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Bad Seeds: Inhuman Poetics in Nineteenth-Century America

By

Gillian Kidd Osborne

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of

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in the

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Committee in charge:

Professor Samuel Otter, Chair Professor Anne-Lise François Professor Robert Kaufman

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Abstract

Bad Seeds: Inhuman Poetics in Nineteenth-Century America

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Plants sprout, vegetate, flower, and molder pervasively across nineteenth-century American literature and yet, like most roadside weeds today, are largely ignored. My dissertation demonstrates that, far from mere stylistic ornamentation, this profusion of vegetation was a means of imagining literature and humanness as inhuman: responsive to otherness outside of texts as well as at the core of a composing subject. Applied to aesthetic agents and objects, plant metaphor unsettled more rhetorical claims during the period for genius or formal convention as self-contained or individuated. The inhuman poetics I trace reveals ways in which poetry in nineteenth-century America was defined not only by genre and print conventions, but also by attempts to make literature responsive to what stands outside of texts: nature, history, and experience. I show how, by directing attention to literary texture and to the extra-literary, plant metaphors model ways of dialectically thinking through the relationship between humans and nature. Rather than view this relationship as monistic or unmediated, I argue that literature offers an essential tool for registering the human's desire, and failure, to transcend or obliterate itself.

Although, like many cultural forms in nineteenth-century America, this poetics drew on sources outside of the United States (particularly works of German and British Romanticism), attention to plant-life in America was necessarily localized. This common attention engaged many of the most canonical authors of the day. I undertake immersive readings of plant-life across the careers of Dickinson, Thoreau and Melville to offer new insight into some of their more under-studied works and to deepen understandings of what "poetry" meant to each. My work contextualizes these readings by demonstrating intersections between these authors and Romantic theory and biology, popular botany in ante-bellum New England, and sentimental poetry on friendship and flowers. Relating my findings to contemporary debates about poetics and crises in the humanities and in the environment, I demonstrate how historical particularity sheds light not only on the past but also on present attempts to theorize poetry's relationship to the social and ecological.

BAD SEEDS: INHUMAN POETICS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Introduction: Genius as a Bad Seed	; <u>;</u>
Organic Form & Organic Agency	
The Impersonal & the Inhuman	
Literature & "Life"	
Historical Poetics & Eco-poetics	
1: The Merge: Grass, Trees, Author, Text	1
Grass as a receding signifier	
Deaths of the author	
The Merge	
TextualMaterial	
2: The Barest Books	24
Bare Reading	
Blank Flowers & Common Names	
Poems & Charts	
Books Out of Doors	
3: Transcendental Vegetation	41
V egetating	
Vegetable Mourning	
Vegetable Memory	
Mind & Matter	
4: Melville & His Mosses	62
Plants before Hawthorne	
Shock & Correspondence	
Plants in Pierre	
Ruins & Plants: Form & Decay	
5: The Flowers of Literary Form	87
Memory & Intertextuality	
Authorship & Inutility: Poetry & Prose	
Willows & Lilacs	
Clover & Roses	
Coda: Seeing through Emerson	113
Transparency	
The Smell of Pines	
The Pain of an Alien World	
On Attention	
Notes	128
Bibliography	147

INTRODUCTION: GENIUS AS A BAD SEED

There is something which is called genius, that carries in itself the seeds of its own destruction.
—Sampson Reed, "Oration on Genius" (1821)

This introduction sets out to answer two primary questions. First, why plants? (This small question incorporates others: why organic form, why nature, why the inhuman?) Second, why are the seeds of this study's title "bad"? Although these two questions are related—as anything wandering toward vegetable metaphor tends to be about relation—the second has the beginnings of a straightforward answer with Sampson Reed, and so I will begin with him.

Except for his influence on Ralph Waldo Emerson, literary critics and historians have largely forgotten Reed. Sometimes described as a proto-Transcendentalist, Reed nevertheless grew to find Transcendentalism repugnant, differentiating himself from what he saw as that movement's "sensualism" in strident terms in the 1836 edition of his Observations on the Growth of the Mind. Reed's differences from Emerson are therefore just as important as the ways that Emerson, as one nineteenth-century commentator put it, "developed and applied" Reed's "seeds, some of which rose to stately flowers in his own garden, and thus attested their inherent value and vitality" (qtd. Reed "Biographical Preface" x-xi). But Emerson and Reed actually had different understandings of the "seeds" that fed intellect. Reed's ideas were shaped by his deep commitment to Swedenborgianism, which he discovered while studying at the Harvard Divinity School, and which subsequently made it difficult for him to find employment in Congregational and Unitarian Boston. As a result, Reed spent most of his adult life working as a druggist. Though he served for a time as the editor of two separate Swedenborgian journals—the New Jerusalem Magazine and New Church Magazine for Children—Observations on the Growth of the Mind remained his only major publication, though this went through multiple editions, from 1826 until 1889. The timeline of this book's life mirrors the timespan of my project: beginning with Reed's first works and ending with Melville's late poetry in 1891. Through the course of Observation's multiple editions, we can see the appeal of the ideas Reed lays out about genius, plant-life, matter and memory in the first half of century persisting toward the century's end.¹

In his "Oration on Genius," first delivered as a talk at his graduation from the Divinity School in 1821, Reed celebrates ideas reminiscent of the "vegetable genius" M.H. Abrams identified as a defining figure of German Romanticism.² Despite the fact that Reed's central concern is intellectual growth—a topic he takes up even more directly in the first version of "Observations on the Growth of the Mind" five years later—much of Reed's language is also symptomatic of what mid-twentieth-century American critics from Cleanth Brooks to F.O. Matthiessen would later recuperate from Coleridge as "organic form." Like Coleridge's definition of organic form, Reed's account of genius emphasizes self-formation: "There is something in the inmost principles of an individual, when he begins to exist," Reed writes, "which argues him onward." This vision of genius is insular and independent: "The mind of the infant contains within itself the first rudiments of all that will be hereafter." Brooks later stressed this hermetic aspect of organic form: the poem sealed off from history and psychology, yet possessing an inner dynamism of its own. In keeping with most articulations of organic form within the nineteenth-century, however—not only Coleridge's, but Schlegel's, on which Coleridge drew, and the many articulations these two authors

inspired—Reed's description of genius is not so much a singular organ as a composite and extensive vegetable: the infant's mind "needs nothing but expansion," just "as the leaves and branches and fruit of a tree are said to exist in the seed from which it springs" (21). Interpreting Reed's "Oration" as just another articulation of organic form during a period saturated with other instances of literary plant-life, however, overlooks the strangeness of the fact that Reed's primary concern is not the growth or interpretation of literature, but rather, human development outside of willfulness or even inspiration. The main feature of Reed's account of genius that sets him firmly outside of typical discourse surrounding organic form, is that Reed's genius not only develops and blossoms, but also, quite shockingly, yet completely predictably, rots.

"There is something which is called genius, that carries in itself the seeds of its own destruction," Reed states (22). The seeds from which genius sprouts are "bad." In Reed's telling, genius cannot vegetate forever (though Thoreau would contest what Reed saw as an inevitable push toward intellectual fruition); nor can it linger forever in flowers, resting on laurels (as Melville knew, after finishing Moby Dick, when he confessed to Hawthorne a feeling of coming "to the inmost leaf of the bulb," and anticipation that "shortly the flower must fall to the mould") (Correspondence 193). Although Melville would concur with Reed that the seeds of genius are destined for flowers as well as decay, the reasons these two men would give for genius's inevitable rottenness are distinctive. While Melville remained a skeptic until the end of his life and worked out his own relationship to genius in a distinctly human and literary field, Reed believed that genius was destined for inevitable destruction because it springs from the divine. Under the duress of divinity, individuality, and thus individual genius, dissolves; the mind grows "not when the man thinks he is God, but when he acknowledges that his powers are from God" (Reed 22). The distinction between intuiting oneself as a god and feeling one's being as composed and directed by god is one that Emerson would trouble persistently, and which he also figured as a point of connection between human and vegetable life. In Nature, Emerson describes humankind as "a plant upon the earth" through whom God "puts [life] forth...as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old" (EL, 41). In his later essay "Circles," Emerson pivots the distinction Reed makes between genius as an individual power and genius as an indication of divine energy around a semi-colon; on one side, Emerson is "a God in nature"; on the other, "a weed by the wall" (396). For Reed, however, there was no toggling. Genius was not a personal possession, but a manifestation of divinity, taking its course through individuals as a season shows up in the changing colors of a field. Unlike the versions of genius traditionally associated with Romanticism, Reed's genius did not enlarge or glorify the individual, but enabled diminishment, and eventually, decomposition, a becoming compost for God: "this is the humility which exalts," Reed ecstatically proclaimed (22).

Writers like Whitman, Dickinson, Thoreau, and Melville did not share Reed's faith in God; yet they inherited his belief in genius as inhuman. The seeds of this dissertation—and the plants that vegetate, flower, rot, and return to seed, from them—are "bad," therefore, because they invite non-individuation and follow a course of development that genuinely considers how literature follows "life." While "life" within Romanticism generally connotes a general animating force, proper to plants and people alike, I have found that, for the American authors I consider here, life often means something far more particular and localized: the precise shape of a leaf pressed to an herbarium page, or an intimate connection between humans (as when Thoreau writes of his brother or Melville writes of Hawthorne). If the vital powers of Romantic life were seen to generate trees, skeletons, and works of

organic literature, the works I am most interested in reveal how such continuity between forms ultimately imparts something strangely un-vital to the literary: an imagination of literature as bare, as vegetating perpetually while prolonging achievement or arrival, or as decay. Thus, the extra-literary "life" that I examine here is comprised of not only living things outside of texts, but also the cultural, historical, or scientific materials more generally, and even the personal experiences of an author. Such instances of life connect to literature not through an author's imagination, but rather by practices of attention to what already exists and what may, even now, be in the process of disappearing. For me, this argument has ethical implications when it comes to understanding literature's place today in an ecologically damaged world. My dissertation therefore argues that literature can help us respond to life not as an abstract force but as particular forms, both living and non-living, that require our attention.

Bad seeds are not necessarily productive. In fact, I will argue below that such seeds run counter not only to individual subjectivity, but also, at times, to the labor of producing literature itself. These seeds are also "bad" because, in the context of the writers I will consider here—particularly Dickinson, Thoreau, and Melville—the "life" that literature registers is not a transcendental or vitalizing force, but rather highly particularized, responding to a material plant (a California Poppy) or to personal memory (that we saw growing on the side of the road in New England). It is easy to overlook how such particularity lurks in the invocations of plant-life these authors so prolifically employ because plants in literature are most often encountered as conventions, textual peripheries to be glided over on the way to plot, character, ideology, truth. I have written a dissertation about precisely these moments because, in a larger sense, I am interested in what happens at the edges of writing, when literature directs or engages attention not only to itself but also to various versions of what the "world" or the "real" might mean: nature, ecology, history, experience. The contemporary poet Anne Carson articulates a version of this peripheral attention in a poem, "On Reading":

Some fathers hate to read but love to take the family on trips. Some children hate trips but love to read. Funny how often these find themselves passengers in the same automobile. I glimpsed the stupendous clear-cut shoulders of the Rockies from between paragraphs of *Madame Bovary*. Cloud shadows roved languidly across her huge rock throat, traced her fir flanks. Since those days, I do not look at hair on female flesh without thinking, Deciduous? (39)

This poem takes a while to get going. It begins with the simplest of plots: fathers, children; hate, love; journeying together, yet in isolation. But the poem only gestures at narrative. Its real focus is not becoming, but rather, reading, and what reading enables. Reading initiates a permeability that breaks the hard dichotomies of the first two sentences, opening the poem to Rockies, *Madame Bovary*, anonymous women, and to shifting time-scales. The speaker "glimpse[s]" the mountains "from between paragraphs"; she does not stare at them directly. Yet this indirection produces the poem's turn toward sensing its surroundings: clouds, shadows, rocks, fir. At the same time, the speaker does not see this scene as it is; rather than an unmediated vista of wilderness, her mountains are inflected with Emma. And as a result

of this infiltrated reading, the speaker carries this moment forward toward further moments of infiltration: when considering "hair on female flesh," she recalls both trees and the process by which they filled her reading. The poem may also be porous at this moment due to intertextuality. I can't help reading Carson's attention to hair on women's arms in relation to Prufrock's wobbly claims for knowledge—"I have known the arms already, known them all"—themselves disrupted by Eliot's commitment to associating sensibility—"(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)" (5). And perhaps, for reasons similar to those illustrated by the poem, I cannot help reading into Carson's poem the half-empty apartment I lived in my first semester of graduate school, when I discovered "On Reading" and the feelings of surplus it gave me, or the springtime in New York years earlier, all the running up and down stairs and the magnolia trees shedding themselves and Eliot's lines in my head.

As the firs in Carson's poem and the magnolias that populate my own memories suggest, I think there is something about plant-life—or, rather, in the way most humans think of and respond to plants—that makes plants powerful points of attraction for an attention both to the immediately sensual and to memories of such experiences. Because plants do not, seemingly, make the kinds of demands for recognition on us that other living beings make, our regard for them can be less transactional. We look at the lilies, but we notice the people to the left of them as well. I see this half-attention as possible, rather than a failure.³ Similar to how Benjamin thought distraction might have revolutionary capabilities, I think that there are certain forms of attention—not necessarily lessened, but rather, porous, open to impulses beyond a singular intent—that could be radically important to cultivate. Plants invite attention in a way that I think is correlative to how works of literature also engage their readers.

My focus has been on nineteenth-century American literature because plant-life is such an emphatic feature of the works of this period, and because plants in the works I will examine come to exemplify this sense of literature as permeable, or, as I will call it, "bare." My study is in conversation with other attempts to think the relations between aesthetics and materialisms in nineteenth-century American literature by focusing on the recurrence of a particular trope. Paul Gilmore does this with electricity in Aesthetic Materialism (2007), while Eduardo Cadava, in Emerson and the Climates of History (1997), argues that "weather" in Emerson's writing becomes a barometer of the historical. These studies offer useful insight not only into the preoccupations of particular authors, but also into larger social interest in responding to the large-scale cultural, economic, and technological change that nineteenthcentury Americans experienced. My argument here is that plants were also a particularly salient trope throughout the period, but that, by writing about plants, authors were less concerned with large-scale historical change and more focused on the small, incremental, developments they experienced as writers for whom writing served as a primary mode of engagement with their world in the most immediate of senses: their backyards, their neighbors, the ancient Eastern mountains worn away by millennia that they could see outside their window as they wrote. Paradoxically, the attention writers like Thoreau or Thomas Wentworth Higginson gave to documenting and writing of plant-life can help us now to see how nineteenth-century nature was also, of course, historical. The places where Higginson botanized around Cambridge in the 1840s were already developed and, consequently, occupied by different plant-species by the 1890s, and Thoreau's records of the bloom-times of plants have helped scientists recently trace the effects of climate change around Concord, where spring flowers come earlier every year.⁴ This retrospective element to reading plant-life in nineteenth-century American literature is an important one, as it brings to light the workings of what Bruno Latour has identified as "nature-culture." But the authors I consider were also already acutely aware of nature as an intensely mediated space and concept, or, as Dickinson's more effectively put it, "a Haunted House" (L 459A).

The lack of research on botany and plant-life in nineteenth-century American literature is strange, given how much interesting and important work has been produced in recent years on Romantic botany in Britain and Germany during the same period. Theresa Kelley's Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture (2012) has shown that "botany" served as "the cultural imaginary of romantic nature" by providing a means of encountering nature as both particularized sets of materials and vast networks of culture and empire (2-11). Kelley's book also gives significant attention to the influence of botany on formulations of womanhood during the period, a perspective developed as well by Amy M. King in Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel (2007) and Ann B. Steir in Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England. 1760 to 1860 (1996). While these studies focus on British Romanticism, Robert Richards's The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe (2002) demonstrates how central botanic study was to German Romanticism (and thus to British Romantics), tracing a line that begins with Goethe and ends with Charles Darwin's studies of plants. An interest in plant-life has also recently animated works of philosophy, particularly those attending to the same German Romantic philosophical tradition that Richards traces. Elaine Miller's The Vegetative Soul (2002) argues that the plant is "the metaphor of metaphors" in Western philosophy since Plato, while Michael Marder and Matthew Hall have reconsidered plant-life in philosophy by developing new theories of humans' ethical obligations to plants.

The fact that all these studies return to a Romantic tradition, and that there has been little corresponding interest in literary plant-life within nineteenth-century American literature, speaks to a residual mistrust that many Americanist critics seem to feel about the very idea of Romanticism in America. When plant-life is written of in relation to American literature, it has largely been in the context of sentimental literature, rather than Transcendentalism or other American texts more directly marked by European Romanticism. In particular, critics have reassessed sentimental flower language in order to unsettle the seemingly stable gendered connotations of this language. In Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing (2010), Dorri Beam builds on work by Paula Bennet, Christopher Looby, and Elizabeth Petrino about nineteenth-century writers using flower language to subvert normative sexual or romantic expectation. But Beam also navigates a meeting ground of sentimental popular American culture and the Romantic elements that influenced Transcendentalist writing when she writes of how Margaret Fuller, who was steeped in the German Romantic writers and impatient with Emerson's more dilettantish appreciation for Goethe, refigured flower language in order to "resist the grammar of metonymic substitution" (38). Beam reads Fuller, along with other women writers of the period, as interested in claiming "flower language as an alternative language" (38). Although this desire to imagine flowers as an alternative signifying system is in keeping with the whole history of slippage between poetry and "poesy," poems and flowers, roses cascading from a balcony to fall on a troubadour's head, it also corresponds to Romantic theories of organic form developed from Romantic theories of science. Coleridge formed his ideas about organicism not only by reading Shakespeare (and Schlegel), but also by considering animals, plants, shells, stones.⁵ The importance of science to nineteenth-century intellectual life set the long literary history in the West of associating plants, particularly flowers, with linguistic signification, into direct relation with materials. This confluence of these literature, history, and science has been under-studied in American Romanticism in recent years, an oversight my work seeks to correct.

As Claudette Sartillot points out in Herbarium Verbarium (1993), Baudelaire knew this history well when he affiliated flowers not with love, passion, or other gradations of sentiment within a romantic field, but rather with evil in Les Fleurs du Mal (4). In "Correspondences," Baudelaire writes of the affiliations between literature and life that flower-language telescopes, yet in other poems, he injects frissons and shocks into moments of oblique correspondence, suggesting that the significance gleaned from such moments is not always easy or appeasing. As a result of Baudelaire's re-imagination of correspondence as something sinister—think, by way of contrast, of the breezes that populate Wordsworth's mind at the beginning of *The Prelude*—it is hardly surprising that the most unsettling and non-mimetic thinking about flower language has been by French theorists. Both Beam and Sartillot push back against Bataille's essay on "The Language of the Flowers," which, (unsurprisingly, this is Bataille, after all) focuses on the sordidness at the center of what otherwise might seem ornate or aesthetic: flowers are marred by their repulsive "tufts" of reproductive fluff, their rottenness held up by a stem for all to see (10-14). But even Bataille's exploration of floral perversion is yet another version of plants signifying. Barthes and Derrida both write about this entanglement of language and flowers; and Deleuze and Guattari attempt to over-throw a certain Western proclivity for thinking of thinking in terms of plant-life by turning from trees to their dendritic and rhizomatic root structures, smutty with soil; in effect, however, this only swaps out one end of the plant for another.⁶ Furthermore, it is paradoxical that the entire methodology in A Thousand Plateaus—argument by metaphor—in many ways reinforces the capabilities of any figuration, including plant-life, to seem more than it means.

I have been most interested in this dissertation, however, not in plant-life signaling excess, or even excessively signaling, but rather, in the ways that plants, ultimately, convey very little, hinting at slightness or transience, while at the same time evoking affective and intellectual responses, particularly literary ones, seemingly incommensurate with their apparent fragility. Even in the language of the flowers, a flower conveys one, maybe two or three words or ideas at most: lilacs, first love; willow, enduring sorrow. It is a paltry language; but the power of this paltriness within the nineteenth-century, and for the twentieth century theorists that sought to re-examine its power—speaks to how aesthetic responses can easily be cut adrift or expand exponentially from objects of attention that may not necessarily seem to call for such responsiveness. In this regard, my thinking about plants in literature builds on Elaine Scarry's Dreaming by the Book and Anne-Lise François's work in "Flower Fisting" (and, less overtly, in *Open Secrets*, which, while it is not about plant-life nevertheless develops a theory of "recessive" responsiveness that I see as similar to the kinds of suggestion that plant-life often invites, but does not demand). Scarry writes of flowers, along with other diaphanous and flitting things—butterflies, birds—as engaging the imagination by leaving so much to be imagined; their transparency invites coloring in. François builds both on the theoretical tradition of taking flowers as metaphors of metaphor and on Scarry's exploration of flowers as "readily imaginable" (in François's paraphrase), in order to examine how this easiness of one form of imagination (the literary or aesthetic) permits a failure of imagination when flowers must be artificially inseminated for agricultural purposes because of the colony collapse syndrome of American honey bees. The very work demanded by manual pollination, in other words, brings to light how little we regard the reproductive expenditures of plants (and their insect pollinators) as labor, despite the fact that its results directly impact human enterprises of economy and agriculture. The artificiality of pollinating flowers by hand reveals the artifice that was there all along.

As a critic, I am interested in the layers of mediation that both literature and nature entail, the absence of isolated things in themselves.⁷ This depth of mediation reveals itself in the exaggerated experiential responses that objects of attention, stripped of their obvious trappings of literariness, can nevertheless elicit. Drawing on Emerson, who spoke of "bare lists of words" as "suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind," I examine this condition throughout my dissertation as "bareness." Eliot complained of a similar effect when he characterized Hamlet's hemming, hawing, and general emotiveness as lacking an "objective correlative" in the action of Shakespeare's play (58). Yet Eliot should have recognized that Modernist poetry, with its early passionate dalliance with the image, and its various contractions, ruptures, and stripping away of pre-existent notions of poetic form, was intimately engaged with uncovering a non-objective correlative, forms of aesthetic responsiveness in the context of what no longer looked like "literature," at least not as literature looked before Modernism. Melville uses another term—"ineffable correlativeness"—in his *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*, whose dissonance with Eliot's I find felicitous.

Melville describes how an incommunicable power in the face of the character Isabel is linked "by some ineffable correlativeness" to a rakish portrait of Pierre's father as a young man. The psychological reading of this passage is that in the face of his father, Pierre recognizes, for the first time, traits of a family resemblance in Isabel, who claims to be his sister. The "camp" reading is that what Pierre finds erotically provocative in Isabel, also attracts him to this painting of his father. But another reading lies in the portrait and face's resemblance, yet failure to explain one another, a resonance that remains at the level of the ineffable. If there is no objective correlative in *Hamlet*, a play Pierre also contemplates before this portrait, there are legions of "ineffable correlatives" in *Pierre*, the ghosts of correspondences in which actual connections are tenuous but the affective effects of these suggestions threaten to implode the novel. Such ineffable correlation seemingly poses a threat to literature, or at least to ideas of literature figured in terms of formal or generic convention, even as it revels in the unpredictable affective expansiveness that literature enables.

