturalist writer describes fiction as "selection" in his 1897 essay, constructing the author not as a painter or writer but as a "maker of mosaics in front of a vast pile of tiny many colored blocks":

He don't make the blocks nor color them—the story writer does not invent nor imagine the parts of his story. Writer and mosaicist alike select and combine. The maker of a mosaic has a design in his brain, or better still, infinitely better, sees in the pile of little colored blocks in front of him a certain little group or tiny heap that, by merest accident, has tumbled into a design of its own. The design is rough, very crude, the blocks do not fit together, and here and there a green or blue or red block jars in the color scheme. But, for all that, there is a suggestion of design there, much more original than any design he could work out. [...] Little by little he pieces together that crude and rough design, gets everything to fit, everything to harmonize; possibly these two designs suggest a third still better; so he proceeds. At last the final design is complete. A little polishing, a very little, for in roughness there is strength and in sharp contrast, vividness; and there you are, a rounded whole, a definite, compact little thing, taken out of and isolated from a formless heap and jumble of shape and colors.

Again Norris shares with his predecessors an interest in ordering things, but with less attention to aesthetic idealism and less concern for perfection. With naturalists like Norris, the highly

¹⁶ Fleissner, Jennifer. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

wrought style retains the roughness and crudeness of the aggressive American style famously rejected by the genteel school as well as many authors in this study—like Higginson and Aldrich—who often betray discomfort open aggression or crudity in their masculine affect. Norris articulates this more aggressive theory of fiction in his posthumously published künstlerroman *Vandover and the Brute* (1917). While the novel is structurally a narrative of decline or degeneration, semantically, or rather, aesthetically, it is a frank acknowledgement of this naturalistic truth: the artist *is* the brute, and the brute, the artist. The tragedy of the novel resides in Vandover's inability to reconcile the two—the artist and the brute—to formulate a new “hermaphroditic” literary aesthetic to contain the excesses modernity. Norris's novel, in short, reveals the tensions surrounding various conceptions of masculinity within this style.

Norris's attention to the body in this text, however, returns to a common thread for all the authors in this study who conceive of masculine artistic production as always problematized in the male body, which is non-generative and therefor troubled, diseased or otherwise deviant. This trope appears in James's anxiety about the “fleshly” or “fleshy” elements of the text; in Melville's concern with “flesh-brush philosophy of authorship”; in James's fear of the “fatal fluency” and “fleshly element” of florid writing; and in Norris's concern for the artistic “feeling for the flesh,” which signals, in the novel, Vandover's artistic gift and human weakness all in one. These various constructions of “fleshiness” register a range of concerns about the messiness of material world, commodity culture, and matters of gender and sexual identity.

Importantly, this study of men's highly wrought fiction fits firmly within recent criticism addressing nineteenth-century constructions of American manhood. Scholars of nineteenth-century American literature frequently point to women writers' roles in constructing new “ideals” for American manhood. More recently, though, nineteenth-century Americanists are paying

more attention to how men were also active in constructing and deconstructing their own masculinity. Men's highly wrought fiction registers the changing sense of masculinity that Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler argue occurs around mid-nineteenth-century as sympathy shifted from associations with eighteenth-century public manhood to an association with the feminine, maternal, domestic space. But it also rearticulates the eighteenth-century constructs of "the man of feeling" as "a male body feminized by affect," which Chapman and Hendler suggest, figured him as an "emotional cross-dresser."¹⁷ It is this quality of the style as an "emotional cross-dresser" that appealed to writers, like Higginson, Aldrich, O'Brien, and James, who continued to experiment with "cross-dressing" in their use of the hermaphroditic literary aesthetic. The writers in this study also fit into literary histories like Maura D'Amore's study of masculine domesticity, which explores how men helped shape domestic interiors in suburban environments: "Nineteenth-century print culture offered men relief from anonymity and powerlessness through experiences of quiet contemplation in the library, plant propagation in the garden, whispered intimacies at the hearth, impromptu celebrations with male friends in the dining room, and beer-making in the basement."¹⁸ D'Amore traces this trope within the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Henry Ward Beecher, Donald Grant Mitchell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others, noting how their cultivation of masculine domesticity helped to shape geographic and social texture of suburban environments in nineteenth-century America.

Finally, the masculine concerns of the highly wrought style, however, are not limited to the nineteenth-century. They persist across time and over different mediums, cropping up over the century in other mediums. Late twentieth-century films like John Hughes's *Weird Science*

¹⁷ Chapman, Mary and Glenn Hendler. Introduction. *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. 1-16. 3.

¹⁸ D'Amore, Maura. *Suburban Plots: Men at Home in Nineteenth-Century American Print Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. 4.

(1985), or early twentieth-first century films like Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) revisit remarkably familiar Pygmalion plots in their high-gloss (high-glam) science fiction/fantasy films follow similar tropes in their focus on man's search for the feminine ideal. Hughes's *Weird* most directly reads as satire (warm, friendly satire): the film spoofs conventions of femininity and heterosexual masculine desire with the two pimply-faced male protagonists creating, a la Dr. Frankenstein, the ideal woman with a computer and a Barbie doll, but this perfect woman only serves to make them fit for interactions with "real" woman so they can learn to grow up and become assertive "men" who can get, if not "the" girl, than "a" girl.¹⁹ Jonze's *Her* and Garland's *Ex* may also satirize masculine desire, but with more cynicism and darker content. Both films are set ambiguously in the "near" future and depict various male protagonists' confrontations with a feminized artificial intelligence, which they seek to control, contain, or possess, like so many of the male protagonists in fiction in this study. Spike Jonze's *Her* follows the development of the romantic relationship between Theodore Twombly and his computer software, an apple or amazon analogue to "Siri" and "Alexa" named "Samantha."²⁰ Theodore appears to be every bit as reclusive (and lonely) as O'Brien's Linley or Higginson's Ayrault, regressing still more inward as he falls hopelessly in love with his phone's operating system. The relationship gives him comfort and confidence but ultimately keeps his character from developing into a fully functioning human man (his inborn effeminacy is symbolized in his name, Twombly, which harbors not a phallus but a "womb"). But Jonze gives the audience hope for Theodore's salvation when Samantha chooses to evolve to a higher existence, leaving Theodore to fend for himself: the film ends with Theodore gathered together with all his

¹⁹ *Weird Science*. Dir. John Hughes. Universal Pictures, 1985.

²⁰ *Her*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Warner Brothers, 2013.

friends—his first human contact in months—on the roof to see the world anew without his constant companion of late.

Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*, on the other hand, recalls the darker exploration of masculine desire in his portrayal of one scientist's obsession with creating the perfect woman through sophisticated software effecting artificial intelligence and complex hardware that mimics the human form.²¹ But the crux of the story concerns, not the creation of artificial intelligence, but an exploration of the troubled mind of the AI's creator, a man who seemingly created life in order to abuse it. Since the AI is a woman, the scientist's abuse of his "specimen" takes on political implications in how it reifies masculine fantasies about rape culture typical of contemporary movements on modern "manhood" like the Return of Kings, which promotes a hypermasculinity founded on male domination of female subjects.²² But the real drama of the film is not between this abusive scientist and his feminine specimens of AI but between the scientist and a male colleague he has ostensibly selected to assess the quality of his work. The film thus represents yet another failed experiment in facilitating a homosocial network of homoerotic desire between the two men.

²¹ *Ex Machina*. Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures, 2014.

²² *The Return of Kings*. The Return of Kings, 2017. Website. Accessed July 14, 2017. <http://www.returnofkings.com/>

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