To return to the questions I began with, I have chosen to study the recurrence of plant-life across works of literature because I think such moments most fully encapsulate literature's capacities of ineffable correlation; literary figurations of plant-life suggest connections between, as Emerson said, "the man and the vegetable," but they do not insist or even argue for such a connection. In undertaking this study of nineteenth-century American literature, I have found that what Van Wyyck Brooks called the "flowering of New England" had a lot to do with the deep intellectual connections these authors cultivated with plant-life, and not only with flowers. It would be hard, even in a room full of Americanists, to lob a bouquet and hit anyone particularly familiar with Brooks's account these days; like Matthiessen's American Renaissance, some version of it has been absorbed, mostly by oppositional osmosis, into collective memory. Yet Brooks's method, with its blend of psychological and historical materialist reading practices, is actually quite in synch, though stylistically foreign, to many of the concerns of criticism today. Given contemporary interest in affect, materialisms of various stripes, and reformulating historicist criticism with an eye toward form, we should look again at Brooks's portrayal of history as a depersonalized force that absorbs both individuals and cultural practices in its wake. The omniscient narrator of Brooks's writing is bizarre and compelling in this regard, and works to conjure both a sense of sensual immediacy within the past and the impression of humans as caught up in collective energies they cannot quite fathom. Because of this approach, Brooks's history is

also far less canonical than Matthiessen's; yes, we have Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, but we also have Maria Gowen Brooks, Channing, Tuckerman, Marsh, Alcott, and many more, still largely understudied, voices of nineteenth-century New England.

The way Brooks places poems and plants beside one another is exemplary of his mode of criticism as translation of zeitgeist. At the end of one passage, Brooks describes how, in Cambridge in 1840, "other facts pressed themselves upon one's attention," from the "village church-yard" to "the spot where Washington took command of the army" (31). But it is not only these more obvious markers of history that compel Brooks's, or "one's," attention:

On the shelves of the closets lay bundles of mint and catnip, lavender, sweetmarjoram, pennyroyal. Apples were stored there, and peaches spread their fragrance on the darkness, as if waiting to inspire strains and strophes. For little boys were growing up in Cambridge who were to be known as 'household poets,' and often as something better. Their parents even wished them to be poets. The Cambridge fathers and mothers were not poetic, but they respected poetry. Their gardens were full of marigolds, hollyhocks, larkspurs, and the humbler vegetables of the working kind, carrots, parsnips, beets,—as if to remind the sons of the Revolution that classes were provisional in republics, that a deserving carrot was better than an undeserving lupin, that hollyhocks were only hollyhocks when they were plucky enough to withstand the wind, each on its own stalk (which made them pleasing vegetables indeed), and that the man who had the family portraits must always prove himself on other grounds. One of the 'household poets' [Oliver Wendell Holmes] was to make this clear. The Cambridge flowers had a moral meaning, as good New England flowers ought to have; but they had a poetical meaning that was even more apparent. So did the sounds one heard on summer evenings, the bells of the cows ambling home at twilight, the lullaby of the crickets in early autumn, the hymns of the frogs, in spring, in some neighbouring swamp, not to speak of the creaking of the winter wood-sleds, dragging their loads of walnut over the complaining snow. Every sound and odour had its value. One heard the carpenter smoothing his knotty boards, and the whips of the four-horse coaches rattling by; one heard the ticks in the joints of old bedsteads; one smelt the salt of the sea in the summer breeze. What a store of allusions and similes, drawn from the homely facts of his daily living, a Cambridge boy might pack into his poems! When it came to associations and recollections, such as all New England boys shared in common, buried under the leaves of many summers, the Cambridge boys who were to write their poems were to understand the meaning of Byron's line about 'striking the electric chain (30-31).

In this passage, household order, poetic aspiration, and democratic sensibilities touch one another like neatly stacked sheets, folded with lavender, or flowers abutting vegetables in a garden. The plants that festoon the scene Brooks paints of New England life introduce an attention to the peripheral and slight as imbued with meaning: "[e]very sound and odour had its vale." The life of nature and of laboring humans intersects and informs one another, creating "a store of allusions and similes, drawn from the homely facts" of "daily living." The "flowering" of New England was not only indicative of a moment of cultural innovation or cohesion (a moment before the Civil War forced Americans to refigure their understandings of themselves far outside of region and with a newly foregrounded sense of the horrors of history), but also of an achievement of associated sensibilities. Eliot described this confluence of daily fact and poetic sensibility as the sense that frying onions, reading

Spinoza, and falling in love might all inform one another. In Brooks's New England—and I appreciate his decorative narrative strategies that draw attention to this as only one telling of the time and place—sensibility is associated through nature, culture, history, and plants as figures for constellations of material life.

A pervasive investment in "poetry" is also central to Brooks's account. He describes a "new mood" spreading "like the flowers of May" across the region. Young men and women take to the fields to observe:

They went on woodland walks. They recorded the days when the wild-flowers opened. They observed the little tragedies of nature that no one had noticed before, a cat springing on an oriole and marching proudly off with her golden booty projecting in all directions from her mouth. They gathered the first hepaticas, the trailing arbutus that had bled unseen under the boots of their fathers. In hundreds of hamlets the neighbors assembled awe-struck while the night-blooming cereus opened its petals, standing hushed in the presence of the marvel, as the connoisseurs of Florence had once stood in the presence of a new Botticelli. It filled them with romantic associations to think of these splendid flowers opening in the night of the Mexican jungle, where there were no eyes to look at them but the agate eyes of lizards and serpents (185).

In this dissertation, I argue that these activities—of walking, recording, observing, gathering, and remembering—were a part of the "poetry" of the period, and that plant-life, as both a particular object of attention and a figure of deep literary history, enabled this expansive understanding of the poetic. Brooks also made this connection. In his account, books were informed by plants and sometimes, plants overtook books in their instructional suggestions: "The cercus was their Boston Athanaeum," Brooks writes, and "Poetry spread like fox-fire through the woodlands" (185-186).

Organic Form & Organic Agency

Literary critics have long understood "organic form" to connote formal qualities of self-containment and "autopoiesis": poems cut off from the world, and unfurling themselves in self-affirming isolation. This understanding overlooks the non-insularity, however, of how, within Romantic discourses of organicism, form is tied to a creative agency that is, by no means, isolated from what stands outside of texts. The New Critics untangled aesthetic form and agency by arguing that "organic form" had to do with poems alone, effectively over-writing an author's psychology or the depths of historical or material circumstance. In the various waves of reaction to New Criticism, as poets and critics attempted to puncture the cellular walls of organic form through ideas of "open form," "projective verse," or experimental poetry as defined by process rather than outcome, agency was shifted again toward humans, writers and readers. Yet the strange thing about this shift is how continuous its metaphors remained with Romantic organicism: Robert Duncan still returns to a meadow; Charles Olson draws parallels between lungs and branches; Joan Retallack describes experimental poetry as an encounter with "alterity." These poets return to questions that are in fact continuous with Romanticism: how does a poem register a bird, a plant, or a wave? And what happens to the poet in the attempt to render this encounter?

Plant-life has been the central metaphor of organicism, from Romanticism to today. Consider, for example, Keats's well-known off-hand ars poetica: "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (*Letters* 113). Keats's aligning of poetry with leafage is typical, as is the implied easefulness on the part of a poet that this metaphor suggests. If poetry is merely a routine profusion—every April, another poem (was this the bone Eliot had to pick with spring?)—where does the poet stand in relation to his labors? By invoking vitalist energies as the animating life force of poetry (and of seedpods and vertebrae), organic metaphor ultimately directs attention away from the specificities of the poem it purports to valorize and, in doing so, occludes the poet. Even though the visible object of Keats's dictum is poetry and its leafiness, his indirect object is actually poetry's composer. Note to the poet: make like a tree, or don't make at all. Organic metaphor almost always involves this tangle of aesthetic object and agent—each displaced, by metaphor, into some underlying set of energies that neither a single poem nor a poet could ever hope to master or contain.

Although these complexities become apparent enough through close reading of a single line in one of Keats's letters, it is not from such commonplace and suggestive asides about poetry's plant-like nature that an Anglo-American critical tradition inherited the idea of organic form, (though in my work, I have tried to attend to these peripheral disclosures), but rather, largely through Coleridge's (slightly) more systematic accounts of life, literature and *Biographia Literaria*. In works like "On the Definition of Life" and "*Theory of Life*," Coleridge laid the terminological foundations of organic form that he would elsewhere—in "Art and Poesy," in letters, and in his lectures on Shakespeare—more explicitly apply to literature. Ocleridge's theories emphasize life as a "process" rather than a "thing"; this process contributes to the production of individuated "wholes," composed themselves of distinct parts: a body with its organs, to re-invert Deleuze and Guattari's later explicitly antionganic terminology (*Theory of Life* 94, 42). 11

In "On Poesy or Art," Coleridge applied this understanding of "life" directly to a definition of beauty as "unity of the manifold, the coalescence of the diverse." This idea within Coleridge's theories of organic form proved incredibly influential. But it is not the only point that he makes. Coleridge also draws distinctions within the concept of the organic: he differentiates "dead organic" shapes, such as triangles, crystals, or buildings, from the "living organic": trees, animals, but also, all forms of poesy or art that incorporate the irregular or unruly (221). This irregularity, while it does not break the cellular walls of the organic, nevertheless depends on a kind of osmosis: between life and art, and between persons and things. 13 Artists "must imitate," Coleridge argues, not things themselves, but "that which is within the thing." In distinguishing between things and an animating force within things, Coleridge not only draws apart "form" and "idea" but also opens an abyss in mimesis itself, which, in this definition, has little to do with imitation as representation, and more to do with imitation of experience (225). Organicism as fundamentally about experience is more directly articulated elsewhere: in Shelley's celebration in "A Defense of Poetry," for example, of "this power" that "arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed" (531). Shelley's account brings to light the implicitly not-quite-human agency that experiences such transformation through the figure of poetry as a "secret alchemy." The poet is caught up in magical transmigrations, in which bodies transcend their biological definitions and iron turns into gold. In the twentieth century, Eliot would revise Shelley's "secret alchemy" into an even more inhuman figure: the poet as catalyst, setting substances whirring and fizzing in a beaker (Sacred Wood 30). Yet the lab-like setting of this metaphor makes it hardly less mysterious; poetry composed in an

alchemical or catalytic combustion equally draws on "unconscious"—or what Emerson called "occult"—parts of a poet's self. Shelley: "the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure" (531); Eliot: "genuine poetry conveys before it is understood" (*Selected Essays* 200). In each of these accounts, including Coleridge's, art is aligned with "life," and poetry, like some wholly depersonalized mover, enlivens form and former alike.

These examples reveal that New Critics like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, miss the core of organicism when they use the term "organic" to describe seemingly cohesive objects within a poem—a river or a city—or as a synonym for a poem that appears formally rigorous and self-sequestered from the world. However, these critics, like Coleridge, also spoke of organic form as having more to do with experience, or process, than with the final shape of a poem on a page; in overlooking their emphasis on experience, we miss an important feature of the reception history of organic form. "The poem, if it be a true poem," Cleanth Brooks writes, for example, in The Well-Wrought Urn (1947), "is a simulacrum of reality...by being an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience" (213). This understanding of poetry is very much in keeping with Coleridge's own—that a poet should imitate the process of a plant, and not the final image of a tulip or a tree. The difference lies in the fact that for Coleridge, this process was grounded in the experience of composition, whereas for Brooks and Warren, a reader stands on the outside of the poem looking in. Wimsatt and Beardsley's diatribes against the "affective fallacy" warned against reading a poem as a revelation of authorial experience, further distinguishing between writing and reading as two distinct sides of literary experience. In Coleridge's messy and glorious criticism, these two sides of literary life are still clearly interlinked. Whereas for Coleridge, the impulse for all organic form was the same—it was, simply, "life" manifesting in a poem as it would in a mineral, or a bone, Brooks and Warren's first rule of understanding poetry, in their textbook of the same title, is that "Emphasis should be kept on the poem as a poem." The Romantic conception of organicism asserts the opposite: emphasis should be placed on the poem as anything but a poem. A poem should be discussed, as Coleridge discusses Wordsworth's poetry, as if it were a tree. Even though Brooks and Warren maintain this vegetative imagery, asserting that a poem is more like "a plant" than "a wall," they miss the essential feature of plant-life in this respect (ix); both plants and walls can be cohesive wholes composed of disparate parts, but only a plant can actively transform the world, through metabolic processes, into the very substance of its self.¹⁵

While Brooks and Warren adapted Coleridge's terminology to their own evaluative ends, F.O. Matthiessen did a better job in *The American Renaissance* (1941) of considering organic form historically. Matthiessen observes that, following Marsh's publication of *Aids to Reflection* in Maine in 1829, "[t]he most immediate force behind American transcendentalism was Coleridge" (6). It was not only Coleridge's understanding of organicism that was influential; although he borrowed much of his vocabulary from other sources, Coleridge nevertheless became the point of introduction into American discourse of terms like "subjective," "objective," "psychological," as well as "aesthetic, intuitive, idealize, intellectualize, organic, organization, and self-conscious" (7). And indeed, almost all of these concepts become entangled with the idea of the "organic," which, Mattheissen rightly realized, had not with experience more than with form. Matthiessen attributed the "various degrees of formlessness in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman" to these authors' enthusiasm for organicism as a principle of compositional experience; his readings of how this principle affected Thoreau's expansive notion of the poet's "duty" to document nature and history are

particularly insightful (134, 154-165). If Matthiessen grasped the true significance of organicism for these authors, his observations have been lost to recent decades of literary critical debate, in which his version of an American canon of white, male, authors— Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman—was roundly criticized. But interest in Matthiessen—not only as a critic but also as a Marxist, and closeted homosexual—has been growing. In re-reading Matthiessen, particularly in the light of other attempts to reconsider "nature" in American literature and to bridge perceived divides between formal and historical criticism, I find it worth reconsidering his treatment of organic form as an essential influence on ante-bellum New England authors.

Another early literary critic who has recently been "having a moment," is I.A. Richards, whose writings on organic form also offer an alternative to the version popularized by American New Criticism. 16 Richards's work directly influenced the New Criticism, and yet he was a sustained reader of Coleridge and offers an almost opposite interpretation of the significance of the organic from the self-sealed cellularity Brooks and Warren describe. 17 In The Principles of Literary Criticism (1924), Richards uses the term "organic" not to designate aesthetic form, but rather bodily, visceral, physical experiences or responses elicited in a reader or viewer by aesthetic forms. The colors of a painting, even "when simply glanced at," may call forth an "organic reaction" in a gallery-goer (90). Elsewhere, Richards specifies such organic responsiveness as the manifestation of "fear, grief, joy, anger and the other emotional states" (89). At other moments, he uses organic to mean any bodily or visceral sensation (85). In these instances, the organic has very little to do with describing aesthetic objects, and everything to do with identifying rudimentary components of an aesthetic agent's experience: emotional and physical. Richard describes these "organic functions" as linked to "the brain" by a "ladder" (87). Richards's ladder imagery recalls the Boethian "chain of being" so influential in eighteenth-century science, that vision of life forms connected (and hierarchized) from the microbial to the mammalian. Yet these gradations of being remain proper to a human self. In this interpretation of organicism, human aesthetic responsiveness internalizes material developments and differences within the non-human world; to feel "organic" is to experience oneself at a sub-conscious or sub-intellectual level. Richards's amorphous understanding of the organic as having to do not simply with form, or agents, but with the experiences forms seem to produce within agents who are not quite capable of knowing themselves, is far more in keeping with what I have found to be an understanding of the organic in nineteenth-century American literature.

The critique of organicism since these mid-century critics reintroduced the term has been so extensive that it is difficult to point to any particular moment at which organicism came under attack. Organicism has been rejected in terms of fallacies of all kinds: Yvor Winters's criticized the suggestive imitative aspects of the idea as leading to "the fallacy of imitative form" (qtd. 137); similarly, the experiential aspects of organic form were brushed aside by Wimsatt and Beardsley's critique of psychological reading strategies. During the early days of theory, Barthes sought to replace the organic metaphors of "works" with a "network" of inorganic "texts" ("From Work to Text" 1473). For more recent Americanist critics, the idea of organic form, at worst, directly recalls the conservatism of the New Critics; at best, organic form still smacks of Romanticism, which, in its revision and expansion of canons, the field has worked to move beyond. But I have found organicism to be not only an important historical-cultural feature of the landscape of nineteenth-century American writing, but also an interestingly unstable one, ripe for reconsideration as we seek new ways of investigation relationships between history, nature, and the literary.

Several other critics working on a later body of American poetry have also recently reconsidered organic form. In his dissertation, Joshua Schuster argued that Modernist poets like Moore, Loy, Williams, Stein, and Zukofsky, used "biological metaphors," not unlike those of Romantic organicism, to rethink possibilities for "socio-political transformation" (5, 7). Schuster attempts to distinguish between this understanding of "life" as biological in a Darwininan sense—unfinished and evolving—from Foucault's influential articulations of state structures controlling populations through "biopolitics." In reassessing the relevance of organic metaphors for this group of Modernist poets, Schuster argues that organicism shouldn't mean only a "unity of the whole," and locates a shift in "the concept of the organic...in the late nineteenth-century away from holism and towards notions of uneven development, change, process, contingency, and constant flux" (13). Like Schuster, Michelle Niemann argues that a Modern poetic sensibility revises the notion of organic form from an "ideal" of enclosure and sustainability (110). Niemann reads the contemporary poet Oni Buchanan's sequence "Mandrake Vehicles" as an attempt to refigure organic form not as self-contained or self-composing, but as characterized by energies of excess (101). I have found that these later attempts to revise or reject organic metaphors often just reinstate a version of Romantic Organicism, however, rather than the meaning of the organic as insular and aloof popularized by mid-century American critics. Ecopoetics does not so much reject the Romantic "nature poem," though the field is often figured in these terms, but rather, a critical reception history that is knit deep into the fabric of Anglo-American literary critical practice of the last seventy years or more. I have tried to keep this critical history in mind, even while directing my attentions primarily to the workings of organicism within nineteenth-century American writing itself.

Literature & the "Real"

At its most basic, the contested history of organic form has to do with how we understand the relationship between literature and what stands outside of literary space: how does literature negotiate, respond to, record, or contradict nature, history, experience, or, most generally, the "real." By grouping these various possible categories of what exists or unfolds beyond the edges of literature under the rubric of the real, I am invoking Lukács's investment in this term, which inaugurated a whole tradition in Marxist aesthetics. Lukács was criticized for believing that literature's responsiveness to the real was at its greatest in realist art, the novel in particular; Adorno's arguments for dissonant music or lyric poetry later revealed an alternative vision of forms that might respond to the real. What interests me in both of these critics, however, is their shared belief that, first of all, there is some generalizable "real," and secondly, that aesthetic form necessarily finds its groundings there. This position rearticulates Aristotle's classic concept of mimesis, but with the important difference of mediation grounded in dialectics. It is not simply that literature imitates or reproduces real forms, figures, or events; rather, as Jameson describes in The Political Unconscious, the aesthetic acts to "draw the Real into its own texture" (81). Put another way, the real becomes "incorporate"—a word Whitman uses to describe the traces of his action as a poet within literary substance: "I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots, /And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over" (34). Whitman's passive construction—"I find I incorporate"—corresponds to Jameson's idea of the political unconscious, aesthetic forms internalizing social and historical conditions irrespective of an author's intentions. But Whitman's account of the real as drawn

into poetic substance differs from Jameson's; at this moment—although Whitman's real also includes laborers, cities, and all the lumbering, denigrating, features of nineteenth-century industrial life—Whitman's line stretches to include gneiss, coal, moss, fruit, grain, roots, animals, birds: in a word, nature.

Within a Marxist tradition, when the real is given a synonym, it rarely comes to signify nature, but rather history, sometimes daily life, or more concretely the material and economic conditions of production and labor. The richness, continuity, and influence of this tradition has meant that history, as a summary concept of what stands outside of texts, has received a great deal of careful critical attention. Furthermore, because, again, of the investment Marxists have to dialectic and to mediation, no Marxist critic would claim that aesthetic works are equivalent with real things. Rather, as Jameson elucidates, drawing on a later period of Marxist aesthetics in Althusser's notion of history as an "absent cause," "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (82). We can only get at history through its detritus and transcriptions, an understanding that can at times seem to bestow a great deal of agency to things—from dresses made of feathers to Parisian shopping arcades to poems, all of which Walter Benjamin began to set into constellation with one another in his unfinished Arcades Project. The degree of autonomy Benjamin bequeathed to the objects of his historical attention made Adorno uneasy, who chastised his senior colleague for underattending to the work of critical synthesis and exposition. Adorno had not only the force of polemical prowess on his side, but also history itself, which summarily left him the victor in this debate when the Frankfurt school declined to publish Benjamin's preliminary attempt to translate the bulk of archival material that comprises his Arcades into an essay on Baudelaire; Benjamin, fleeing the Nazis, died shortly thereafter. ¹⁸ In the generations of critics that have followed, Adorno's methodology has maintained far more traction, despite widespread appreciation, extending beyond Marxist circles, for Benjamin's "style." Yet Benjamin's critical methodology bears revisiting in our current critical climate, in which "new materialism" has ostensibly inaugurated a different version (without itself reconsidering Benjamin's oeuvre) of Benjamin's desire to constellate things, letting them, to a certain degree, speak for themselves.²⁰

The resemblances between what new materialism or object oriented ontology claims to make available in terms of phenomenology and Benjamin's practices of archival constellation as a practice of historical criticism, bring to light another feature of what discomfited Adorno in Benjamin's approach: namely, that Benjamin appeared to treat historical materials as unmediated versions of "nature." Nature has proved problematic for Marxist critics because it is so often claimed as an unmediated realm of things in themselves, glowing in the dark of their own inalienable otherness. Yet this same Marxist tradition has also contributed directly to understandings of "nature" as itself highly mediated, resulting in recent critiques of the concept of nature within ecocriticism.²¹ Since its inception in the 1990s, the status of "nature" for ecocriticism (and even the term ecocriticism) has also remained unsteady:²² Critics have sought to erode the irregular fences separating nature from human civilization. William Cronon argued that wilderness exists not only in the sublime cliffs and vistas of the Sierras, but equally in suburban backyards, while Latour has brought nature and culture together into the monad "nature-culture"; and Timothy Morton has argued for attention to "ecology without nature." This work emphasizes nature as mediated, artificial, contaminated, both near and far, then and now. This understanding of nature as an infiltrated field, however, has largely been presented in terms of itself, rather than as an "absent cause" to which we only have access through traces, refuse, and aesthetics. Morton has made a point of claiming aesthetics as an important tool for

"ecological thinking," yet, strangely, as largely divorced from aesthetic objects themselves. Instead of approaching the "real" through poems, paragraphs, or curtains, Morton believes that aesthetic attitudes can be mobilized into direct responsiveness to a world of objects as agents. I like poetry too much, and generally have trouble experiencing the world as quite this immediately available, however, to believe that this is true. Ecocritics, despite their various differences, can largely be linked to one another through their preference for some "nature" above and beyond history as constituting a primal extra-textual "real." Because we can look at, touch, hide ourselves in trees as we cannot with history (though I'm not even sure that this is true, given the cultural nostalgia that has characterized the last few decades, with its repurposing of "vintage" objects, steam-punk styles, paleo-diets, and other forms of "living history"), it is assumed that trees, as representative denizens of nature, are more "real" than history: we do not need poems to get at them when there is already a trail carved out for us through the woods.

In contradistinction to many of these critics, I find both "nature" and the "human" worth preserving as concepts precisely because, with their centuries of baggage, compounded by an enduring elusiveness and a refusal to signify one particular thing, these terms, like "nature," are powerful "absent causes," and force us to not take for granted any version of what-you-see-is-what-you-get. To return to Dickinson's formulation again (which haunts me): "Nature is a Haunted House, and Art a House that tries to be Haunted." This uneasy equation implies not only that, as Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, "there is no there there," but also, that nature and art are codependent: we would not know what haunting felt like if we didn't encounter ghosts in contexts that only appear more solid than their shifting shapes. And even though Dickinson seems to prioritize Nature over Art, I find her formulation of each as both made and spooky so enlightening because it so deftly dissolves any premise of some ontological construction site at which one might, if deconstructing deeply enough, arrive.

My point here is not, however, that nature, art, and history endlessly recede within themselves, but rather that we sense and negotiate our relationships to both history and nature through aesthetic objects. History and nature, in relation to aesthetic objects, have long been granted different statuses as repositories for the "real." Following the death of history and of nature, however, in this new era of the Anthropocene, history and nature are no longer as easily distinguished from one another: both have become equally infused with anxieties, horror at the recognition of harm, and hopes for radical transformation. Now, in Jameson's memorable formulation, it is not only "History that hurts," but nature as well (102). It is time for us not only to historicize the concept of nature, but to apply strategies of dialectical thinking and attentiveness to aesthetic mediation that have marked the strongest historicist criticism, to our treatments of how texts record nature as well.

Jameson warns against the use of what he calls "homologies" in criticism, namely practices of equating literary labor with manual labor, or literary material with materiality itself (45-46). Since it is clear that my interest in metaphor and experience is at risk of appearing to too facilely equate the interiors of texts with what stands outside of them, I want to say a few words here about how what I am doing is motivated not by a desire to develop a "material" theory of language of any sort (for that, I could have simply directed my readers to Emerson), but rather an attempt to understand fantasies of authorship or literary experience as determined by more than words alone. At no point am I claiming that the authors I consider succeed in comfortably equating literature with the real; rather, I argue that persistent suggestions of literature as a space for or of the real—as nature, as history, or, most generally, as collections of "things"—instantiate literature as something slight, or

"bare," yet capable of invoking degrees of responsiveness that resemble, and yet are not quite the same as, claims within literature of moments at which pages pale into rocks, firs, clouds.

Critics of Modernism have persistently claimed that their objects of study possess a "thingly" quality that it is worth reconsidering in the context of this discussion of literature and the real. As a representative smattering of this criticism, consider John Crowe Ransom's description of "physical poetry" (associated with Imagism) in The World's Body (1938), J. Hillis Miller's description of Modern poetry as a new space for the real in *The Poets of Reality* (1965), and Daniel Tiffany's exploration of materialism in the modern lyric, Toy Medium (2000). 24 What these accounts share in common are claims for Modernism's distinctive negotiation of the real. Of course, we could turn directly to the poets these critics consider as well for claims of a new thingly quality in their works: Pound's desire in *The Cantos* to make a poem that recorded history, Eliot's (idiosyncratic) archive, Stevens's rock. All these attempt to make the poem more porous, susceptible to influence. But I would argue that what makes Modern poems distinctive from pre-Modernist poems is not so much their relationship to reality, or the idea that the real might become "incorporate" with literary form; as my return to Whitman's term indicates, this impulse was thickly rooted in Romanticism. Rather, what we see within Modern poems is a reassessment of the real as definitively historical rather than natural. Modernism merely rewrites nature as history, and the desire to make this incorporation visible resulted in Pound's imperative to "make it new." Contemporary ecopoets have therefore not really strayed from Modernism's project. Rather, they have come to realize how nature, as history—contaminated, damaged, overwritten, and also at hand—might re-enter the space of poems. By choosing to focus on pre-Modernist texts in this dissertation, I have sought not only to gain a new understanding of historical works within their particular context, but also to understand—to historicize and to unsettle—this definitive and enduring feature of Modern and post-Modern poetics.

Historical Poetics & Ecopoetics

Within my primary field of study, one of the most exciting movements within recent criticism has been the turn toward a "historical poetics," directed by the efforts of critics such as Virginia Jackson, Meredith McGill, Barbara Packer, Yopie Prins, Shira Wolosky, and others. 25 Although the idea of "historical poetics" has had a fairly long history itself, dating back to before, and directly influencing, the Russian Formalists, historical poetics as it is currently practiced in the study of American literature, is more or less a direct descendent of Jameson. Critics of an Americanist historical poetics have nevertheless largely decoupled Jameson's strident Marxism from his command to "always historicize" and his interest in genre studies (9). In particular, Virginia Jackson has now argued across several essays, an anthology, and her critical monograph, for a historical understanding of "lyric reading." Jackson launches herself at a supposed transcendental tendency of the lyric, solidified only during Modernism: the lyric's perceived tendency to sing (softly and to itself) over the singularities of history and everything else "poetry" may have once meant. Yet the definitions of poetry as "overheard" or taking place in another room, incandescent and aloof, like a candle, that Jackson draws on are mainly an invention of the later nineteenth century, with such despairing critics as Matthew Arnold and John Stewart Mills.²⁶ For Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, even Shelley, and their later counterparts in the States, Emerson, Whitman, Bryant, Holmes or Dickinson, poetry was also importantly founded in

the stuff of the material world; through the process of writing, a poet paid unmistakable homage to that world, even when he did not name flowers, trees, breezes, or birdsong in his poems. Writing poems at all—whether they were about mythical creatures, or worms in roses, or the mute intimations of urns—was an expression of participation in a world of objects as much as it may have also been the expression of a single, or singular, voice.

In contrast, the study of ecopoetics—though it bears at least a structural resemblance to historical poetics in its attention to nature rather than history as constituting a primary exterior to textuality—is still relatively new, and markedly under-theorized.²⁷ I am interested in what ecopoetics might offer to the practice of historical poetics in nineteenth-century American literature, and, vice-versa. As I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow, "poetry" in nineteenth-century American meant something more expansive than only participation in genre conventions and cultural norms. For the writers I investigate here, "poetry," without need of modifier (eco- or historical), became a sign for literary labors of responsiveness and attention to the world outside of texts—historical, natural, and otherwise.

Impersonal & Inhuman

From Romanticism through late Modernism to contemporary ecopoetics, organic form is aligned with fantasies of authorship that have largely been overlooked. These fantasies pivot on authorship as "inhuman," an otherness encountered not only in the world, but also at an author's core. When authors collapse the distance between themselves and the products of their labor by employing the same metaphors in relation to both—a poem like a flower, a poet like a tree—they fantasize about authorship as a process that is not localized or even particular to their experience, as something taking place outside or over there, in some half-lit territory of agency, material, and language. This may sound like just another articulation of poetic inspiration, poets channeling their muses, but I have found the articulation of this possession to be much stranger in its approximation of the "inhumanities" of composition.

My thinking about the inhuman began with Melville's novel Pierre, or the Ambiguities. There, the character Isabel describes how she feels "that all good, harmless men and women were human things, placed at cross-purposes, in a world of snakes and lightnings, in a world of horrible and inscrutable inhumanities" (122) To Isabel, the inhumanities are, as Emerson defines "Nature" (in Nature) the "NOT ME" (Essays 8). What differentiates Isabel from Emerson, however, is how her understanding of this "NOT ME" precedes, and only later allows for, understanding of her self. For Emerson, there is a "ME" before there is a "NOT ME." Predetermined self-knowledge permits knowledge of "Nature" as other. But Isabel knows the "inhumanities" with far more particularity and directness before she begins to develop a general sense of herself as human. She reports: "When I saw a snake trailing through the grass, and darting out the fire-fork from its mouth, I said to myself, That thing is not human, but I am human. When the lightening flashed, and split some beautiful tree, and left it to rot from all its greenness, I said, That lightning is not human, but I am human" (122). First, she observes—a snake, the grass, lightening, a tree; next, she identifies that "thing" as "not human"; and only then, faced with this particular other, is she able to conclude that she is human. To invert Emerson's definition, we might say that Isabel understands, not Nature, but herself as human, through negation; to Isabel, Isabel is "NOT

NATURE." (And as the focal point of incestuous and/or homosexual desire in Melville's novel, Isabel corroborates her unnaturalness in other ways as well).²⁸

Even after she comes to understand herself as human, however, Isabel never loses sight of this otherness. She knows "nothing of [her]self," she says, "except the general feeling of [her] humanness among the inhumanities" (123). She refers to other humans as "human things" (122). For Isabel, thingliness remains a defining feature of the human. The "inhuman" thus internalizes an otherness that is at once proper and improper to the human. In common parlance, to behave inhumanly is to fail at being human; this again presupposes, however, an *a priori* knowledge of how a human should behave. The human produces (by aberration) the inhuman. But in Melville's account of Isabel, the inhumanities produce the human.

Theorizations of the inhuman all focus on this idea that what might be "proper" is some thing or experience that, at the same time, seems profoundly contrary to the "human." Drawing on Adorno, who argued that, "Art remains loyal to humankind uniquely through its inhumanity in regard to it," Jean-François Lyotard draws out two distinct sides of the inhuman, which he argues must be kept "dissociated." Lyotard aligns the first meaning of the inhuman with dehumanizing "systems" (2). Pheng Cheah elaborates on this dehumanizing side of the inhuman in his study of the meaning of the "human" within global capital systems. Cheah argues that within globalization, inhumanness becomes inevitable and yet continues to be understood as that which "is not proper to the true end of man" (Inhuman Conditions 2). Again, in this formulation, which comes first—the human or the inhuman—is at stake. Cheah posits two opposing disciplinary approaches to this question; while social sciences accept the meaning of the human as established and secure, the humanities take it as their central mission to investigate the human. In this sense, the humanities contribute to processes of dehumanization by suggesting that there are no conditions "proper" to the human (3). Cheah's critique raises the question of whether the "human" itself is proper to the human.

In Lyotard's account, on the other hand, the other meaning of the inhuman is constitutional: "what if," he asks, "what is 'proper' to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?" (2). For Lyotard, this inhuman is "infinitely secret," "a familiar and unknown guest" that takes the soul "hostage" and "haunt[s]" the mind (2). In Adorno and Cheah's articulation, the "inhuman" is fully externalized: for Adorno, in art's capacity to alienate the human; for Cheah, in alienating systems of globalization. In contrast, there is something semi-mystical in Lyotard's account, a quality that Emerson would identify as the "occult" in his formulation of the "occult relation between man and the vegetable" (EL 11). As in Melville's fictionalizing of Isabel's relationship to the inhumanities, according to Lyotard, the inhuman is foundational to the human. In fact, according to Lyotard, this second definition of the constitutional inhuman may be all we have to combat the dehumanizing effects of the first, systemic, inhuman (Inhuman 7).

It is this second definition of the inhuman—as an intuition of an otherness proper to the human—that most interests me. Framed in these terms, this inhuman may seem to be an extension, or a reformulation, of what Sharon Cameron has identified as the "impersonal." Although an excavation of impersonality in American literature has been a career-long passion for Cameron, she addresses her own thinking on this topic most directly in the collection of essays, *Impersonality* (2007).²⁹ There, she addresses impersonality not as an antithesis to personality, but rather as "a penetration through or a falling outside of the boundary of the human particular" (ix). Cameron considers personality as a specified extension of humanness; collectively, humans have humanness, but only individual humans

possess personality, or, conversely, impersonality. But this account leaves out experiences in which one does not experience oneself as "one" but rather as composite, unspecified, or, as George Oppen would put it, building on Whitman, "numerous" (Selected Poems 83-110). Furthermore, while, Cameron suggests that "impersonality means different things for different authors," for a disproportionate number of her case studies—for Empson, Edwards, Emerson, Eliot, and Weil—impersonality intersects with experiences of the "divine." Of all the authors Cameron studies in *Impersonality*, Melville, as both fiction writer and skeptic, is the odd man out. In Cameron's account, impersonality in "Billy Budd" has very little to do with divinity and almost everything to do with Melville's depersonalizing of characters by making them continuous with material phenomenon like weather.³⁰ And yet, in an earlier work, Melville also summed up the impersonal as a divine other; in "The Candles" chapter of Moby Dick, Ahab rails against the "vast impersonality," that threatens him as "a personality" (503-508). In this scene, the impersonal is externalized into Nature or God as Ahab claims personality as totally individuated, entirely for himself. This dichotomous vision of impersonality and personality does not interest Cameron, however, nor will it be my focus here, though in Ahab's tirade, we can see the groundwork for Melville's development of the idea of "inhuman" as a meeting of the "vast impersonal" and "impersonality." In his next novel, Melville made these two dependent on one another in the character of Isabel; in Isabel, he also dissolved the idea of self as singular and "Nature" as other. In Pierre, Isabel's self is composed of the inhumanities, and they are numerous.

In my understanding of the inhuman, a sense of otherness arises neither from the divine nor from disruption within a consolidated self. Instead, I argue that many of the same authors Cameron has spent pages patiently, eloquently, investigating—Emerson, Dickinson, Thoreau, Melville—were finally more invested in the "inhuman" than the impersonal because they imagined their literary practice as coextensive with vegetative forces of production. One of the features of Cameron's criticism I find most compelling, yet one which she scarcely addresses directly, is how her readings seem to suggest that human experience is itself "literary"—composed, superficial, elaborate, wordy—as much as she asserts the impersonality of the texts and authors she considers. Because Cameron approaches literature from, as she puts it in an early work, an "unabashedly theoretical" perspective, there is always an implication that what she says of works of literature has some bearing on "life" (Lyric Time 23). Anyone who reads literature "philosophically" must anticipate ethical or experiential pay-offs outside of the bounds of texts. Yet this connection in Cameron's work is rarely overt. Nor does my study mean to be prescriptive. Instead, I have tried to consider this interaction between literature and life as "proper" to textuality itself, as authors attempt to think through literature and life as interpenetrating, and, subsequently, as inhuman.

Organization & Acknowledgements

What I have learned here—about plant-life as a figure enabling forms of "inhuman" literary attention, "vegetation" as a process that unsettles time by refusing productive linearity, memory as a creative faculty different from the imagination but no less "active," and literature's attempts to register "life"—I have learned through sustained readings and writing through the following texts.

My first chapter turns to Whitman as a means of explaining how invocations of organic connections between literature and nature—epitomized in *Leaves of Grass*—draw

attention to literary form. Because Whitman ultimately understood organicism as a surface effect, he could redirect its suggestions toward making his poems seem, by the standards of the day, relatively un-literary, and, at the same time, stylistically manifest of experiential expansiveness. In chapter two, I elaborate on the ways that a jettisoning of literary form nevertheless conjures literary affects and responses; I read natural history manuals, collections of dried plants, and journalistic accounts of what Thoreau called "general phenomena" as poetic objects that literalize the metaphor of "nature's book." Drawing on examples from the reading, writing, and plant-gathering practices of Dickinson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Henry David Thoreau and his siblings, I show how participation in popular botany became a form of poetic apprenticeship. Viewed in these terms, the practice of "Poetry," like the practice of assembling an herbarium, relied upon sharpened attention to natural particulars as well as fantasies of literary space as a repository for the real. Chapter three extends this argument from poetic objects to aesthetic agents by showing how Thoreau and Emerson drew directly on accounts of plant anatomy to imagine intellectual and emotional growth as "vegetative." I argue that their accounts of sensations that are not quite proper to a self provide models of inhuman authorship. Thoreau developed his understanding of authorship through early collaborations in natural history with his siblings, John and Sophia. I show how their projects relate to popular floral "albums" of the day—bound, blank books that were used as collective writing spaces. For Thoreau, imagining collaborative authorship reaches an early culmination in the poetics of his first (and still understudied) book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1848). My study concludes with two chapters investigating plant-life in Herman Melville's work—from his review of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse through his late poetry. More than any other author in my dissertation, Melville was interested in plants predominately as metaphors. At the same time, however, he was also deeply invested in the interpenetrations of writing and "life." Melville transformed imagery of mossy, decaying, structures, and a "flowery" style (both borrowed from Hawthorne), into figurative cruxes for literary form not as an achievement but as an intertextual reference for experiences both personal and collective. In particular, I focus on Melville's late, neglected manuscript, Weeds and Wildings, which, I argue contrary to prevailing readings, was not a book of love poems for Melville's wife, but rather a text in which Melville continued to think through his relationship with Hawthorne as both author and love-object. In this work especially, plants become figures of intertexuality for Melville, internalizing life and creating a deep literary surface that resists reading even as it invokes realities outside of the text.

When I look back over the past few years, during which time this work found its way toward this present form, it is a relief and a pleasure to think of how many people I have to thank for their support. First and foremost, I am grateful for my dissertation chair, Samuel Otter, and committee members, Robert Kaufman and Anne-Lise François, from whom I learned much, both directly and through their work, that has not only shaped this project, but will remain a touchstone for projects to come. Among Berkeley faculty, I also wish to thank Charles Altieri and Joanna Picciotto, both of whom I have loved talking with and learning from, and who went out of their way (and their fields) to be supportive of me and my work. I am also grateful for my fellow graduate students, past and present—conversation partners and friends—especially Kate Chandler, Juliana Chow, Megan Pugh, Samia Rahimtoola, and Ayon Roy. The participants in the Townsend Humanities Center sponsored groups on "Mediating Natures," "Contemporary Poetry and Poetics," and the seminar "Nature No Nature" helped me to think about a history of environmental criticism in relation to poetry. Among colleagues and institutions outside of Berkeley, I am grateful to

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Finally, I wrote the bulk of this dissertation when I was living away from Berkeley, from old friends and family, in Santa Barbara with my partner, Brian. I owe the most to him in the most immediate respects. I can't really say enough about how much he supports my life and my work, so for now, I won't say anything at all. I dedicate this dissertation, which I feel I began long ago, to my teachers. But if there's any work to follow this, Brian, it will be for you.

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;

How could I answer the child? [...] I do not know what it is any more than he.

—Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," 1855-1891

"[I]t is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality...to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me."

—Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 1967.

The first two editions of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, independently printed in 1855 and 1856, were designed with vegetation in mind. Both have green covers, with embossed flowers, vines, and leaves arranged as a more or less symmetrical frame for the book's title, which, in both editions, breaks from the greenery into gold. While the 1856 title expands to fill roughly a third of the cover, carved into a neat, angular, font, the first edition's title is diminutive and disintegrates at its edges into plants. The "L" sprouts from a tuft of grass, trailing roots at its base and curling upward into leaves at its edges. The roots of "G" are more unruly, scraggling off to the lower left of the letter. Leaves unfurl from its back and circle inwardly; a sprightly spray of grass arrays its peak. "S's" sport various leaf shapes, from pine, to fern, to ivy; the front end of one "s" blossoms, while the back end of another bears a cone. The "v" trails a twining pea-like tendril, and fuzzes mossily along its left edge. While the "of," ceases to resemble language at all, furling into a dense and tangled root structure and turning out tripartite leaves. This merging of language and vegetation in Whitman's now iconic title obscures a horizon line: it's not possible to say at which moments these plants emerge from dirt into light.

Such fanciful, vegetating, casing for a book was common during the period. Many of the covers of gift books and albums resemble Whitman's book of poems: frilling with green and gold. Like Leaves of Grass, these books made the connection between plant-life and literature a primary trope. Gift books gathered literary content from an array of authors, pairing poems, essays, and stories with prints that frequently featured flowers or, sometimes, women growing roots and stems. As ornate anthologies—a term whose original meaning connotes a collection of flowers—gift books were essentially expensive commonplace books, although their vegetable adornment corresponded with the minimization of assembling agency: while commonplace books depend upon the preferences and tastes of a single collector, gift books came preassembled: plucked and ready for purview. Albums required more input, though also not only of an individual. These mostly blank books often reprinted the same floral plates that decorated gift books, and came with titles like *The Floral* Album, Flowers of Loveliness, Flowers in Frolic, or Flower Tokens. Owners of albums solicited literary content from their family and friends, who filled the pages with poems, sometimes with letters, and even, occasionally, braided or curling locks of hair. Overwhelmingly, this written material, and the purpose of physical tokens like human hair, turned on memory. In one version of The Flower Album, inscribed to Etta Bunker by Eunice C. Bunker, and placed and dated the Cranberry Isles, Maine, August 1865, poems proceed with titles like "Think of Me" or "Remember Me." The entries span nearly two decades, and yet each of the album's authors—friends, cousins, relatives—makes a plea for their collective writing space to arrest

time, making their voices and memories perpetually present within these pages, and consequently, for their dear Etta.³¹ Like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, these popular books embossed with plants suggest a literal connection between life as something to be gathered and pressed into a book and authorship as a collective enterprise guided by memory rather than by imagination.

Whitman, like Dickinson, has long been read and taught as a literary exception—an experimentalist outlier to the conventionality of nineteenth-century popular poetry. Yet, perhaps more than any other American author of the nineteenth-century, Whitman's work foregrounds the idea of poetic authorship as a vegetative, inhuman, flourishing that I will examine across this dissertation as one of the most common conceits of the period. In his preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman turns repeatedly to descriptions of literary labor in terms of plant-life. On the poet, he writes, "rise solid growths that offset the growths of pine and cedar and hemlock and liveoak and locust and chestnut and cypress and hickory and limetree and cottonwood and tulip-tree and cactus and wildvine and tamarind and persimmon." The poet comprises entire vegetal ecosystems: "canebrake or swamp, "forests," "pasturage," "savannah or upland or prairie" (iv). In my Introduction, I showed how Romantic theories of organic form primarily focused on the *effects* of aesthetic objects, a reader's intuition of seemingly vegetative qualities. When, in the twentieth-century, the New Critics adopted the vocabulary of organic form, they too used it as an evaluative prop—a designation of literary quality. But Whitman's emphasis is on the experience of organicism from the perspective of the poet. In Leaves of Grass, Whitman not only metaphorically relates plant-life and poetry, he also makes more material suggestions of continuities between the vital productivity of plants and the productions of authors.

Whitman extended and intensified organic metaphors, affiliating poetry with "life" and life with both nonhuman materiality and the diverse, particular, practices that shape human lives: agriculture, industry, culture, government. Not only could Whitman describe the poet as participating in material forces as would a plant (or a river, or a bird), he could also describe the characteristics of Americans as "unrhymed poetry" and the "United States themselves [as] essentially the greatest poem" (iii). This expansive vision of poetry—encompassing far more than genre and print conventions—depended on the idea that the same vital energies animated both natural and cultural forms. Because, for Whitman, the impulses of organic authorship were essentially common, available to all, grass—"Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones / Growing among black folks as among white"—became his primary vegetable figure. Grass was Whitman's "password primeval," "the sign of democracy": a material manifestation of differences nurtured by the same forces that feed humans, plants, forms of government, and poems (16, 29).

In this chapter, I examine Whitman's investment in grass as a common, collective, figure, from the first printing of the poem that would later be titled "Song of Myself" (none of the poems in Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* have titles) through poems added to *Leaves of Grass* in 1860. In these early poems, grass, by its commonness, complicates the metaphorical/material connection Whitman seems to assert between language and life by coming to stand for *too much*, to recede and dissolve within a proliferation of meanings that reinforce the surface of Whitman's poetry as an end in itself. As a collective figure, grass also sets the stage in these early poems for authorship as non-particular to an individual, as easeful—a "loafing" receptivity to what already exists, and a willful non-participation in more instrumental forms of labor. This attitude also returns attention to the surface of Whitman's poems as straightforward and sufficient, mere gleanings rather than a full harvest.

In these early poems, as Whitman directs his attention to what stands outside of his text, his glance is caught, first, by materials—grass and other vegetating denizens, whiffs and impressions. These impressions open directly for Whitman onto other outsides: history, culture, government, nationality. In Whitman's pre-Civil War poetry, I find these connections between non-human materials and human cultural forms and practices more suggestive than strident, just as Whitman's constant recursions to drawing connections between his words and the world outside of them seems more to invite possibilities than to forge resolutions. Whitman wants poetry to be expansive; therefore, he expands it, gesturing toward what stands to the left of him as well as to the right. The Civil War shattered some of Whitman's confidence in the power of suggestion, and in his later poetry and essays the social, cultural, and national outsides to language that Whitman invokes have sharper edges. They loom in relief of the open style he developed in these early years, and which he kept, even after he seems to have no longer quite believed in the impulses that had directly contribute to the development of this style. These observations apply mainly to a quality of shifting tone in Whitman's work, and I will not have space here to elaborate on them further. But I bring them up to clarify part of what draws me to consider Whitman's early work as distinctive from his later poetry, though the consistencies of his formal style would seem to dissolve such distinctions across the span of his career.

In the opening two sections of this chapter I have employed some of the terminology of structuralism and post-structuralism. These critical practices—Saussurian linguistics, Roland Barthes's "writing," or Jacques Derrida's "écricture"— which were so fascinated with what more recent critics have returned to as the "surface" of the text, are already several critical generations removed. The New Historicist modes of reading that developed in their wake—and that still exert a powerful influence on American Studies—responded to these hyper-attentions to text, summarized by Derrida's famous quip, "il n'y a pas d'hors-texte" (there is nothing outside the text) (Of Grammatology 158). The New Historicists showed that, indeed, there was plenty beyond the text: history, ideology, various forms of group or individual identity, and material culture. Their work expanded our understanding of the historical circumstances of nineteenth-century literary history and culture. Recently, however, some critics have begun seeking alternatives to these critical modes.

Some of these responses have renewed attention to textuality—though with a difference—through either surface or depth models of reading, skating along the ornamented or self-evident edges of texts, or plunging into more capacious accounts of the entire careers and reading practices of a particular author.³⁴ Others have sought an alternative to ideology critique by troubling the literary "subject" more generally, showing how seemingly fundamental features of personhood like character, feeling, and agency become unstable in a literary context and often outside of literature too.³⁵ In fact, despite differences, these critics all share an interest in reformulating practices of literary attention in intersection with thought, feeling, and even being, outside of texts. While this attention to how texts mirror or speak to "life" may seem to have an obvious ethical dimension, these accounts tend to be far more descriptive than prescriptive.³⁶ Most broadly, this widespread interest in rethinking the relationship between history and formalism seems like an attempt to simply reintroduce "pleasure" to critical practices—from close reading to cultural studies—that have remained far more consistent than these recent responses sometimes polemically suggest.³⁷ In my own work, I am interested how historicism and ecocriticsm both arising in response to the textual attentions of structuralism and post-structuralism mirror one another: one directed attention to history, the other, to "nature." While weariness with, or wariness of, historicism has produced some of the varied responses mentioned above, ecocriticsm has evolved in a different direction—ever more toward analysis of the extra-textual, away from "nature" toward "ecology." As a result, ecocriticism—along with ecocritique or the environmental humanities—has been characterized predominately by descriptive and literalizing practices of reading, a preference for "non-fiction" over fictional or poetic modes of writing, and a resounding belief in the ethical implications of such practices of attention and interpretation. My dissertation aims for a more evenly distributed attention to nature and literature.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that the intersection of Romantic philosophy and literary theory with popular botany in ante-bellum New England produced understandings of the literary as requiring an intensified attention to the natural world that intersected with, but was ultimately distinct from, science. I focus in this chapter on how Whitman's work at once exemplifies the suggestions of Romantic organic theory on a rhetorical, or "surface," level, without adopting a corresponding attitude to what I will examine at the end of my dissertation as literary "depth"—invocations of experiences that span the subjective and the textual, and that prioritize composition over readerly access to works of literature. Despite their emphatically proclaimed allegiances to vegetation, Whitman's poems draw attention to themselves as poems; his commitment to constructing poems that would make the suggestions of organicism visible, and experientially available, to a reader, drove Whitman to make such drastic changes to the poetic line. Whitman invokes the natural world, but he finally commands attention to the literary apart from grass or leaves. Thus, Whitman makes the ways in which organicism need not be more than a surface effect transparent.

In the context of this argument, the poststructuralist terms of my initial readings operate as "reactivations" rather than "rediscoveries." In "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault distinguishes between these two modes of historical criticism: in the first, something new is discovered about a particular history; in the second, a concept is brought to bear within a new context. I return to this terminology because it seems to me the most fully realized instance of a sustained attention to the surface qualities of texts and how these surface effects implicate realms of experience beyond the pages of books. This return therefore contextualizes the recent interest in literary surface, while at the same time redirecting attention to this interest as a feature of *writing* rather than critical practice. Furthermore, poststructuralist concepts of the linguistic field or the death the author shed new light on nineteenth-century theorizations of poetry, which were often, particularly the versions I am most interested in here, markedly indirect, grounded in suggestion and metaphor.

Whitman's attention to "grass" as a privileged signifier—a signifier that self-reflexively draws attention to the instabilities of reference itself—renders distinctions within the linguistic field apparent. Some signs are more "suggestive" than others. Whitman's grass is emblematic of the plants that festoon all invocations of organic form or agency. The emphasis poststructuralist critics placed on this unevenness and suggestibility at the surface of the text, which Derrida called textual "play," seriously affected the status of the author as the sole figure responsible for bringing such instability into being. When Barthes killed off the author, he did so in order to liberate "writing," turning literary language into a pleasure ground for the reader. Foucault followed with an account that focused more on the "function" authorship still served for critics and historians as an idea consolidating a set of "works" or ideas, and as a barometer for the literary. For Foucault, however, the authorfunction radically changes in modern literature, when authors purposively begin to prioritize

language as a means of self-effacement. While literary forms, both oral and written, once offered "a protection against death," the modern author—Mallarmé is Foucault's primary example—cedes himself to language, displacing his own life into the life of language (1623-4).

But Mallarmé published his great work of living language, Un Coup de Dés N'Abolira le Hasard, in 1897. Part of my argument in this chapter, then, is simply that Whitman was killing himself off as an author, giving precedence to writing, almost half a century earlier. And while the radical changes to the sound and look and feel of verse that this allowed for have long won Whitman a place in the pantheon of American Modernists, I argue that the dispositions that allowed for Whitman's attitude toward poetry and the final effects of that attitude on the page, were ultimately endemic to the nineteenth-century—pervasive and verdant. Finally, the paradox of organic form within this literary and historical context was that, even as authors insisted on seeing connections between literature and "nature," even as their statements about these connections seemed, at times, to literalize the metaphorical, their efforts ultimately drew attention not only to nature but also to literary space as a privileged realm in which to imagine such unmediated connections between culture and wilderness, language and life. In the final two sections of this chapter, I explore this paradox and its formal effects in terms of Whitman's own "critical" vocabulary: as the "merge" between life and language, and as a reworking of the space and patterning of the poetic line. But first, back to vegetation, and Whitman's returns to the "grass."

Grass as a receding signifier

Whitman uses the word "grass" sixteen times in "Song of Myself." Four of these appearances arrive during one of the most sustained speculative moments in the poem.³⁸ This section begins with a question, posed in a voice other than the author's:

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands; How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrance designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and
say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child...the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass, It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men, It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
It may be you are from old people and from women, and from offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass if very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers, Darker than the colorless beards of old men, Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues! And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women, And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men? And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere; The smallest sprout shows there is really no death, And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it, And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward...and nothing collapses, And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier (16-17).

In a poem full of declarative catalogues, Whitman's litany of possible meanings for the grass remains remarkably indefinite. Although Whitman lists a number of possible meanings for the grass, these meanings substitute for one another rather than accumulating into a unified theory. In this most prolonged engagement with grass in the poem, grass operates as both a privileged signifier—one that stands out in the linguistic field as carrying more potential meaning than the words that surround it—and yet also, precisely because of this overabundance, as a receding signifier, whose meanings disappear within one another. Grass continues to appear in different guises, and with different meanings, across the poem—from the material product of laborers, haying in the field, to an immaterial conveyer of "messages" (36, 42). Because grass signifies things, humans, and experiences that stand outside of the poem, its instability as a sign concentrates both the poem's recurrent desire to incorporate materiality itself, and its ultimate inability to do so.

Grass signifies so broadly because it is so common, cropping up anywhere water and sun will feed it: "This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, / This the common air that bathes the globe," Whitman writes (24). At the beginning of the poem, Whitman sprawls on the grass in an unnamed locale that is most likely Brooklyn, but could just as easily be Kentucky, or California. At first, he does not name these places, focused instead on the minutely local: "observing a spear of summer grass" (13). Yet Whitman's gaze is not, even at this moment, fixated on the particular. Outside of poems, the grasses that covered Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn were not at all the same as those that arrived with ranching in California, radically altering the landscape of that state, displacing chaparral with hills that turned golden (or bone-white during drought years) in the summer. But Whitman's use of the general term "grass" elides such differences, allowing places, like the

other meanings of the grass, to disappear within one another. Mid-way through the poem, the speaker looks back on what he "guessed at when [he] loafed on the grass": namely, as Kenneth Koch would later write, that one thing "may hide another" (Whitman 35; Koch 441-42). From this realization, the speaker traverses the nation—from "the city's quadrangular houses" through "savannas" and "forests" down rivers by bears and buckwheat, "scaling mountains," "walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush," by agriculture and industry and bare animal life, "Approaching Manhattan," "Under Niagara," "Upon a door-step," at festivals and in fields, in gardens and "the gymnasium" "the curtain'd saloon," "the office or public hall" (Whitman 35-38). Whitman names these places as particulars, but it is the unspecified and shifting nature of grass as the primary location of the poem that allows each place to slide into or under another.

In its ability to absorb other places, Whitman's grass resembles the American lawn, and the European settlers who continued to spread across the North American continent during nineteenth-century. The lawn began its life in America as an imperial import. The lawn had long been a feature of British landscape gardening, where it served as a framing device for ornamental gardening, or as the designated location for certain kinds of leisure activity—lounging, picnicking, and lawn games. But under the guidance of American landscape architects like Frederick Law Olmstead and Andrew Jackson Downing, the lawn evolved from a planting of supplementary importance to a central affair. For centuries, gardens and green spaces in Europe were placed at the back of houses, concealing practical household chores or leisure from public view. In the nineteenth-century, however, another American landscape designer, Frank J. Scott, made a democratic intervention in green space by connecting private houses through a common spread of grasses at the properties' front. In the twentieth century, the American lawn would become a symbol of private property, consumerism (my mower better than your mower), and the powers of industry to tame what was never really "nature" to begin with. For a brief period, however, the nineteenth-century American lawn was a space of the "commons," a symbol of collective identity and shared resources, a use of "grass" very much in keeping with Whitman's in "Song of Myself." Because grass can grow almost anywhere, however—at least under sufficiently artificial conditions, like the faux-Scottish highlands of golf courses in Palm Springs or Dubai—lawns also enable landscape erasure. Put another way, lawns allow landscape itself to become a receding signifier. Lawns invoke an elsewhere—England, or a commons that does not quite exist in America, or miniaturized projections of ethereal pastures. In each of these instances, the plant-characteristics of particular bioregions are over-written, mowed under, subsumed into turf.³⁹ While this quality of lawns to erase, recede and subsume is true of lawns everywhere, as Timothy Morton observes, it is particularly troubling in the United States, where lawns hide not only unsightly clods in the earth, but also the slaves tilling fields beyond the lawn, or the agricultural settling of the prairies; in the United States, the lawn's seemingly innocuous smoothing away of difference uncomfortably parallels a nationalist program. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Morton argues that, "the lawn is the work of nature in the age of technological reproducibility"; like the work of art in the age of reproduction, lawns dissolve the distance between subjects and objects that formerly constituted aesthetic, or, in Morton's formulation, Nature's, aura ("Wordsworth" 325). It is precisely this distance between subjects and objects that Whitman's invocations of grass are intent, also, on collapsing, and the effects of this dissolution, when viewed in these terms, become equal parts democratic and disturbing.

As a receding sign like the lawn, Whitman's grass allows for possibilities of connection—that one thing might be another, and so one thing is connected to another. But the material features of a lawn make visible the ways in which this indefinite signifier might also occlude. The lawn absorbs multiplicities within a single figure, subsuming multiple species of grass into a singular vegetable entity, presenting a gathering of individuals as a unified field. In a lawn, Kentucky bluegrass, crabgrass and other species common to the American lawn—none of them native to the Americas—become one, melting pot combining with salad bowl into a comprehensive shade of green.

Ultimately, Whitman's greatest sleight of hand lies not in the places and things that fall into the grass, but in the way the speaker of "Song of Myself" absorbs other selves. Midway through the same catalogue in which reflection on the grass as a location prompts litanies of location, Whitman turns to people—equally "[p]leas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign"—linking each to each (37). Eventually, the speaker himself moves from observation to identification; the poet is also sailor, soldier, bridegroom, wife, hero, martyr, mother, slave. Whitman presents himself as the sign for these: "I am the man," he writes, "I suffer'd I was there"; "I take part I see and hear the whole" (39-40). The unfixed meaning of grass as a sign—a place, a thing, an idea—enables the poet's capacious efforts at identification with these multitudes. This slippage between subjects and objects that the grass permits is also the primary feature of organicism; rather than claim aura for his poems, Whitman claims materials, supplanting the "distance" of aesthetic experience with a receding immediacy of textual and material elision.

The fact that grass means many things in the poem ultimately turns grass into a signifier of multiplicity itself—of "being numerous," as George Oppen would later put it (83-110). 40 In "Song of Myself," Whitman is still very much invested in presenting America as legion, an accumulating list. By the time of "Democratic Vistas" in the 1870s, he would eventually come to believe that the country was unified enough to export its cultural practices abroad. The receding signifier of the grass in "Song of Myself" illustrates these two possibilities of American democracy—inclusive, or absorbing. At the end of the poem, Whitman brusquely frames these seeming contradictions as co-existences: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself; / I am large I contain multitudes" (55). Grass is therefore not only a sign of multiple meanings, but also of contradictions among these; Whitman's entire project depends upon both preserving and naming particulars and differences all while insisting that everything he enumerates remains resolved within the capaciousness of his poem. Finally, as literary plant-life, grass also makes Whitman's contradictions fundamental to literature's attempt to capture the real; Whitman invokes grass, always as a composite of individual plants, as a sign for the lives, both human and nonhuman, that stand outside of his poem, all while leaning on language to perform the work of absorbing that otherness into song. As both material and self-reflexively linguistic, grass epitomizes Whitman's contradictions.

In Whitman's most direct connection between language and vegetation, he ascribes "words simple as grass" to "[t]he friendly and flowing savage" (44). Emerson makes a similar connection in "Experience," he introduces "Indians, trappers, and bee-hunters" as humans who seem to possess a more unmediated access to the meanings of nature, to experience a world in which words are things, and things speak. In suggesting this connection, Emerson recalls the organic principles of correspondence that determined his theory of "Language" in *Nature*. There, he proclaimed that "[w]ords are signs of natural facts" and that "[t]he world is emblematic (Essays & Lectures 20, 24). In "Experience," however, Emerson ultimately writes against such transparency: "the exclusion reaches them also," he warns, and all forms

of language, and the lives they give shape to, stand removed from the non-human world: "the world is all outside: it has no inside," he concludes (480-81).

Although Whitman invokes the quintessentially organic concept that words might be "simple as grass" in "Song of Myself," and, by attributing this language to the "savage," suggests a relationship between words and things that precedes civilization's distancing influences, his invocation of these ideas ultimately emphasizes surfaces like those in Emerson's "Experience": a world in which language drifts apart from material moorings. In this passage, as with the one in which a child asks after the meaning of the grass, one question follows another, and possibilities of meaning are linked through "or" rather than "and," implying substitution rather than accumulation:

The friendly and flowing savage...Who is he? Is he waiting for civilization or past it and mastering it?

Is he some southwesterner raised outdoors? Is he Canadian? Is he from the Mississippi country? or from Iowa, Oregon, California? or from the mountains? or prairie life, bush-life? or from the sea? (44)

Whitman reimagines the trope of the "disappearing Indian" as a series of equally possible identifications for who an American native might be. 41 Rather than disappearing from the landscape, the identity of the "savage" becomes foregrounded as names for places and identities that are not necessarily tied securely to definite meanings. Each of the proper place names Whitman names here (except for California, whose etymological provenance is unclear) come from Native American languages (as do roughly half of American state names). 42 Whitman invokes these as indications of identity—"Is he Canadian?"—as regional descriptors—"the Mississippi country"—and as state names—"Iowa, Oregon, California." Furthermore, Whitman surrounds these proper names with descriptions of regional or location-based identity that are more general, again, mixing identity—a "southwesterner raised outdoors" with description of place—"the mountains," "the sea"—and a combined place-based way of life—from "prairie life, bush-life." We could read Whitman's account of American identities as place names as a preservation of the centrality of Native culture within national identity; yet, the slippage throughout the poem between language and the realities that stand outside of it might just as easily enact an uncoupling of native or "savage" identity from racial and place identity. The political stakes of Whitman's receding signifiers become clear as this slippage linguistically parallels the very real removal of tribal peoples from their lands as European-American settlers moved ever westward. By once again drawing attention differing realities absorbed by hyper-charged signs, Whitman reveals how his poetics ultimately depends on language not as a system rooted in materials, but rather, as a field in which alternate material realities float free from determinations of place, identity, or even "being" more generally; while the open-field of Whitman's poetry invites and praises common experience, it also subsumes differences beneath the very sign of the common.

When Whitman at his most declarative states "This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, /This is the common air that bathes the globe," he distributes the immediacy of this deictic across all the possible meanings of grass. Though it seems that he is pointing at the tufts sprouting around his feet, this call to attention is in fact a sweeping gesture: this is the grass, and this is the grass, too, and both fall under the same inclusive, unfixed, sign. This lack of fixity permits Whitman to disavow his own stylistic originality, a feature of his writing which ultimately must take place at the level of language alone, aligning

his "thoughts" instead with those of "all men in all ages and lands." "If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing," he writes (24). The openness of grass as a receding signifier permits Whitman an openness of identity throughout the poem; though he sings of himself, that self is as over-full of possible identity as the grass, and so, not really any-one at all.

Deaths of the Author

In "Song of Myself," the communal, unfixed, nature of "grass" allows for a form of authorial "death": the death of an individual in favor of collective life. Of all the possible meanings Whitman suggests in the speculative section with which I began ("A child said, What is the grass?"), he lingers longest over grass as the "uncut hair of graves," as the material manifestation of past human lives and voices: grass as an over-turner of death in its relentlessly sprouting self-reproduction. Toward the end of "Song of Myself," Whitman confronts death even more directly: "And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality it is idle to try to alarm me." He addresses "life" in anaphoric parallel, depicting death and life as two sides of one another: "And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths." Between these two addresses, Whitman—again in the same anaphoric pattern—speaks to death particularized and material in the form of the "corpse," whose decomposition becomes "good manure" for plants: "And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me, / I smell the white roses sweetscented and growing, / I reach to the leafy lips I reach to the polished breasts of melons" (54). Imagining individual death as continuous with —even directly productive of—collective forms of non-human life is central to "Song of Myself." As a singular author, Whitman lies down to die in the grass, and is thus reborn as grass, and as the diverse places and others that this collective form of plant-life indefinitely suggests.

In fact, we could read Whitman's "I" here as the voice of the grass itself, reaching out toward leaves and melons, turning corpses into manure. Such a conceit appears in a widely reprinted, anonymous poem, "The Voice of the Grass," which Whitman may have seen during the years that he was ruminating on what would become *Leaves of Grass*. This poem appeared first in *The Liberator* in 1847, before being published in at least four other regional newspapers over the next two years. In the poem, the speaker comes "creeping, creeping every where," at both the beginning and the end of every six line stanza. Like Whitman's speak in "Song of Myself," this speaker is characterized by its expansive access to others; the grass creeps in country and city, by the "aged poor," by "children," by laborers, by "flowers," cows and birds, by the living and by the dead. The middle stanza of seven stands apart from the rest, for in it, the grass reflects on itself—on its invisible and inaudible pervasiveness. Just prior to the beginning of the stanza, the refrain alters slightly to "Silently creeping, creeping every where." Then, primed for the grass's silence, we nevertheless hear, in the voice of the grass:

Here I come creeping, creeping every where.
You cannot see me coming,
Nor hear my low, sweet humming;
For in the starry night,
And in the glad morning light,
I come quietly creeping every where (156).

The grass is everywhere, and yet, unseen, and unheard. Perhaps the best part of this strange, literally "creepy" poem, is the grass's assertion that, though it is "Silently" creeping, it emits a "low, sweet humming," that no one hears. What does the grass's humming sound like? These paradoxes of the grass's "voice" correlate to some of the paradoxes of Whitman's dissolution of himself as an author into the speaking voice of *Leaves of Grass*. The "voice" of the grass crosses boundaries; it is both recognizably human throughout, speaking in stanzas and concentrated in a clear, singular, subject, and yet also nonhuman; it range of sounds lie beyond what humans can understand. Whitman also claims contradictions for his speaker—an author who passes beyond the limits of recognizably "poetic" or even singularly human speech and experience, who "dies" in order to be reborn in language itself.

As a direct indication of this authorial "death" (and perhaps also as protection against censorship), Whitman gave his first edition of Leaves of Grass no author, just as he gave the poems of that edition no titles. Although, within the context of "Song of Myself," he introduced himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos," nowhere else in the edition did Whitman's name appear (29). Instead, facing the book's title page, Whitman printed that now famous portrait of himself—leaning on a fence post, shirt unbuttoned almost to his navel, hat placed at a precisely jaunty and careless angle: a portrait of the artist as lazy, sensuous, common, self-possessed. (For the cover of his Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror (1975), another one of Whitman's twentieth century descendants, John Ashbery, invoked this iconic portrait of an American poet; standing lazily in a doorway, Ashbery wears his shirt unbuttoned, one hand on his hip, and a very 1970s mustache.) By performing authorship as embodied and material, rather than abstractly identified with a single signifier, Whitman suggested that authorship was as organic and self-forming as the letters of his title were like clumps of grass or furls of ivy. Both authorship and language, that is, have their founding in the real, the material, the embodied. Although "Song of Myself' claims by its title to be a celebration of one man, Whitman turns himself into a cipher, effectively emptying out one identity and flooding it with others. In the previous section, we saw how this worked in the figure of the "grass" and the "savage." Whitman enacts another "death" of the author in "Song of Myself" by figuring the labor of poetic production as consummately easeful, a flagrant non-participation in forms of instrumental labor, including versions of authorship itself. This gesture—with its emphasis on Poetry as experience rather than form—is the feature of organicism that the twentieth-century Anglo-American "reactivations" of Romantic theories of organic form paid the least amount of attention to, and which interests me the most here. Whitman figures this minimal poetic labor as "loafing."

In the portrait that stands in for his name, Whitman is self-consciously posed as "one of the roughs," with grass at his feet, simply clothed, leaning on a fence (29). And yet, he is an agricultural laborer in repose, observing, inviting, and lounging rather than planting or harvesting. Whitman introduces this pose as "loafing" the first two times he mentions grass. In the second stanza of the poem, he describes his activity: "I loafe and invite my soul, / I lean and loafe at my ease...observing a spear of summer grass" (13). The next time grass appears, Whitman is still loafing there, extending an invitation: "Loafe with me on the grass... loose the stop from your throat, /Not words, not music or rhyme I want...not custom or lecture, not even the best, / Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice" (15). Here, Whitman not only foreswears labor, but also one version of poetry itself, laying aside words, music, rhyme, for, the "lull" and "hum" or a voice; in its sub-linguistic quality, this humming voice that Whitman wants resembles the "voice of the grass." Merging himself

as a speaker with this not quite poetic speaker, Whitman returns to the poet's work as also not quite work, as easeful and inevitable as grass creeping along roads and by doorsteps alike: "The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is always ready ploughed and manured...others may not know it but he shall." The "greatest poet," Whitman asserts, performs this obverse of work "[w]ithout effort and without exposing in the least how it is done" (vi). The poet makes his labor and the conditions for this labor, and thus the effort of his poetry as poetry, disappear. In these instances, Whitman offers the grass as a site for supine observation, for the production of an unembellished voice. Loafing is poetic activity at its most unadorned.

But loafing is also a word in active etymological transition during the period of Whitman's writing. Not until the nineteenth-century—only a few decades before the first Leaves of Grass—did loafing becomes associated with idleness, and the root of this meaning is obscure. The first two examples of this new nineteenth-century meaning of loafing—to "idle away" time—that the Oxford English Dictionary lists, one from J.C. Neal's Charcoal Sketches (1838) and Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit (1844) appear in quotations. In the first, Mr. Dabbs is said to return "from his 'loafing' place—for he 'loafs' of an evening like the generality of people" (OED III.ii.34). Likewise, Dickens writes that "Major Pawkins rather 'loafed' his time away" (xvi.203). But by the time Stowe describes how men "talked, and loafed, and read, and smoked" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* nine years later (1852), the scare quotes have disappeared (I.xii.183). Loafing has become, like reading and smoking, a distinct form of leisure activity. The next example is the first mention of "loafing" in "Song of Myself" I listed above, in which Whitman "loafe[s] and invite[s his] soul." Whitman is also credited as the originator of turning this leisurely verb into a noun, when, in his 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass, he describes a farmer stopping "by the bars, as he walks on a First Day loafe" to look at his "oats and rye" (39).

During these same mid-nineteenth-century decades, loafing came to designate not only an activity, but also a social type: "loafers" were loiterers or vagabonds. The *Knickerbocker*, in 1835, provides a sketch of the "Loafer" (6.63). (The twentieth-century shoe style, the now somewhat perversely preppy loafer, references this combined meaning of "walking" and easefulness.) Richard Henry Dana in *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), one of Melville's sources for *Moby Dick*, designates "loafer" as a "newly invented Yankee word," and Dickens, in his *American Notes* (1842), describes three "half-drunken loafers" as "loitering" about "with their hands in their pockets" (*OED* vii.17; II.vi.151). Thoreau, as a Yankee, was aware of this use of the term, describing ants as the opposite of "loafers," hurrying along with "their special errands" (*Journal* 1852 46).

The opposite of industrious ants, half-intoxicated, loitering, purposeless, "loafers" are a nineteenth-century suburban New England version of the bohemian "flâneur" that Walter Benjamin describes in his writings on Paris of the nineteenth-century. Benjamin describes how an earlier bucolic "promeneur," as Rousseau strolls aimlessly through pastorals in his Reveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire, becomes an urban "flâneur," epitomized for Benjamin in Baudelaire's poetry of crowds and shocks (442). The flâneur as a type appears in relation to developments in capitalism, and particularly, with forms of urbanism that intensified divisions of labor and flooded markets with a greater abundance of commodities than ever before. Benjamin describes the flâneur as both a figure fascinated by the workings of capital, the shiny sites of commodity exchange, but also a figure of resistance. By his idleness, his willful non-participation in the forms of labor that produce the scenes and trinkets he leisurely observes, the flâneur performs his own "empathy" with "exchange value itself" (448). The flâneur knows how human labor is translated into the value of things, and drags

his feet, willfully, though seemingly as a dandy, participating in a smørgasbørg of capitalist glut. As an example, Benjamin cites extensively from Paul Ernst de Rattier's Paris n'existe pas (1857), including this remarkable passage on how the flâneur's non-labor becomes a form of labor itself: "As for the flâneur, who was always—on the sidewalks and before the display windows—a man of no account, a nonentity addicted to charlatans and ten-cent emotions, a stranger to all that was not cobblestones, cab, or gas lamp,...he has become a laborer, a wine grower, a manufacturer of wool, sugar, and iron. He is no longer dumbfounded at nature's ways. The germination of a plant no longer seems to him external to the factory methods used in the Faubourg Saint-Denis" (qtd. Arcades Project, 432). The flâneur resituates "nature," that is, within a larger capitalist project, aligning germination with factory lines, and yet, at the same time, resists the very forms of productive labor that keep capitalism functioning. The flâneur thus makes idleness itself commensurate with labor. In my readings of poetic labor in nineteenth-century New England as a "vegetative," inhuman, production, we see this exchange of the different meanings of "fruits" in full effect. Rather than producing actual "fruits," the poet produces poems, figuring his work as a productivity in which he plays no particularized part. By focusing on the grass—a plant-form whose "fruits" are connected to grains and thus to basic sustenance of much of human life, and yet, are also, for most untrained eyes difficult to recognize as organs of reproduction at all—Whitman makes the flâneur's preoccupation with the fruits of labor more inhuman, and more poetic, than capitalistic and productive. His grass, and his poems, he claims, are all the more nourishing for their effortlessness.

Before loafing in New England in the nineteenth-century became associated with idleness, its etymological roots were directly tangled with nourishment, tracing back to our other common use of the word: "loaf" as a noun of primary nourishment, a boule of bread. This more ancient meaning of the word dates back to Gothic and Old High German. In the first of these "hlaif-s" referred simply to bread. Both Gothic and Old German had forms of the word to connote a person with whom one breaks bread, a "messmate" or "comrade" ("ga-hlaiba" in Gothic, "gileipo" in Old High German), the equivalent of the later Latin meaning of "companion," one with whom ("com") one consumes bread ("pan"). This long-standing association between "loaf" as a source of nourishment and a social context in which one would share this nourishment also plays out thematically in Whitman's poems. Although the poet as loafer begins in a solitary sprawl, it doesn't take long before his "companion" joins him, and the entire poem examines loafing as a posture in which sociality is primary among the many easeful, organic, non-labors the poet participates in.

Finally, the meaning of "loaf" as "shaped" dates from the 10th century in Old English and German. From the 14th to the 16th century, a "loaf" came more generally to stand for a "mass or lump," first of sugar, molded into a "cone," like modern day Mexican *pilloncilla*, and later, anything shaped or molded. The oldest meaning of this verb form of the word, applied not to bread making, but to vegetables making themselves. While bread, sugar, meat-loafs are shaped by human hands, cabbages and lettuces loaf themselves, ready for harvest. Dodens 1578 translation of Lyte's *Niewe Herball*, for example, lists the months in which the "white cabbage...closet or lofeth" as "June, July and August." This meaning of loafing as a vegetative self-formation lasted into the nineteenth-century; Cobbett's *Year's Residence in U.S.A.* (1818) describes some cabbages "earlier in loafing, than any of the rest of the plot" (I.ii.95).

Whitman refigures this vegetal self-making as an inhuman *poiesis*. Loafing displaces authorial agency onto others, whether human companions or vegetal grass. It suggests that poems are responsible for forming themselves just as cabbages, if left largely unattended, will

still curl into shapes in a garden. At the heart of organic metaphors of authorship is this idea of authorial non-participation in aesthetic labor. By externalizing and further particularizing an image of this labor as a way of life that was being actively redefined in his historical time and place, Whitman performs yet another connection between literature and "life," suggesting continuities between the world of his poetry and the cultural, historical, and natural world to which his poems respond. But "loafing" in "Song of Myself" is also tied to the space of the poem because it is only there that the poet can imagine a death of the author that is not—as creepy as it may sound—a complete death.

While such authorial "deaths" in "Song of Myself'—as imaginative surface effects remain positive, Whitman's attitude toward death is not everywhere so sanguine. Perhaps the starkest contrast of Whitman's unsettled attitudes toward death can be seen by comparing "Scented Herbage of My Breast" with "This Compost." "Scented herbage of my breast" first appeared as an individually untitled segment of the "Calamus" sequence in the 1860 edition; in 1867, Whitman titled the poem by its first line. The poem that would become "This Compost" when it was added to "Autumn Rivulets" in the 1867 edition of Leaves of Grass first appeared in the 1856 edition as "Poem of Wonder at the Resurrection of the Wheat"; in 1860, the poem is untitled, included in the numbered sequence "Leaves of Grass." ⁴⁵ In "Scented Herbage of My Breast," the poet imagines "body-leaves growing up above me above death" straight from his chest, "blossoms of my blood." As with the grass in "Song of Myself," Whitman lingers over this sprouting as a receding signifier: "I do not know what you mean there underneath yourselves," he admits. And yet, he finds these "slender leaves" and "faint tinged roots," "beautiful," though they "make [him] think of death" (Leaves of Grass 1860 342-343). This comfort with the unknownility of death, and with the processes of material decay and transmutation into other material forms, differs greatly from the horror expressed by "This Compost."

In "This Compost," death becomes more "real"; the continuity between life and death is alarming, and as such, the distance between the experienced and the imagined—between literature and life—becomes actually unstable, and frightening. 46 Whitman is retrospective: "I withdraw from the still woods I loved," he writes (208). He recoils from the land that once replenished him. The poem launches, as the first long grass section of "Song of Myself," into a litany of questions. These questions, rather than inquiring into the meaning of the grass, ask how it is possible for earth to perform its perpetual births and rebirths when so much death is buried just below its surface:

O how can the ground of you not sicken? How can you be alive, you growths of spring? How can you furnish health, you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain? Are they not continually putting distempered corpses within you? Is not every continent worked over and over with sour dead?

Where have you disposed of those carcasses of the drunkards and gluttons of so many generations?

Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and meat?

I do not see any of it upon you to-day—or perhaps I am deceived,

I will run a furrow with my plough—I will press my spade through the sod, and turn it up underneath,

I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat (209).

The poet expresses disbelief in the earth's ability to renew itself; and his own labor, modeled on the agricultural turning of furrows with which poetry's lines have so long been associated, grows equally contaminated, turning up carnage and bodies the earth has not yet decomposed. This first section of the poem wallows in horror. In the second section, Whitman attempts to redeem the earth. He launches into a catalogue of earthly renewals: "The grass covers the prairies" / "The bean burst noiselessly through the mould in the garden, / The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward, / The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches, / The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves" and so on for seven more lines, culminating with the "summer growth" both "innocent and disdainful above all those strata of sour dead." But even following this overflowing list of renewals, the poet still wavers. "What chemistry!" he skeptically proclaims. At the end of the next stanza, he remains amazed: "That when I recline on the grass I do not catch any disease, / Though probably every spear of grass rises out of what was once a catching disease" (209-210).

"This Compost" is one of Whitman's most unnerving poems; and in it, grass once again figures prominently. Rather than a series of signs for common places and identities, however, the very ability of grass to recede into so many meanings produces terror. "Now I am terrified at the Earth," Whitman concludes: "It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions" (210). Whitman's horror in the poem is therefore not only a response to death, but also the earth's regenerative fecundity, to life itself. Although Whitman wrote "This Compost" almost a decade before the Civil War began, the horror he expresses in this poem anticipates the transformations the war would inaugurate not only in American social and cultural life, but in literary attitudes as well. Following this rupture——an event that rent the idea of nineteenth-century "nature," overwriting the American landscape with the regional divisions of politics and visible sites of human carnage—invocations of "life" were unsettled from their Romantic moorings. In "This Compost," Whitman recoils from death as a reality rather than the loafing posture of participation in larger systems of non-human reproduction he cultivated in "Song of Myself." In "This Compost," Whitman recoils from the connections between literature and life that animate literary organicism, aligning himself even more forcibly with the realities—biological and historical—that stand outside of his poems.

This horror of what grass conceals is a far cry from the open invitations, even as an image of death, of grass in its final appearance in "Song of Myself." The section begins with a non-human perspective on the poet and his efforts: a "spotted hawk" complains about the poet's "gab" and "loitering." The poet identifies with his observer—"I too am not a bit tamed," he writes, "I too am untranslateable." In this untamed self-identity, the poet dissipates, coaxed into "vapor and the dusk" (*Leaves of Grass* 1855 55-56). The poet's loafing posture earlier in the poem fades more explicitly into his own death at the poem's end. In the final three stanzas, the poet stages a death that allows for a possible future, drawing attention to the poet's preserved and enduring presence in his writing, even after his death in poems and life:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, And filter and fibre your blood. Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, Missing me one place search another, I stop some where waiting for you (56).

Whitman's warning to his reader—"You will hardly know who I am or what I mean," recalls the "Voice of the Grass," whose humming and creeping go largely unnoticed. The difference between the anonymous author of this poem, and Whitman, however, is that Whitman tells us to keep looking. He may be lying down to die in the grass, but he expects us to find and feel him there, to encounter his voice as if it were raised from the dead, or from the page, and, at the same time, to be nurtured by the gorgeous, welcoming, textures of his verse alone.

The Merge

Whitman's grass and his loafing authorial persona contain multitudes through a linguistic sleight of hand: emptying a single signifier (grass, author) in order to refill it with an abundance of signifieds. But Whitman also explores a more material bringing together of things in *Leaves of Grass*. In the idea of "the merge," Whitman foregrounds material connections between others—human lovers, as well as humans and animals, plants, and even minerals—as the defining feature of biological life. Yet his ambivalence about "touch" as the primary means for such merging discloses how much, despite all of Whitman's sensuality, the sexual mechanisms that lead to biological reproduction remain suspect in *Leaves of Grass*. As an alternative to sexual reproduction, Whitman imagines immaculate forms of matter merging with matter. This immaculate imagination returns Whitman's attention back to language itself.

Whitman introduces the idea of the "merge" in what would become "Song of Myself" in sexual terms. 47 "Who need be afraid of the merge?" he rhetorically asks, before demanding: "Undrape." Whitman depicts sexuality as "natural": "you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded," he writes. Yet the commanding tone here, combined with Whitman's declaration that he can "see through the broadcloth, and gingham whether or no" his interlocutor willingly disrobes, closes what might have begun as sexual invitation with an assertion of inevitability (17). In the poem that would become "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman again uses the "merge" to indicate sexual union, this time in explicitly reproductive terms: "This is the bath of birth," he writes, "this is the merge of small and large and the outlet again" (79). But though Whitman often portrays sexuality as inevitable or biologically predictable, there is also an undercurrent in "Song of Myself" of anxiety about "touch" as well as a celebration of self pleasure, both of which unsettle the idea of the "merge" as applying only to sexual reproduction.

Whitman's focuses his attention on "touch" midway through the poem, beginning with his declaration, "To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand." This admission prompts an investigation of touch and its effects—"Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity"—that is bewildering. Whitman begins by describing sensations in his own body—"Flames and ether making a rush for my veins, / Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them, / My flesh and blood playing out lightening." This quick accumulation of sensation peaks with the anticipation of merging with another body—"to strike what is hardly different from myself." But at precisely that

moment of achieved intimacy, Whitman shifts into an accusatory mode, complaining of "prurient provokers" who "tak[e] no denial, / Depriving me of my best as for a purpose." These seducers have been "bribed to swap off with touch" and have "[n]o consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger." In this swap, touch surpasses and undoes the self. Whitman switches to military metaphors: "every other part of [him]" is deserted by "sentries"; he is overwhelmed by "a red maurauder," "given up by traitors," and yet, this scene suddenly resolves by returning, again, to the self: "I and nobody else am the greatest traitor, / I went myself first to the headland....my own hands carried me there." The passage culminates in accusation of touch itself: "You villain touch! what are you doing?" The poem's speaker both demands the ejaculatory culmination of touch—"Unclench your floodgates!"—and views such resolution with ambivalence: "you are too much for me," the speaker admits (32-33). Throughout this passage, although the sexual significance of Whitman's metaphors becomes increasingly blatant, it becomes increasingly unclear who is acting, and who is acted upon, as these same metaphors wander away from a locatable body. Is the "new identity" that touch inaugurates terrifying because it gives others "too much" control over the self? Or is touch terrifying even as onanism because of its capacity to make the self experience itself as other? The passage, even when it seems so overwhelmingly to be about one thing—a poetic speaker and his demanding erection—nevertheless also illustrates how sensational effects in Whitman's poetry more generally overwhelm subjectivity.

In later revisions of "Song of Myself," Whitman broke the section here. The next three couplets in both this and later versions serve as a transition from an investigation of touch to the next section, in which touch becomes de-particularized and even non-human. These three stanzas more from human touch to vegetal reproduction:

Blind loving wrestling touch! Sheathed hooded sharptoothed touch! Did it make you ache so leaving me?

Parting tracked by arriving....perpetual payment of the perpetual loan, Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.

Sprouts take and accumulate....stand by the curb prolific and vital, Landscapes projected masculine full-sized and golden" (33).

While touch is ambivalent, because it necessarily involves human actors, uncertain of the edges of their selves, "[s]prouts" placidly reproduce. Questions and exclamation marks resolve into a calm "merge" of "Landscapes" and men. Whitman shifts from the immediacy of touch as human sexual merging—"Is this then a touch?"—to a more metaphysical investigation—"What is less or more than a touch?"—before returning to a more mutual exchange between humans and non-humans, each figured in terms of the other: "I believe the soggy clods shall become lovers and lamps, / And a compend of compends is the meat of a man or a woman, / And a summit and flower there is the feeling they have for each other" (33). The mechanisms by which "clods" might become "lovers" remains mystical; women and men might physically consume plants and animals, and thereby become them, but the next line again diverts attention away from the literal to the metaphoric, as things—"a summit and flower"—come to represent emotional states.

In the stanza following, Whitman celebrates the simplicity of the material, and mostly, non-human world: he works from "a leaf of grass" through toads, blackberries, a cow, a mouse, to a "farmer's girl boiling her iron tea-kettle and baking shortcake," who, in

her rustic femininity and her placement in the series, apparently becomes an extension of animals and plants. In the next stanza, Whitman internalizes the non-human: "I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots, /And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over." This incorporation results from a very different process of "merging" than the sexual merge initiated by touch. Though he imagines and works such fusions through language, the poet is hardly physically implicated in such combinations. He stands apart: "[I] have distanced what is behind me for good reasons." And this distance allows for a complete control over "desire" as well as experiences of proximity with others; the poet simply "call[s] any thing close again when [he] desire[s] it" (34). This form of merging between human and nonhuman necessarily depends upon language. Earlier in the poem, Whitman called this "the thoughtful merge of myself," aligning his "intricate purpose" with the purposes of "the April rain" and "the mica on the side of the rock" (25). This "thoughtful" merging—imagined, linguistic, immaculate—isn't marked by the same ambivalences prompted by human touch. It remains forcibly ideal.

Whitman achieves the fullest expression of this imagined form of human-non-human merging by turning to a pre-sexual being, again in the figure of a child. In the poem that would become "Poem of the child that Went Forth, and Always Goes Forth, Forever and Forever" in the 1856 edition and (with less emphasis) later, "A child went forth one day," Whitman again conjures a child, curious about the grass. In the opening stanzas, this child becomes the "object[s]" that he sees. Whitman works up and down the chain of being, from plants, through animals, and back to plants:

THERE was a child went forth every day,

And the first object he looked upon and received with wonder or pity or love or dread, that object he became,

And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,

And grass, and white and red morningglories, and white and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird,

And the March-born lambs, and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the mare's foal, and the cow's calf, and the noisy brood of the barnyard or by the mire of the pond-side . . and the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there . . and the beautiful curious liquid . . and the water-plants with their graceful flat heads . . all became part of him.

And the field-sprouts of April and May became part of him wintergrain sprouts, and those of the light-yellow corn, and of the esculent roots of the garden, And the appletrees covered with blossoms, and the fruit afterward and woodberries .. and the commonest weeds by the road (90).

The mechanism by which the child becomes the objects he looks upon is simple: he goes "forth every day." He doesn't seek out his objects of attention, nor work to make himself receptive to them. Rather, the "first object" he sees, regardless of his emotional response—"wonder or pity or love or dread"—becomes him. Whitman reduces the processes of "becoming," of growing into personhood, to their most minimal—basic recognition of the otherness of biological forms, and the intuition of continuity with these. The child's attention migrates from plants to animal life, mediated by the immaterial "song of the

phoebe bird" at the end of a line that begins with grass as an inaugural receding signifier. The animals that follow, all newly born—lambs, a litter of piglets, a foal, a calf—are the result of biological birth. But Whitman does not linger on this merge; he returns to plant life at the end of this long stanza about baby animals; the animated "water-plants with their graceful flat heads" more fully sum up the child's incorporation of these others. Whitman prioritizes plant-life here because the biological mechanisms of plants, though connected to those of animals, are finally, radically, different. Plants seem to make more of themselves out of pure matter, to transpose dirt and water and sun into biological life. In this respect, they exemplify the immaculate "merge" that, for Whitman, is at the heart of the organic imagination. Plant metabolism and vegetation—the process by which plants directly absorb nutrients from surrounding materials in order to extend their bodies—was as striking to Whitman, at to the authors I consider in this dissertation, as plant reproduction, those stages at which plants plump into flowers or fruit. Using the word same word, "esculent," to describe the "roots of the garden" here and the "esculent roots" he finds he "incorporate[s]" in "Song of Myself," Whitman gestures away from fruition toward a metabolic rather than sexual merging with surrounding matter (90, 34). These roots, a part of the plant that lies outside of the centuries-old affiliation between poesy and flowers, are nevertheless as nourishing, in Whitman's estimation, as the fruits and seeds a plant produces above ground. These edible outgrowths are emblematic of the process by which Whitman's persona in "Song of Myself," and the child in this poem, absorb otherness, beginning with the vegetable.

This metabolic, rather than reproductive, merge with otherness prepares Whitman's speakers in both poems to absorb humans as well. Here, the child takes in "the old drunkard," "the schoolmistress," boys and girls both white and black, and finally, even, his "own parents." Whitman returns to sexual, reproductive, merging when he describes the child's father who "propelled the fatherstuff at night" and the mother who "conceived him in her womb and birthed him." Yet these material productions of personhood are limited; even parents "gave this child more of themselves than that." Just like the plants, animals, and other people outside the family, these parents become "part of him" through their quotidian gestures—the mother "quietly placing the dishes on the suppertable"—their demeanor and acts—the mother "mild," the father "strong, selfsufficient, manly, mean, angered, unjust" and abusive. All these become a part of the child—the "family usages, the language, the company, the furniture the yearning and swelling heart." These produce a "sense of what is real." In the final move of the poem, however, Whitman questions this reality. What if all these things—biological others, human others, gestures and practices and ways of being—proved "unreal," mere "flashes and specks"? The poem concludes by dissolving all the concretions it has insisted have become incorporate with the child, beginning first with humans—"[m]en and women crowding fast in the streets"—followed by the entire social world these humans contribute to—streets, houses, shops, ferries, boats (91). At the end, the poem returns to non-human materials:

The hurrying tumbling waves and quickbroken crests and slapping;
The strata of colored clouds the long bar of maroontint away solitary by itself the spread of purity it lies motionless in,
The horizon's edge, the flying seacrow, the fragrance of saltmarsh and shoremud;
These became part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes and will always go forth every day,
And these become of him or her that peruses them now (91).

These others are not only not human, they are also mostly un-biological: waves, clouds, sandbar, mud. The two biological others that appear here—"seacrow" and "saltmarsh," animal first and plant after—are buried in the middle of a line and reduced to mere impressions: the bird flies away, the saltmarsh merely emits its "fragrance." The final line similarly subsumes the child, who becomes indistinct, yet also multiple—"him or her." In this absorbing action, the line begins to resemble the child itself, taking in materials and stretching to accommodate them. As Whitman's lines absorb this agency, the human figure that began the poem is excused from metabolically processing the world; now, while Whitman's poetry itself absorbs otherness, the child stands at a remove, and merely "peruses" what stand outside of him or her. By the end of the poem, in other words, the child has learned to read. How, he regards all these "objects" as possible language that enacts a powerful and pervasive merging of its own.

Textual...Material

One of the conceits of organcism is that textual production is continuous with forms of material reproduction. Organicism thus disavows textuality, through text, in order to claim a more immediate connection to materiality. Addressing oxen in "Song of Myself," Whitman can therefore believe that what he sees in their eyes "seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life." (20). Later in the poem, he can aver, "A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books" (30). Whitman performs this gesture of writing off writing across his poetry. Early on in "Song of Myself," he challenges his reader: "Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth much? /Have you practiced so long to learn to read? / Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?" (14). Implicit in this challenge is that these forms of reckoning—considering the earth, and considering words—are comparable. But Whitman proceeds to disavow both. Instead, he offers companionship: "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems" (14). Whitman prioritizes the semblance of experience over the work of understanding the earth or poems. When he disavows literature, it is always in favor of experience.

In "Song of Myself," one of Whitman's catalogues unfolds as a set of contrasts between the textual and the material, or even more generally, between artifice and life:

My words are words of a questioning, and to indicate reality;

This printed and bound book....but the printer and the printing-office boy?

The marriage estate and the settlement...but the body and mind of the bridegroom? also those of the bride?

The panorama of the sea...but the sea itself?

The well-taken photographs....but your wife or friend close and solid in your arms?

The fleet of ships of the line and all the modern improvements....but the craft and pluck of the admiral?

The dishes and fare and furniture...but the host and hostess, and the look of their eyes?

The sky up there....yet here or next door or across the way?

The saints and sages in history....but you yourself?

Sermons and creeds and theology...but the human brain, and what is called reason, and what is called love, and what is called life?" (47-48).

In this list, representation stands on one side, growing ever more general—books, contracts, "panorama," "photographs," navy and industry, domestic objects, distance, history, theology—and humans, proximity, "life" on the other. The ellipses that separate the two seem to offer an alternative; the second half of the line should somehow answer the first. Yet the ellipses and the question mark that punctuates the line ultimately leave the relationship between the two sides suspended. Though Whitman seems to disavow representation, particularly through the production of literature, this very gesture of disavowal is ultimately in keeping with organic conceits rather than with any real turning away from the possibilities of his poetry as text.

Whitman focuses on this tension between the textual and the material most directly in the poem that would become "Song of Occupations." There, he claims his allegiance to material realities outside of writing: "I pass so poorly with paper and types....I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls (57). He returns to "reckoning" again, as a problem of believing that material realities—"the landscape," "men and women," physical laws of the universe, "land," "sea," "stars," or finally, predictably resolving with vegetable matter, "seeds"—might have only come into being for the purposes of representation—to be "painted in a picture," "written of" or sung of," studied by "savans," turned into "maps and charts," organized in "constellations" or turned into "agriculture" (60). Whitman rails against such transformations of matter into print. The poem concludes resoundingly on this note, in preference of humans over any thing they might produce:

When the psalm sings instead of the singer,
When the script preaches instead of the preacher,
When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved the supporting desk,
When the sacred vessels of the bits of the eucharist, or the lath and plast, procreate as
effectually as the young silversmiths or bakers, or the masons in their overalls,
When a university course convinces like a slumbering woman and child convince,
When the minted gold in the vault smiles like the nightwatchman's daughter,
When warrantee deeds loafe in chairs opposite and are my friendly companions,

I intend to reach them my hand and make as much of them as I do of men and women (64).

Again, Whitman sets the two ends of his line against one another. Here the comparison is more apparently definitive, accumulating into a declaration of commitment to "men and women" over their productions, wrapped up snuggly in a period. But the conditional "When" that begins each of these lines except for the last actually prevents conclusion. The time in which text will achieve its own action, being, and connection to materiality is yet to be reached. As such, though Whitman makes much of men and women in his poems, and proudly proclaims his allegiance to the "real," ultimately, these declarations draw attention to themselves as necessarily encrypted in language. As we will see in later chapters, although Whitman's declarations of connection to the extra-textual are no more or less emphatic than Thoreau's, Dickinson's, or Melville's, Whitman ultimately feels the tug of the literary acutely; though he gestures outside of his poems repeatedly, he comes back to men and women through the process not of touching them, but of writing for them.

Earlier, near the end of "Song for Occupations," during the longest catalogue of the poem, a meandering list of things, peoples, places, professions, Whitman sums up the reality of all these as "the heft of the heaviest" (63). In the midst of that same catalogue, he describes "the curious way we write what we think....yet very faintly" (62). This tension between the "heft" of things and the faintness of writing is at the crux of Whitman's poetry;

the tension between these also stands at the center of organic invocations of textual approximations of the real. Whitman's work is emblematic of this paradox of claiming literature as a space in which real things are harnessed; yet the same paradox, open-ended in its idealism as all paradoxes are, leaves Whitman able to determine how he will make such contradictions visible on the page.

That Whitman was wildly original as a formalist within the context of nineteenthcentury American poetics is a truism. By breaking with meter, extending his lines, and relying heavily on anaphora and other forms of repetition, Whitman humanizes organicism—his twentieth-century inheritors, like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, would continue this trajectory—by making his primary biological metaphor the human body, with its lungs and ambiguous sexual urges, rather than the plant. 48 Whitman's break with his poetic past and present have been so influential on the poetic futures that followed him that the question of why Whitman felt a need to so radically re-imagine the space of the poetic line in particular remains largely unconsidered. That Whitman's "genius" is received as predictable or inevitable—a "natural" outgrowth of literary progress—is itself symptomatic, however, of the ideas of literary organicism that were a fundamental component of "Poetry" in nineteenth-century America. While Whitman made radical changes to how poetry looked on the page, that is, his understanding of what "Poetry" encompassed, an understanding that led him to make such changes, was very much in keeping with the poetics of many of his nineteenth-century peers. Whitman's exemplarity demonstrates both a culmination of how the suggestions of organic form might be made textually, if not experientially, literal, as well as the fact that such a formal expression of organicism was hardly inevitable at all. Dickinson was no less committed to the idea of poetry as "Alive," for example, and yet, her poems demonstrated their involvement with the real through revisions and extensions of preexistent forms, like the hymn, creating a sense of tension between the formal and the lived that Whitman's lines, in their own way, smoothed over.

Paradoxically, it was Whitman's investment in poetry as a primary agent of sociality, culture and history that allowed him to develop a more "natural" seeming line. The inhuman poetics that I will describe in this study derives from correspondences—forged in metaphor—between the biological productions of plants and the production of poems. This poetics suggests that poets are like plants and like poems, that agents are akin to the objects they produce. The fantasy of an inhuman agency at the heart of aesthetic production had pervasive appeal across this period of literature (and is a recursive conceit across much of Western poetry). But Whitman, though he adopted much of the vocabulary of organic correspondence between literature and life, also, as we have seen in "This Compost," recoiled from the implications of such continuities. Whitman's poetry is ultimately a poetry of life, particularly human life within community, far more than it is an inhuman poetics of death-in-life. Thus, Whitman's work registers the split between aesthetic invocation and actual experience. Whitman saw humans and their aesthetic labors not as natural—the fantasy of organicism—because he understood "nature" as a human conception. And this understanding allowed Whitman to transpose a dialectic of nature and culture into his poetry, so that what seems most natural in his verse is in fact most clearly indicative of Whitman's characteristic "style."

In his 1855 preface, Whitman described the defining feature of this style as "simplicity." He argues:

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity...nothing can make up for excess or for

the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art. If you have looked on him who has achieved it you have looked on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the graygull over the bay or the mettlesome action of the blood horse or the tall leaning of sunflowers on their stalk or the appearance of the sun journeying through heaven or the appearance of the moon afterward with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me" (vii).

In this passage, Whitman sums up organicism as the dream of speaking as if one were an animal or a plant. But this mode of speech is also, invariably, "in literature," a "triumph of art." Whitman describes his method as an almost perfect mimesis—looking into a "mirror" and seeing precisely the same thing. The implication is that his role as an author is so minimal—merely receptive, the opposite of "meddlesome"—that the world has simply presented itself to him to be recorded. And this transparency and transference is indeed the wonder of Whitman's art. His catalogues and repetitions, his inclination to list, to mix quotidian idioms with rhetorical echoes of oration or song—all these effects contribute to a sense of Whitman as speaking, singing, available, and of the world that he presents as unadorned and direct. His anaphoric catalogues transform the refrain of poetry from a series of returns or interruptions into series of simple phrases in which we lose track of where lines begin and end as they blur together; we stop seeing poetry under the hum and lull of the simplified voice of Whitman's grass. Through his revisions and expansions of Leaves of Grass over the remaining decades of the nineteenth-century, Whitman ultimately made the vegetative qualities of his first edition's title internal to his poetry; like a plant, any part of Leaves of Grass, from any edition, feels as capable of growth as any other part, as if one could place it in water and wait for it to sprout roots, then bury it in dirt and wait for the rest of the book to expand from this clipping.

At a time when a number of other nineteenth-century writers, also influenced by principles of organicism, were writing in a style Dorri Beam characterizes as "highly wrought," Whitman turned in a different direction. Instead of emphasizing literary surface, he sought to direct his readers' attention toward life. Yet Whitman's "simplicity" is equally an effect, a style. This effect grows directly out of the language and theory behind organic metaphor, a conceit that Whitman, perhaps more than any other poet of the nineteenth-century, made central to his poetic enterprise. As I will explore in subsequent chapters, the literary effects of this conceit were hardly determined. One of the most unsettling components of organicism is its fixation not on the lush expansions that characterize Whitman's lines, but rather on literature's "bareness." Organicism imagines wearing away the literary in order to provide for experiences that may not, ultimately, fit within poetic lines at all, no matter how long they are or how reminiscent of verdant fields fading into horizons.

2: THE BAREST BOOKS

"Bare lists of words are found suggestive," Emerson writes in "The Poet," "to an imaginative and excited mind" (455). This chapter examines how and why instances of bareness—both material and linguistic—become potential sites of imaginative and excited experience, and argues that such an imagination, responsive to present conditions rather than the not-yet-achieved, differs from the faculty often ascribed to the heroic Romantic poet, even by Romantic poets themselves. ⁴⁹ By taking the plant as a "metaphor of metaphors" (Miller *Vegetative Soul* 11), ⁵⁰ nineteenth-century theories of organic form and vegetative aesthetic agency on both sides of the Atlantic offer a metaphorically determined counterpoint to more rhetorical claims during the period of poetry as a representatively human endeavor or the poet as consummately human. Rather, such common assertions of poetry as a vegetative flourishing or the poet as possessing something like a bulb for a brain, suggest, without insisting on, inhuman allegiances at the core of poetic enterprise.

While this affiliation of poetry and plant-life was not new in the nineteenth century—the sixteenth-century slippage of "poesy" as both an imaginative collection of words and a quaint bouquet illustrates this long-standing allegiance nicely—the rise of popular botany during the Romantic period reimagined poetry's vegetative qualities in increasingly material terms. Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* (1791), for example, mingled cutting-edge discoveries of plant sexual anatomy, heroic neoclassical verse, and footnoted confessional asides. Goethe based his *Metamorphose des Planzen* (1790) on direct observations of plant-life encountered during and further narrated in his *Italian Journey* (1816). And in a letter of 1818, Keats explicitly tied this widespread attention to plant-life to fantasies of authorship, proclaiming that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (*Letters* 113). The pervasive turn to plant-life in the work of the nineteenth-century American authors I consider in this dissertation stood in relation to this context of trans-national Romantic poetry and science.

The literary plants of this period somewhat discomfiting align not only poetry and plants, but also plants and authors. Keats asserted that poems were leaf-like—organic, formal, vital—but, also, that poets were like trees. And a tree-like poet is less obviously alert and alive. While I explore the effects of this plant-author connection more closely in the next chapter, here I wish to focus on how, just as turning authors into trees saps away some of their human agency, figuring literature as plant-like empties some features of language that we might identify as consummately literary—supplanting metaphor with materials, the particular with the common, and formal complexity with flatness. A poem becomes equivalent with a list or a chart. Drawing on Emerson, I have called such instances of depleted language "bare," and yet, as Emerson suggests, such moments are hardly stripped of literary effects or affects. Here, I compare herbaria collections of dried plants assembled by Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau to the writings of each. As aids to thinking about and memorializing plants both materially and aesthetically, the herbaria illuminate the relationship these writers negotiated between powerful experiences of literature as lived and living, and the relative paucity of a page's ability to approximate that vitality. My reading therefore complicates accounts that ground an authorial excess only in Dickinson and Thoreau's manuscripts: Dickinson's variants and envelopes, Thoreau's vast wilderness of journals. 51 These were, indeed, writers deeply invested in the ragged edges of their works; yet Thoreau and Dickinson also conceived of writing as a permeable space, infiltrated by words and paper, but also by experience and life. This quality of their work was enabled not by an

understanding of literature as an excessive or highly wrought realm, but by an understanding of writing as fundamentally bare and thereby susceptible to experiential filling.

This attention to bareness affected how each considered plant-life as well. While scientific discourse in the period, particularly in Europe, may have been spurred by botanical "discoveries" in far flung places, and titillated by the uncommonness of some plants—their monstrous, exotic, or even unclassifiable attributes⁵²—much of the aesthetic discourse on plants remained preoccupied by commonness: plants as representatives of vitalist principles shared by all living things, as pervasive intermediaries between minerals and animals; plants as proximate, as friends. Dickinson and Thoreau's botanizing exemplifies this interest in the common and the close.⁵³ Attending to plants in their work reveals that, amateur botanists like Dickinson and Thoreau collected plants not for the purposes of scientific mastery, but because this practice heightened their attention to their own backyards. This care for the proximate had an aesthetic dimension: writing become an active means of attending to the already at hand.

Unlike other natural history collections—shells, birds, mammals—which fit neatly into cabinets, the two-dimensionality and extreme delicacy of pressed plants necessitates other forms of storage. In herbaria, plants are preserved between paper, either in single-bound books, or on separate sheets, forming a "library." Bound within a volume, herbaria literalize "nature's book" by making a book out of nature; generally, such collections are assembled for more aesthetic ends, similar to a commonplace book, or even a journal, but one in which the material is matter itself, given or found rather than imagined and transcribed. As a library, an herbarium is more accessible to scientific use. Dickinson's herbarium fits the aesthetic model, with multiple specimens of mixed forms arranged on pages of a pre-bound book, its green leather exterior pressed to look like climbing vines, while Thoreau's herbarium, spread out across hundreds of pages and specimens, is a library whose holdings are still referenced (and even revised) by botanists today.

Dickinson compiled her herbarium as a teenager in the 1840s, when her most productive years as a poet were still over a decade away. ⁵⁵ In contrast, when Thoreau began his herbarium in the early 1850s, he had been journaling for over ten years, and had begun to publish essays and poems. ⁵⁶ Although the literary works for which these two authors are well-known seem formally antithetical—Dickinson's highly wrought and explosive poems like brambly gardens beside Thoreau's rambling essays, books, and journals—Dickinson and Thoreau share investments in "poetry" as a form of thinking directly engaged with materials encountered in their barest forms.

By lingering on instances of material and textual bareness, I mean to put pressure here on the "imaginative and excited mind" susceptible to suggestion that Emerson describes. A bareness productive of "suggestion" does not begin or end with "surfaces"; nor is the imagination at such moments purely descriptive.⁵⁷ Rather, an imaginative mind thrills to, and sometimes recoils from, an intuition of participation in constitutional experiences of bareness produced by continuities between human and nonhuman life. Within the immediacy of things as they are stirs an expansiveness expressive of things as they might be. Potential, in such moments, is felt to belong to the world, rather than to intelligence alone. Simulations of bareness produced in literary form invoke this uninvolved participation, intimating a received spaciousness within materials, available and common, as they are.

This receptivity to what already exists has a long history in *poiesis* as an unspecified, yet primary, "making" that is not necessarily dependent upon words. In Greek, *poiesis* applies equally to making a chair, or a body, as it does the making of a poem. This versatility and dependence upon particular materials arises in the usage of *poiesis* as a medical suffix:

"haemopoiesis," the making of blood, or "lymphopoiesis," the making of lymphocytes within blood.⁵⁸ In these instances, making operates in service of a determined material. While the material of poetry is often defined as language itself, the historical resilience of metaphorical accounts of poets and poems (word-smiths like black-smiths) as things other than themselves and outside of language stands as a reminder that, as materials, words are only half-there. The specter of Orpheus coaxing expression from rocks and trees haunts the history of poetics. Heidegger sought to elide the rift between actual rocks and poems when he argued that *poeises*, both in language and thought, was a "bringing forth" equivalent to the emergence of a butterfly from a cocoon, or a wave crashing on a shore (10). In his description of the poems of Paul Celan, Adorno casts off "the helpless language of human beings," but not the affiliation between poetry as a making in search of materials more solid than language. Celan's poems, Adorno writes, imitate "the dead speaking of stones and stars." They bury below or beyond the "organic" (322).

Within the nineteenth-century traditions of thought that Heidegger and Adorno extend toward such different ends, organicism as a theory of creative intelligence and aesthetic form was endemic, and its primary metaphor was plant-life, those forms mediating between inhuman matter (stones, stars) and sentient life. As metaphors for poets and poems, plants contribute to a poetics lodged between matter and a representative humanness: daffodils (and breezes and clouds) setting off Wordsworth's egotistical sublime. Melville's Pierre, or the ambiguities (1852), whose fraught pastoral beginnings explore Wordsworthian sentiments as if these had been injected with steroids or shoved under a microscope, expresses this middling condition in the character of Isabel, who comes to know her "humanness" only "among the inhumanities" (123).⁵⁹ The two central characters of this novel—the heroic writerly Pierre and the inhuman guitar-strumming Aeolian harp of Isabel—embody two sides of the Romantic poet: the poet as priest, prophet, or legislator, valorized as perhaps never before, and the poet as a receptive medium, open to the impulses of matter, even to the point of being contiguous with trees, stones, lightening, snakes or cats (all of which Isabel thinks she might be). My argument is that these two versions of the poet depend upon one another—that a powerful poet within nineteenth-century organicism is a better vegetable, more in tune with what it means to dissolve into grass, or germinate as a seed. If, in more rhetorical moves, a poet could be handed a scepter or a laurel crown, within metaphor as one of the building blocks of literary language, this same figure dissolves into pastures, moved by winds rather than by the will. As the same metaphors slip between poets and poems, subjects and objects, an unstable relation develops between vegetable passivity and human expressive power, or between materiality and subjectivity more generally. Here, I approach Emerson's "relation between man and the vegetable" through the literal materials and formal effects of this connection. Caught in *poiesis*'s restless search for materials during a period of widespread popular interest in botany as a scientific and aesthetic practice, specimens in Dickinson and Thoreau's herbaria, and metaphoric counterparts in the works of each, become supercharged signifiers within a materialist aesthetics central to nineteenthcentury conceptions of the poetic.

Bare Reading

Bare making is intimately tied, as Emerson suggests, to bare reading: lists of words found in natural history books or guides, for example. Reading natural history is not only about gaining a deeper knowledge of the world. Such reading also activates the imagination

and the memory. Natural history makes the world more legible by invoking scenes that are not immediately at hand, naming their particulars, and leaving these names with a reader like pocket-change for future exchanges in the real. At the moment of reading, the world is kept from a reader by several conditions. Firstly, she is reading, and so her eyes are committed to the page. (Thoreau unsettled this distance somewhat by carrying books into the woods with him and recording in his journal intermittently from both words and world.) Seasons also intervene, as when walks must be exchanged for books due to falling snow. In an essay published in The Atlantic Monthly in 1861, "My Out-Door Study," Dickinson's correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson refers to the benefit gleaned from reading such texts: "Even the driest and barest book of Natural History is good and nutritious," Higginson writes, "so far as it goes, if it represents genuine acquaintance; one can find summer in January by poring over the Latin catalogues of Massachusetts plants and animals in Hitchcock's Report" (258). In 1876, in one of her letters to Higginson, Dickinson tipped her hat to this "good and nutritious" "acquaintance" with the dry list of Hitchcock's Report on the Plants Growing in the Vicinity of Amherst: "When Flowers annually died and I was a child, I used to read Dr. Hitchcock's Book on the Flowers of North America," she writes. "This comforted their Absence – assuring me they lived" (L488). Dickinson reports that she "reads" Hitchcock. As Higginson says, however, the Report is a dry and bare book: a catalogue, a list of names. Like Emerson, Higginson discovers a particular form of imaginative abundance directly enabled by the bareness of a list.⁶⁰

The "good" or "comfort" that comes of natural history reading derives from "acquaintance" with something known or experienced before, which, through the act of reading, is remembered in all its fullness. Both Higginson and Dickinson set this scene of reading in the winter, a season in which the plants listed have been reduced to stalks and rooted reserves: an impoverished text, set in an impoverished season. And yet, reading and remembering brings "summer" into "January." Reading a dry and bare book of natural history is a literary act in which nothing is made, but in which the reminder of something already known produces a sudden flowering in the cold quiet of a wintry present.

These forms of flattened reading set the imagination to work on materials that are remembered, knowledge that has already been received, fashioning lush scenes from limited materials. In his first essay for the Dial, a review of several books of natural history compiled as a "Natural History of Massachusetts" (1842), Thoreau recounts an experience of reading when the plants of Massachusetts are dormant and the birds have all gone south: "Books of natural history make the most cheerful winter reading," he writes. "I read in Audubon with a thrill of delight, when the snow covers the ground, of the magnolia, and the Florida keys, and their warm sea breezes; of the fence-rail, and the cotton-tree, and the migrations of the rice-bird; of the breaking up of winter in Labrador, and the melting of the snow on the forks of the Missouri; and owe an accession of health to these reminiscences of luxuriant nature" (Thoreau "Natural History" 546). Traveling imaginatively through keys and sea breezes distant landscapes for a native New Englander—Thoreau improves his health through "reminiscences" of scenes he has never actually seen. In these descriptions of distant, less violent seasons, Thoreau experiences imagination as recollection, as Massachusetts infused with Floridian warmth. The "shock of recognition" Melville identifies when reading Hawthorne is something like this reassurance that in the dead of winter June existed and exists: an influx, one more closely resembling a gift than a bolt ("Hawthorne" 346). While literature might produce a shock, reading a list of flowers in winter produces something softer—a nutrient, a comfort—that arises from an impression of a world, even a frozen or distant one, released by thaw.

These two experiences—the lightning bolt of literature and the warm flush produced by reading natural history in the winter—run along similar tracks, though they differ by degrees. In "My Out-Door Study," Higginson introduces the latter as prerequisite for the former, describing natural history as a training ground for literary labor:

On this flower bank, on this ripple-marked shore, are the true literary models. How many living authors have ever attained to writing a single page which could be for one moment compared, for the simplicity and grace of its structure, with this green spray of wild woodbine or yonder white wreath of blossoming clematis? A finely organized sentence should throb and palpitate like the most delicate vibrations of the summer air. We talk of literature as if it were a mere matter of rule and measurement, a series of processes long since brought to mechanical perfection: but...tried by the out-door standard, there is as yet no literature, but only glimpses and guideboards; no writer has yet succeeded in sustaining, through more than some single occasional sentence, that fresh and perfect charm. If by the training of a lifetime one could succeed in producing one continuous page of perfect cadence, it would be a life well spent, and such a literary artist would fall short of Nature's standard in quantity only, not in quality (254-55).

Here, it is actually June, and Higginson wants writers to put down their winter reading and get outside. Out there, however, the world is also thick with language, awaiting reading; the air is a "finely organized sentence," the "flower bank," the "ripple-marked shore" are examples of "perfect cadence," and the "woodbine" and "blossoming clematis" are fragrant with the "simplicity and grace" of "structure." In a lecture given in August 1841, Emerson referred to this seeming literariness of plants, and breezes, and shorelines, as "the method of nature." "Let us see that," he wrote, "as nearly as we can, and try how far it is transferable to the literary life" (118). Both Higginson and Emerson describe literature as an experience taking place somewhere else—on a shore, or in a forest. "My book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects," Emerson writes (266); the somewhere else where literature originates should be near enough to smell and to hear. These authors present the act of "reading" natural history, or nature more generally, then—a list of flowers, or a flower-spangled shore—as an experience of immanence, a sudden influx of feeling which, in all its richness, can at times feel like the presence of materiality itself. While the materials being read, in other words, may be bare, there is an almost exact correspondence between this understatement—language stripped of seemingly more literary qualities—and an overstatement of experience. The reader finds the world in the place of words.

Blank Flowers & Common Names

How do writers enable such experiences for their readers? This is a particularly urgent question when it comes to Dickinson's work. Recent criticism on Dickinson has tended to prioritize her writing materials over the effects of these materials on readers. The publication of *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981) and Franklin's variorum edition (1998), which broadcast for the first time the poet's penchant for tearing poems open with variants, "visions and revisions," inspired an earlier generation of critics to reconsider this poetess as a radical formalist. Virginia Jackson's recent return to Dickinson's materials revealed an even more recalcitrant poet, one whose poems written on chocolate wrappers and with crickets pinned to their pages indicated a writer antithetical to enduring New

Critical practices of what Jackson calls "lyric reading"—approaching all poems as if they were lyrics, as sealed-off, softly singing, things. 63 Consequently, Jackson, among others, has advocated for a "historical poetics," an approach governed by an uncovering of aesthetic practices particular to the time of composition, rather than the imposition of twentieth and twenty-first century definitions or expectations of the poetic. This approach, while it encourages readers not to take their reading habits for granted, doesn't necessarily get at the full array of nineteenth-century practices of reading "Poetry." One essential difference between poetry of the last hundred years, and the way most readers encountered poetic forms in the century prior, has to do with the relative retreat of poetry from a public, and oral, sphere. Today's poetry readings and slams don't come close to approximating the vast quantity of poetry voiced in public—in schools, lecture halls, beside fire-places—in the nineteenth century. 64 If recitation and reading aloud brought written poems into contact with "life," making poems internal to the bodies of those who performed them, the widespread preoccupation with imagining poetry as continuous with materials, particularly plants, was another way of bringing literature to life. Within the context of historic organicism as a site of negotiation between vegetable matter and poetic labor, Dickinson's work becomes exemplary—not of lyric hermeticism, but of lyric materiality; within this context, Dickinson's herbarium truly begins to look like the poet's "first 'book." 65

Almira Lincoln's Familiar Lectures on Botany, one of her textbooks, may have guided Dickinson's herbarium construction. Lincoln presents an herbarium as an object of both beauty and use. Specimens should be affixed in a book "composed of blank paper," she writes, "(white paper gives the plants a more showy appearance)," noting that an herbarium aids the student's memorization of "the character" of a variety of plants (43). Lincoln details the nuts and bolts of herbarium assembly; she also illustrates how an herbarium perfects (or exaggerates) forms of mimesis. The process of pressing leaves, Lincoln writes, produces an image "more correct and beautiful than the finest drawing" (26). Lincoln explicitly connects poetry to this substitution of the thing itself for its representation when she breaks into verse: "In every little flower and blade of grass! / Each opening bud, and care-perfected seed," she writes, "Is as a page, where we may read of God" (242). Like Emerson and Higginson, Lincoln finds in nature language available for transposition, from the field to the page. By reading and copying nature, botany teaches its practitioners to exercise poetic faculties without necessitating the production of a poem.

Dickinson was not unusual in the 1840s for being a young girl with poetical inclinations and an herbarium, although few existent examples of such books remain. One such collection is held by the Thoreau Institute, and most likely belonged to Thoreau's sister, Sophia, with whom he, along with his brother John, gathered plants in the 1840s and whose botanizing he mentions in his journal a decade later. Though the specimens are arranged on individual pages, rather than bound together in a book, Sophia's herbarium demonstrates a delight in form and color, overlaying leaves from different seasons, or arranging multiple species on a single page as Dickinson does. To Some gift books of the era, decked with painted flowers and full of poems, provide another point of reference for Dickinson's collection. Mrs. Badger's *Wild Flowers Drawn and Colored from Nature* (1859), which Dickinson's father gave her in the year of its publication, forms a kind of virtual herbarium.

Mrs. Badger's book is about the same size as Dickinson's, similarly bound in leather embossed with leaves and vines. Poems are strewn throughout the book, interspersed with and generally directly referencing painted bouquets. Although Dickinson did not include poems in her herbarium, the interdependence of words and flowers held great appeal for her as well. Dickinson frequently composed poems that reference particular bouquets, sending

both flowers and poems as part of the same ornamental missive. While these letter-bouquets invoked a connection between writing and life, Dickinson also enjoyed suggestions of slippage between language, flowers, and persons. In her first meeting with Higginson—or so he reports—Dickinson handed her visitor a couple of daylilies. "This is my introduction," he says she said. 69

And yet, despite her obvious delight in textual-botanical or botanical-personal elision, Dickinson's herbarium and Dickinson's poems are distinct from Mrs. Badger's virtual herbarium precisely because the herbarium and the poems remain independent documents, with the vast majority of her poems reaching a version of themselves apart from an accompanying bundle of flowers. If we look to Dickinson's herbarium as a site of literary instruction or apprenticeship, a space in which she might have thought through not only the relations between floral forms, but also about what it means to set such forms to two-dimensional paper, and more broadly, about how aesthetic rendering negotiates allegiances to a material world, then the relative paucity of the herbarium as a literary exercise at first seems incommensurate with the poems. Both the herbarium and the poems, however, reveal the poet thinking through bareness as productive of powerful expressivity.

An expressive constriction appears in the disappearing Latin names within the herbarium itself, for example. Although there is no guarantee that Dickinson "composed" her book sequentially, pages toward the end include more specimens without names, suggesting a possible development. On a page with seven specimens, four of which are left unnamed, it is possible to read the omission of names as ordered. The names that do exist— Lonicera, Smilax peduncularis, Arbor vitae—stand in relation to one another metaphorically and materially. The sweetness of honeysuckle (Lonicera) is flanked by death (Smilax peduncularis, commonly known as "Carrion flower") in one corner, and the tree of life (Arbor vitae) in the other. Both "arbor vitae" and "peduncularis" can also be read in relation to the brain: "arbor vitae" names a part of the cerebellum, and a "peduncle" is a bundle of nerves connecting one part of the brain to another. Both of these terms were in usage during Dickinson's lifetime, and she may have come across them in one of the anatomy books owned by the family, such as Cutter's Anatomy and Physiology (1847). These three plants are also known for their distinctive smells: sweet, rank, and the fresh-musk of evergreen, respectively. Finally, unlike the low-growing weeds that surround them, Lonicera and Smilax peduncularis are both climbers; Arbor vitae, as its name connotes, is a tree. Small, unnamed, and common weeds complete the arrangement: European Gromwell (Lithospermum officinale), Virginia Bugleweed (Lycopus virginicus), Flat-Topped Aster (Aster umbellatus), and Whorled Milkwort (Polygala verticillata). Though these specimens lack names, they draw attention to themselves because they have been captured at moments of flowering. Dickinson has caught European Gromwell at the moment when its buds still look like small white seeds or stones; a member of the mint family, Virginia Bugleweed shows little tufts of flowers along its stalk where facing leaves set off jaggedly on either side; the Flat-Topped Aster is prolifically in bloom, its yellowish umbrella condensed to the page; and the Whorled Milkwort shows its grass-like flowers on top of spindly stems. Unlike their named counterparts, these common plants lack obvious metaphorical underpinnings. They stand for themselves. The symmetrical arrangement of named and unnamed plants on the page thus highlights connections between what is said, what is suggested, and what remains common and material, outside of language, even at its barest.

Just as part of the suggestibility of this page arises from Dickinson's withholding of language, bareness in Dickinson's poetry arises through compression: an intense reduction of syntax, meter, and vocabulary, resulting in the suggestion—rather than the mimetic

illustration—of abundance scarcely within bounds. Her poems invoke a world that their sparseness cannot approximate, while at the same time, drawing attention to the fullness bundled into sparseness itself as the meeting point of both invocation and failure. I have begun to address Dickinson's syntactic and metrical contractions elsewhere. 70 Here, I will focus on her recurrent use of a handful of what I'll call "common names," a symbolic and recursive vocabulary that takes availability rather than rarity or even precision as its dominant characteristic. The over-filling of single, often very simple, words within the course of a line until their meaning becomes decidedly precarious is one of the hallmarks of Dickinson's verse, and is particularly apparent in her recurrent usage of a handful of floral species. Although she grew a wide variety of plants in her garden and was familiar with many more, Dickinson's poems reference only a small collection of plants. These are either flowers with stereotypical "poetical" associations, such as the Rose, which surfaces more than any other flower in Dickinson's work (45 poems). Or, plants whose commonness and approachability make them remarkable in another way, such as the Daisy, Dickinson's second most common flower (26 poems), the humble Clover, the third most common (19 poems), the Daffodil (12 poems), or the Buttercup (10 poems), all remarkable for being quite unremarkable.

Resistant to the definitive knowledge claimed by scientific names, and deployed in unpredictable circumstances, producing the impression that they mean more than they say, Dickinson's common names manage to suggest a lot while stating very little. These common names may seem like allegory, or even cliché. But whereas cliché emerges when the excessive recurrence of a particular metaphor or expression empties language of significance, Dickinson's common names make commonness and recurrence themselves significant. While a "Rose" may appear to allegorically stand in for something other than a rose in various poems, for instance—earthliness, particularly what is loveliest, brightest, or most pleasurable on earth, or heaven, or the soul⁷¹—the restlessness of these representations, migrating from heaven to earth and from poem to poem, keeps the meaning of "rose" finally undetermined. Dickinson also played with cliché as a forced correspondence, sending the majority of her poems involving roses as letters, sometimes along with an accompanying spray of blossoms or buds.⁷² By literalizing the common Romantic theme of correspondence between nature's materials and a poet's words in letter writing that includes both plants and language, Dickinson exacerbates the limits to which more abstract correspondence might actually extend. Within her poems, roses also become figures for correspondence as an enforcement of language's dependence on materials.

In an early poem that began as a letter (though the identity of the recipient has been lost), Dickinson experiments with two versions of a rose, one that dwells in a garden, and one that is given or written or both. This poem was one of the few published during the poet's lifetime ("Surreptitiously communicated to The Republican," confesses the *Springfield Republican* of August 2, 1858, below the title of the poem, which is given as "To Mrs.-----, with a Rose"). During the same summer, Dickinson copied "Nobody knows this little Rose" into her first fascicle. Franklin's transcription of that version looks like this:

Nobody knows this little Rose – It might a pilgrim be
Did I not take it from the ways
And lift it up to thee.
Only a Bee will miss it –
Only a Butterfly,
Hastening from far journey –

On it's breast to lie – Only a Bird will wonder – Only a Breeze will sigh – Ah Little Rose – how easy For such as thee to die! (F11)

Although the poem begins by claiming that "Nobody knows this little Rose," by the third line the poet has picked the rose and in the fourth, offered it to a reader. While this entry into human correspondence seems to rescue the rose from anonymity, at the same time Dickinson suggests that the rose's circle of familiars would have remained broader if it had stayed in the ground rather than migrating to the page. By writing of the rose, by sending it via linguistic correspondence, the poet diminishes its range: the rose "might a pilgrim be" except for the fact that it has already been forcibly plucked and entered into exchange. Within the garden, in contrast, the rose stands in material correspondence with bees, butterflies, birds and breezes, relations that Dickinson both diminishes—repeating "Only"—and elaborates through personification. Relations of oblique connection (bird, breeze) or necessity (bee, butterfly) take on affective overtones of longing, speculation, or loss. These relations elevate non-allegorical networks of dependency among the slightest—flower, insects, birds, and restless air. The poem's final claim—that death comes easily to a rose "such as thee"—can be read, like so many of Dickinson's last lines, along multiple vectors. Is it the rose that has been plucked and made literary that dies easily (subsumed among all the other roses of literature)? Or the particular garden rose that may be overlooked by humans but remains acknowledged by insects, animals, and weather? In each instance, the easefulness of death might be read differently: as reinforcing the rose's insignificance, or as reward for a life of slightness yet sustained interconnection with other life forms. Even as she returns to this most literary of flowers, Dickinson does so to examine its commonness rather than its rarity. She considers the rose in relation to materials as much as metaphors. The brevity and linguistic simplicity of the poem itself, as well as its playful ambivalence about the effects of poetry's efforts to approximate material being, indicate an interest in poetry as a site of bare suggestion rather than superfluity.

There is much more to say about Dickinson's common names. In a longer version of this argument, for example, I would relate the "Daisy," the second most common flower in Dickinson's poems and one with much more ho-hum connotations in popular botanical parlance to "Daisy" as the nickname of the titular character in *David Copperfield*, an allusion whose uneasy innocence Dickinson made extensive use of, including in her notoriously genre-bending "Master Letters," in which she is "Daisy" to her Master's "Sun." Like the rose, daisies in Dickinson's work indicate a commonness that is overwritten and highly wrought. In leaving behind her herbarium and turning to poems, Dickinson did not simply replace forms of materially determined knowledge with purely linguistic modes of knowing. Rather, she extended the herbarium as a "book" whose work is to set representative selections made from matter in relation to one another on paper into a labor of language in which simple ways of saying become semantically profuse. Dickinson assembles instances of literary bareness in order to create a kinetic poetic space whose energy depends directly on relation to experiences and materials bound to, and yet extending beyond, textual transcription.

Bareness in Thoreau's work is seemingly easier to identity; it often gets mistaken for science. Thoreau's career turns between 1851 and 1858 toward what appears to be a deeper engagement with natural study. The author's herbarium registers the shift. The earliest specimens, gathered in 1851 and 1852, focus on flowering plants and some trees, often with several specimens of the same species on a single page, with very little or no detail about the time or place that plants were gathered. During these same years Thoreau's journal burgeons with the heft of recorded lists of plants sighted in the woods and lengthy passages copied out from botanical manuals. Later in the decade, Thoreau began to collect sedges and grasses, both notoriously difficult to identify. These specimens often come with slips of newspaper on which Thoreau scrawled where and when the plant was found. Both early and late specimens demonstrate an interest in the span of a plant's life, often setting flowering and fruiting specimens of the same species beside one another on the same page. While Thoreau's early specimens stand somewhere between the aesthetic and the scientific, kept, in large part, because they are the collection of a famous writer, rather than because of their botanical contributions, these later specimens bear the marks of continued scientific engagement: scrawled over by decades of other botanists, relabeled, remounted, renamed.

Literary scholars have also affirmed Thoreau's development as a naturalist in his later years, often characterizing this move toward natural history in a favorable light.⁷⁴ Pathos enters these interpretations: Thoreau, the amateur naturalist, who missed his true calling; or, Thoreau, the failed poet, enthralled by science, but incapable of translating this enthusiasm into verse. 75 Throughout his career, however, Thoreau continued to think about poetry in relationship to science. His earliest published essay, "A Natural History of Massachusetts" (1842) is peppered with poems. His first book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack (1849), bursts with poetry—original, cited, and translated—and with poetic theory. A Week also commemorates a loss: the death of Thoreau's brother John. In this elegiac meld of poetry and prose, Thoreau the naturalist and Thoreau the poet give sustenance to one another. The book is composed of pairs: Henry and John, the Concord and the Musketkaid (the same river's Native American name, which translates as "Grass Ground River"), water and land, nature and culture, poetry and prose. A Week invokes and then seeks to resolve these: the brothers are rarely individually discernible; the river lights up with the reflection of trees; the boat becomes a turtle, an amphibian mediating between fish and birds; the wildest thing the brothers encounter is the baying of house dogs at night; poems arrive in the middle of sentences, or as extensions of prose, or condensations, or the representation of song. The book tugs between lived and recollected experience.

Thoreau's poems in A Week are varied and plentiful, the result of obvious labor, efforts to sample new forms, stretch the distinction between poetry and prose, and to amplify the musicality of verse. And yet, in keeping with poiesis's long history as bare labor, he presents poetry as an easeful endeavor, emblematic of the brothers' journey, which prioritizes passage over arrival: poetry as a form of drift rather than forceful paddling. Thoreau's presentation of poetry as effortless draws upon the vegetative imagery of organic form. "A poem is one undivided unimpeded expression fallen ripe into literature," he writes; or, "What is produced by a free stroke charms us, like the forms of lichens and leaves." If poems are plants, poets are too: the poet "should be as vigorous as a sugar maple, with sap enough to maintain his own verdure," Thoreau writes. Thoreau praises the poetry of the English Renaissance at length, describing it as "a greener ground," its language "as if a green bough were laid across the page," and sentences as "verduous and blooming as evergreens

and flowers." Yet this flourishing is bare: "the beauty of plain speech." Such rooted sentences allow the reader to entertain semblances of immediate material presence: "one may ride on horse-back through the openings," Thoreau writes (A Week 316, 103, 108).

Mediating between the book's many halves, plants are intermediary agents, partisans to both water and land, poetry and prose, Thoreau and John. Plants set these reflections in relation to botanically determined time. At one moment, the primary first-person plural narrator of the book—the combined Henry-John, or "we"—wish to "inform one of our friends" of the whereabouts of a "somewhat rare and inaccessible flower," the hibiscus. Knowing that soon it will be "too late to pluck it," they are relieved when they realize a farmer can carry the news of this flower to their friend, who in turn can come seek it as they continue on their drifting way (24). The time by which plants are governed is visible in their fleeting passages through life: sprout, vegetation, bloom, seed, fall. Within such circumstances of determination, plants appear as serendipitous gifts: easily missed but when perceived, easefully offered to attention. Though the brothers occasionally go ashore to gather berries or other wild fruit, their relationship to plants during the journey is primarily governed by receptivity rather than necessity. Thoreau often takes the appearance of plants as an invitation for reflection on timeliness and poetry.

On "Sunday," for instance, as the brothers land to "gather a few wild plums" beside "an apple tree," a digression into poetics is signaled by the sighting of "the *campaula rotundifolia*, a new flower to us, the harebell of the poets" (93). The nourishing value of wild plums forms a backdrop for the harebell's aesthetic purposelessness. This conjunction sets off a flurry of poems, and culminates in a passage in which Thoreau explicitly invokes the vegetative imagery of organic form. In it, Thoreau presents organicism as a form of simplicity, "a natural fruit":

As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem, either spoken or done...It is the simplest relation of phenomena, and describes the commonest sensations with more truth than science does, and the latter at a distance slowly mimics its style and methods. The poet sings how the blood flows in his veins. He performs his functions, and is so well that he needs such stimulus to sing only as plants to put forth leaves and blossoms...his song is a vital function like breathing...It is not the overflowing of life but of its subsidence rather, and is drawn from under the feet of the poet " (95-96).

This passage is plush with organic imagery, complete with a poet whose breath turns carbon to oxygen like language into song. Thoreau lingers on the poem as both a linguistic object and a lived reality—"either spoken or done"—and the poem as an expression of common truth—"the simplest relation of phenomena," a description of "the commonest sensations." In this account, poetry does science's work, but better: it sees what is; its labor is concurrent with what it receives. And this ability is not, as Wordsworth famously describes poetry, an "overflowing" but rather, a "subsidence" of life, a form of rootedness. Poetry is not so much an achievement as a basic "function"—a circulation of blood, contraction of lungs, the extension of "leaves and blossoms." Thoreau's account of organic form sets the poet within natural relation, holding him accountable to the simple, the common, and the already there.

Thoreau turns to Homer as a primary example of such simplicity, praising this ancient poet's ability to present "the least information, even the hour of the day, with such magnificence and vast expense of natural imagery" (96). In his attention to Homer's simplicity, Thoreau rethinks Aristotle's account of Homer in *The Poetics*. There, Aristotle

argues that it is the poet's job to present possibility rather than reality, and that "the poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose" but by the fact that "one relates what has happened, the other what may happen" (*Poetics* 35). Poets are documenters of possibility, in other words, while historians present bare facts. Later in *The Poetics*, Aristotle elides these differences, writing that, the poet "must of necessity imitate one of three objects—things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be" (97). Thoreau imagines what is or was as both possible and factual. In Homer, he finds documentations of "scenery" that is "always true, and not invented. He does not leap in imagination from Asia to Greece, through mid air" (Thoreau *A Week* 98). Homer presents the world as if it were lived in the present, Thoreau argues; such a feat depends upon receptivity to the small, sensory, experiences that define daily life.

Like Higginson and Emerson, Thoreau found natural history bare; he also read far more of such books than these other authors. When Thoreau complains that natural history books "aim commonly to be hasty schedules," his complaint isn't so much with scheduling, as with haste (101). Thoreau's late seasonal charts depend upon ten years of data in order to compile "general phenomena" for a single month, extending a career-long interest in organizing literary works according to predetermined structures of time. The temporal stretching of A Week (which encapsulates several weeks within the narration of one), the night in jail in "Civil Disobedience," Walden's single year (compressed of the two that Thoreau actually spent living by the pond), and the months of his late seasonal charts, indicate an enduring investment in how literature requires temporal structures, just as the blossoming of flowers is determined by conditions both internal and external to the flowers themselves. If the haste of natural history books was disappointing, the bareness of their scheduling was something Thoreau imported into his own work.

Scenes of reading in A Week extend the relationship between bare books and poetry beyond natural history. The brothers depend upon the Gazetter, for example, as their guidebook. In addition to historical accounts and navigational directions, from the "bald natural facts" of this guide, Thoreau writes, the brothers "extracted the pleasure of poetry" (94). Later, during one of the first-person singular reveries that arise within the primary narrative, Thoreau narrates an experience on top of a mountain at night of, "reading by the light of the fire the scraps of newspaper in which some party had wrapped their luncheon":

I read these things at a vast advantage there, and it seemed to me that the advertisements, or what is called the business part of a paper, were greatly the best, the most useful, natural, and respectable. Almost all the opinions and sentiments expressed were so little considered, so shallow and flimsy, that I thought the very texture of the paper must be weaker in that part and tear the more easily. The advertisements and the prices current were more closely allied to nature, and respectable in some measure as tide and meteorological tables are; but the reading matter, which I remembered was most prized down below, unless it was some humble record of science, or an extract from some old classic, struck me as strangely whimsical, and crude, and one-idea'd...The advertisements, as I have said...suggested pleasing and poetic thoughts; for commerce is really as interesting as nature. The very names of the commodities were poetic, and as suggestive as if they had been inserted in a pleasing poem,—Lumber, Cotton, Sugar, Hides, Guano, and Logwood" (195-6).

The list that ends this passage—"Lumber, Cotton, Sugar, Hides, Guano, and Logwood"—gives an example of the sorts of bareness that Thoreau, like Emerson, feels is "suggestive" in

or of "a pleasing poem." On top of the mountain, Thoreau finds the bareness of "advertisements" "allied to nature" as "tide and meteorological tables are," while the embellished literature that is "most prized down below" seems "crude" from this vantage; only "some humble record of science" or an "old classic" like Homer's stock descriptions of nature, stand up to the setting.

The next morning, Thoreau climbs up an observation tower on top of the mountain to watch the sun come up. He recounts a beautifully inverted world, in which he looks down upon clouds below, "a situation which required no aid from the imagination to render it impressive" (198). Thoreau describes the fog in prose that opens onto this poem, in which the fog grows verdant:

Low-anchored cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain-head and source of rivers,
Dew cloth, dream drapery,
And napkin spread by fays;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the daisied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades;
Spirit of lakes and seas and rivers,
Bear only perfumes and the scent
Of healing herbs to just men's fields (201).

Like many of the poems that populate A Week, "Low-anchored cloud," reads as a fragment. The bareness that Thoreau admired in reading of "Lumber, Cotton, Sugar, Hides" translates into a poem that is also a list. The first half names what is, a naming that grows more imaginative—progressing from pure description in the first line, "Low-anchored cloud," through dreams, by fays, to the fully metaphorical, "Drifting meadow of the air" in the sixth line. The end of the poem appears to be a simple account of things that exist: "daisied banks and violets," winding marshes, the sounds and motions of birds, and a wandering scent that waters "men's fields." Set within a "low-anchored cloud," however, these quotidian occurrences unfold within improbable space. Metaphoric transport is compiled of an allegiance between an earthly commonness and a cloudy possibility; in such a moment of inversion, earth ascends toward heaven, rather than importing heavenly, unavailable, attributes. In this slight poem, imagination is equally involved with stating what exists as what might exist.

"We can never safely exceed the actual facts in our narratives," Thoreau writes in A Week. "Of pure invention, such as some suppose, there is no instance. To write a true work of fiction even, is only to take leisure and liberty to describe some things more exactly as they are. A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry," he concludes (342). Thoreau aligns poetry and fiction through their mutual commitment to "actual facts." If anything divides prose and poetry, it is poetry's even more extensive care for the real. "[I]n comparison with his task," Thoreau writes, "the poet is the least talented of any; the writer of prose has more skill" (360). The poet is at his best when he does nothing, when he receives the factualness of the world. And the bare facts that he receives "suggest" depths beyond themselves: an extension of materials. "Nature, even when she is scant and thin outwardly," Thoreau writes, "satisfies us still by the assurance of a certain generosity at the roots. In swamps, where there is only here and there an evergreen tree amid the quaking

moss and cranberry beds, the bareness does not suggest poverty" (335). Poetry takes up this un-impoverished bareness and makes it its own.

In his journal, Thoreau describes both Concord and spring as a "poem." In 1860. Thoreau began mining his journals from the previous decade for "general phenomenon" relating to seasonal development. These phenomena, annotated in his journal with pencil, wound up in lists of categories, and in charts of "General Phenomena" or even "All Phenomena" for a particular month. These phenomena include both scientific observations and subjective events: bloom times of particular flowers and meteorological patterns, as well as entries like "Dig up frog." The categories for "All Phenomena for December" cover the names of plants and animals ("Beomyces rosea," "Pine Grosebkeas," "Short eared owl"), phrases describing meteorological occurrences ("Drizzling rains & driving mists," "Mist revealing near objects," "P. pine lit by rain like lichens," "Rain ends in Snow," "Snow turns to rain," "Ice whoops," "Ind. summer-like days"), the appearance of plants or the activities of animals ("Quails revealed," "Birch scales on snow," "Turtles under ice," "Lizzards under ice," "Plants; birds, fruit &c. above ice," "Gnats in air"), the activities of humans ("Hunter out with dogs," "Boys skate on crust"), and Thoreau's own activities ("Bring home box traps," "Observe plants in & above snow," "See what red-squirrels &c. have eaten," "Get in boat," "Attend to bees," "Kill fish under ice," "Walk on Walden & study shores"). Some of the chart's categories are comprised of unspecified nouns or adjectives, floating without corresponding action or actor: "Slosh," "Gossamer," "Tracks." The chart spans four pages, and covers 149 categories. Thoreau compiled similar charts of phenomena for six months— April, May, June, October, November, December—as well as one seasonal chart for Winter phenomena. In addition, he made charts of plant cycles, birds, insects, and a pond calendar charting the freezing and thawing of Walden, White's and Flint's Ponds. In total, 18 such charts are known to exist. 77 Within the actual boxes of the charts, Thoreau notes days of the month, copying details culled from his journals.

These charts complicate the reading of Thoreau's journal as "his central literary enterprise," by demonstrating how the journal became a source text for another form of compressed writerly labor. And while Thoreau also mined his journal for his essays and books, the charts constitute a form of bare literary labor fundamentally different from these works in prose. At the beginning of his career, A Week is a prosimetrum; years later, the charts are also hybrid texts, caught in relation between documentation and imagination, the metaphorical and the material, a meeting ground within which Thoreau locates the poetic. Poetry for Thoreau, like plants, mediates between human (animal) life and the inanimacy of documents (a mineral condensation). The poems in A Week, presented as either lived songs or fragments that slow or divert narrative's onward track, are at once in synch with their environment and keep to their selves. Slow vegetation, rooted stretching, or the recurrence of the same floral characteristics appear year after year within the same plant. The timeliness of plants is both internally and outwardly determined, responsive to seasons, but unfolding according to species-specific dictates as well; these multiple time scales separate plants from humans, who tick time away collectively with calendars and clocks. "None can say deliberately that he inhabits the same sphere, or is contemporary with, the flower which his hands have plucked," Thoreau writes. Though "his feet may seem to crush" a plant, Thoreau writes, in fact "inconceivable spaces and ages separate them, and perchance there is no danger that he will hurt it" (404). The relationship between humans and plants, then—a relationship of need, of admiration, and of possible damage—is intensified by the temporal

disconnect between the times of plants and the time of humans. This slowing and quickening of time is also another instance of connection between vegetable life and poetry.

The book's acute attention to time-spans dividing human and nonhuman life arises also from its work as a memorializing document. Though A Week wanders far, both in space and in thought, the invocation of Thoreau's absent brother is palpable throughout. A Week begins with a four-lined, unrhymed, fragment, addressed to "thou," which Thoreau concludes with an invocation: "Be though my Muse, my Brother—." On the following page, another four-lined stanza seems to answer the first, this time, knit together though endrhymes, and the emergence of a poetic speaker. "I am bound, I am bound," this speaker begins, responding to this invocation. "There it is, there it is" the poem continues, asserting bareness through re-emphasis, before further defining what "it is" as "the treasure I seek / On the barren sands of a desolate creek." These opening snippets inaugurate the book's relationship to poetry as fragmentary and bare, a receptivity, as Higginson might have it, to a creek bank. While Higginson's bank is fragrant and green, however, Thoreau's, at least at the beginning of A Week, marks the absence of vegetation. But this barrenness is also the meeting ground of water, dirt, and sunlight, those elements that feed plants along the "Grass-Ground" river down which the brothers sail. At the very end of A Week, Thoreau returns to the work of mourning, decorating barrenness with flowers. The brothers scramble up one of the river's banks "in haste to get a nearer sight of the autumnal flowers, asters, golden-rod, and yarrow, and the trichostema dichotoma, humble road-side blossoms, and, lingering still, the harebell and the *rhexia Virginica*." Flowers accumulate as the book descends toward its close: "On every hillside, and in every valley, stood countless asters, coreopsis, tansies, golden-rods, and the whole race of yellow flowers," who, like the poet in the book's second quatrain, are "bound" by elements, "turning steadily" toward "their luminary from morning till night." As the accumulation continues, a cited poem emerges, whose bare action of sight extends the catalogue and transposes these autumn flowers: "I see the golden-rod shine bright...The aster's violet rays divide...And varrow in blanch tints is dyed...And distant elm-trees spot the air / With yellow pictures softly o'er." Some plants have passed: "No more the water-lily's pride," "No more the blue-weed's clusters ride." The poem concludes in a comparison of the time of plants and that of humans: "So fair we seem, so cold we are, / So fast we hasten to decay." "So sang a Concord poet once," notes Thoreau (373-4). This unnamed poet—Channing, or Emerson, or Thoreau—expands specificity even as he states what is, growing humble in his documentation of a loss that is coextensive with that of growing things, passing in and out of seasons.

Books Out of Doors

Elsewhere in A Week, Thoreau distinguishes between the feel of books that "belong to the house and street only" and those encountered "in the fields." Carried outdoors, the "leaves" of books "feel very thin. They are bare and obvious," Thoreau writes, "and have no halo nor haze about them." But this thinness and exposure is also a strength. Emptied and stretched in direct relation to the fullness of their surrounding environments, such books become lenses through which environments can be seen, and even amplified. "Nature lies far and fair behind them all," Thoreau writes (155).

This bare reading translates into bare writing, in which the world invades not only the books Thoreau carries on his walks, but the poems and prose he composes there as well. In a poem on "Thursday" of *A Week*, Thoreau recounts an hour during a rainstorm spent in

"microscopic" observations beneath a single tree. Prose and poetry run into one another in this passage, shifting form but not intent. In prose, Thoreau considers "the crevices of the bark or the leaves of the fungi at my feet"; within the space of the poem, his attention turns toward "the meadow," "the ants," "this drop of dew," "grass and wild oats," cloud, wind, rain, a "clover tuft" and the "violets" that "quite overtop [his] shoes." Thoreau describes this moment as a swapping of books for meadows, and yet, within the poem, he never loses sight of the book: "Twixt every page" he writes, "my thoughts go stray at large" (318). Thoreau welcomes the specter of a real book, even as he directs his attention toward what seems to supercede the literary. In a journal entry of June of 1851, Thoreau reflects on the work of A Week. The passage appears amidst the bare accounts of natural observation that become so prevalent in the journal during this period:

The panicled cornel a low shrub in blossom by wall sides now.

I thought that one peculiarity of my "Week" was its *hypaethral* character—to use an epithet applied to those Egyptian temples which are open to the heavens above—*under the ether*— I thought that it had little of the atmosphere of the house about—but might wholly have been written, as in fact it was to a considerable extent—out of doors. It was only at a late period in writing it, as it happened, that I used any phrases implying that I lived in a house, or lead a *domestic* life. I trust it does not smell of the study & library—even of the Poets attic, as of the fields & woods—that it is a hypaethral or unroofed book—lying open under the *ether*—& permeated by it. Open to all weathers—not easy to be kept on a shelf.

The potatoes are beginning to blossom (Writings 279).

Although Thoreau became more actively engaged with botanical labor in the years after writing A Week, upon reflection, he finds this work to be as outdoorsy as his journal or herbarium, not smelling "of the study & library" but of sweet grass and the woods. The "unroofed book" that Thoreau describes resembles the house Dickinson constructs in "I dwell in Possibility—," a face-off between "Poetry" and "Prose" (F466). The work that takes place in Dickinson's house of "Possibility" is unadorned: the "spreading wide" of "narrow "Hands" to "gather." Such labor forwards possibility (poiesis) as receptivity to what is already there: the "Cedars" and the "Sky." Rather than claiming to build the world anew, this poem equates preexistent materials with its own labor, a humble, earthly, "Paradise."

In "A Defense of Poetry," Shelley describes "poetry in the general sense," as a way of living that arises within and yet extends beyond actual poems (511). Within Dickinson and Thoreau's work, poetry comes to stand not only for individual or even collective experience, but also for receptivity to material presences that includes and sometimes eludes human sensibility and understanding. Thoreau was disappointed that the bare descriptions within his natural history books missed the "poetical aspect of plants." And yet, Thoreau affiliated the impression of being "under the ether" and "out of doors" with the "poetic," even though his later essays are more specifically about what one encounters in "fields & woods." "To see the summers sky / Is poetry," Dickinson writes, "though never in a book it lie / True poems flee" (F1491). The bareness of poeisis as an unspecified labor, and the particularity of poiesis within organicism as metaphorically analogous to the non-willful evolutions of plants, is an understanding that Dickinson and Thoreau shared. As Dickinson moved increasingly indoors, and Thoreau spent more and more time outside, both in person and in his writing, poetry remained for each a meeting of material and experience.

My return to nineteenth-century organicism as a collection of beliefs that produced (or preserved) certain practices of poetic structure while at the same time valuing poetic

"experience" as expansively inhuman, serves as a counter-point to twentieth-century criticism of twentieth and twenty-first century poems as uniquely producing spaces of "reality," materiality, or thingliness. 81 Returning to the Romantic roots of Modernism, and especially to these roots as incorporeal with practices of amateur botany focused around the bare practice of noticing or attending to the natural world, exposes how much nineteenthcentury organicism was also deeply implicated in dreams of conjuring "realities" within the space of a poem. 82 My investigation here is not meant to refute the formal experiments which Modernism so avidly introduced, and which have continued to define certain strains of contemporary poetry; however, the fact that the foundation of many of our more radical ideas today about the "nature" or "reality" of a poem lie in periods in which iambic pentameter remained the dominant line of choice, and the musicality of verse was understood as the production of an experiential reality rather than the artifice we now so readily ascribe to rhyme, should inspire us to reconsider (yet again) the relationship between what a poem might be, and what a poem looks, feels, and sounds like for both writers and readers. In "What is Experimental Poetry and Why do We Need It?" Joan Retallack defines poetics as a mode of thinking and composing that jostles writers and readers into spaces of "reciprocal alterity," a "questing to know what can be known only by means of poetry," "an interrogative mode that attempts to invite extra-textual experience into the poetics somehow on its terms, terms other than those dictated by egoistic desires" (n.p). I find a strikingly comparable release from egoism and relations of "reciprocal reality" within nineteenthcentury articulations of aesthetic agency as vegetative and poetic form as bare.

The ethical dimensions of these modes of reading or writing as a direct responsiveness to other forms of life become more apparent when contrasted with another meaning of "bareness." Throughout his discussion in Homo Sacer of "bare life" as both internal to and made invisible by political life, the philosopher Giogrio Agamben says little about literature. Yet he suggests a parallel between the operations of politics and those of language: "There is politics," he argues, "because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life, and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion" (8). Figurations of literature and authorship as vegetative, however, unsettle this distinction, making language a realm in which humans attempt to connect to, understand, and express not only "their own bare life," but also the bare life of other living beings. Language is hardly one thing. And literary language, in particular, makes that superabundance transparent. Even at its barest, language activated for the purposes of literary experience enacts desires for deeper connection between higher-order human functions like reason, imagination, memory, and language itself, and "bare life." Literature is inherently political, then, precisely when it refuses to use language in the ways politics demands.

"[M]emory...is just the intersection of mind and matter."

— Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1896

Thomas Wentworth Higginson relied on botanical metaphor to introduce Emily Dickinson's poems to the world. In a preface to the first edition of her work, Higginson suggested that many of "these verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them." In her first letter to Higginson, Dickinson asked whether he found her verse "Alive." In his preface, he gives her an affirmative (though posthumous) answer: her poems *seem* alive (or at least seem freshly plucked). They give to their readers, he continues, "a freshness and a fragrance not otherwise to be conveyed" ("Preface" x). Though he invokes objects (poetry and plants), however, what Higginson is actually concerned with is experience: what it *feels* like to read Dickinson's poems.

Turning to plant-life as a figure for aesthetic form and aesthetic agency, nineteenth-century theories of the organic, cloaked in vines or trees, often blurred distinctions between aesthetic effects (or form) and aesthetic affects (or experience). In the previous chapter, I considered the implications of literalizing descriptions of literary form as a vegetal growth. If poems and sentences were as verdant as the metaphors approaching them suggest, then literary works, like the plants pressed to an herbarium page, a list of species in a natural history book, or the charting of seasonal recurrences, would be "bare": unembellished, common, flat. Here, I consider the effects of describing experience—intellectual, aesthetic, emotional—as unfolding like a plant. My second chapter asked: what is actually being invoked when a work of literature is said to be like a plant? In this chapter, I apply a similar investigation to accounts of the self. What does it mean, during a period in which the organic was actively theorized as a set of relations between human intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional growth and the material growth of plants (and animals and rocks), to say that a mind is like a field of grass? What does it feel like to feel that one thinks like a plant?

If the Romantic era inaugurated a shift from valuations of artworks as exemplary of particular procedures to artworks as repositories of individual imaginative power, a shift which prioritized the experience of the artist over the artifact of his labor, why, at the same time, was creative power during the period so frequently presented in terms of passive, material processes, belonging not to human bodies and minds but to branches, buds, or the wind that rustled them? In this chapter, I build on recent studies of minimal or passive states of being and feeling; yet I consider why human experiences of "recessive action," "minimal" states of personhood, or "passive constitutions" are so frequently depicted in the literature of the period as being plant-like, while, at the same time, plants remained figures of both literary and scientific fascination and were rarely portrayed as entirely "passive" themselves.84 I will argue here that the pervasive use during the period of vegetation as a metaphor for the experience of intellectual growth—including emotions felt for the first time, and the exertion of memory as an "active power" distinct from the imagination—produced a "vegetable unconscious" within what M.H. Abrams previously identified as "vegetable genius." Vegetable genius is a metaphor: that a poet's mind is like a plant. Vegetable unconscious conjures up the weird dependence between materiality and linguistic play, experience and aesthetic effects, residing within such metaphors. In authors responsive to both personal experience and to the nonhuman lives of plants—Thoreau and Emerson are my primary

examples here—the vegetable unconscious became a means of expressing the feeling that thought has a body that is not the body of a particular human (an author or speaker). I will refer to this experience of a material otherness constitutive to immaterial operations of the self as the "inhuman."

I use the inhuman as an extension of Sharon Cameron understanding of "impersonality" in American authors (Edwards, Emerson, Melville, Eliot) toward a more obvious connection to an ecological consciousness at work in these and many of their historical peers. 85 Such a consciousness is often implicit in Cameron's works—as when she considers the way bodies in Melville and Hawthorne's work often blend into the spaces that surround them, or when she examines Thoreau's attempt to "write" nature into being in his journal. Indeed, Cameron's enduring interest in the non-human as a component of impersonality is evident in her recent writings on animals. 86 Yet Cameron's articulations of the impersonal more frequently tend toward the divine, rather than the earthly. She is interested in the "vast impersonality" that replaces God in Ahab's universe, and which, when internalized, can make a subject a stranger to itself. I am also interested in how subjects encounter not only others but also their selves as other—fictive, and often apparently remote. Yet in this chapter, I demonstrate how such an experience, when figured in terms of a deep connectivity to plant bodies and processes, keeps a subject "rooted" in the world (to use a metaphor that was important to Emerson and Thoreau), even if lost to itself. To put it another way, and to draw on a less well-established critic (and poet), Julie Joosten, the inhuman is an "elsewhere" endemic to the self: a here and now that cannot quite be individuated, and yet which claims the individual for a larger participation in the world.⁸⁷

The articulations of the inhuman as plant-like that I will trace here depend directly on how plant bodies were understood during the period, particularly the ways that plant metabolism and sensation was understood as distinctive from the metabolic and sensational functions of animals. In the last chapter, I began an account of Thoreau's natural history reading. Here, I attend in particular to descriptions of vegetable anatomy in books owned or borrowed by Thoreau; I have also drawn from popular works in the libraries of Emerson and the Dickinson family to create a general account of how discussions of plant physiology at this moment in the middle of the century opened directly onto questions of human sentience, the unconscious, and agency. I look at William Carpenter's Vegetable physiology and Systematic Botany (1858), Loring Dudley Chapin's Vegetable Kingdom (1843), and Harland Coultas's What Can Be Learned From a Tree (1860), all of which were owned by Thoreau. The Dickinson family owned Calvin Cutter's Anatomy and Physiology: Designed for Academies and Families (1847); Almira Lincoln Phelps's Familiar Lectures on Botany (1832), which was familiar enough to also be owned by Emerson and Thoreau, and was one of Dickinson's primary textbooks at Mount Holyoke.⁸⁸ Theorization of vegetable anatomy across these works rarely sticks to the purely biological. Plant bodies inspired speculative investigations into the impetus and thresholds of "life" as well as an incipient fascination with psychology, particularly into the relation between sensation, feeling, and the physical effects of each. Returning to these popular works as source texts for works that have become some of the most canonical literary productions of this era reveals that thinking the human in relation to nonhuman others is hardly new, though the abundance of recent revisions of "the human" would have us think otherwise.⁸⁹ Although Thoreau and Emerson articulate a version of rugged American individualism that has proved enduring (and often disturbing), I find these authors most compelling at their edges, where their writing, and the selves this writing embodies, grows frailer, allowing for intensifications of forces outside of the self. As I will show, these two writers were deeply interested in their own peripheral natures, and in nature as a pluralistic phenomenon beyond those peripheries; understanding this about them changes how we consider their contribution to a canon of American environmental writing.⁹⁰

In the natural history books that Thoreau and Emerson read, plants are generally described via negative deduction, beginning with what they are not. They are not minerals, and not animals. In a Linnaean axiom that crops up repeatedly across these works: minerals grow, plants grow and live, and animals grow, live, and feel (Carpenter 18, Chapin 25). This formulation may emphasize accretion, but figured in negatives rather than positives, accounts of plants give an impression of a slide down the chain of being: plants as subtracted animals, rather than supplemented minerals. Carpenter calls inorganic matter "inert" and "destitute of organs"; Cutter writes that while animals move and feel, plants "are destitute in these qualities." Minerals have had pieces removed; animals and plants have organs, while minerals are "devoid" (Cutter 15; Carpenter 17). This attention to absence rather than presence means that the bodies of minerals, plants, and animals invariably refer to one another. Carpenter argues that "the physiology of man cannot be properly understood, unless studied in connection with that of the lower animals" and "that the physiology of animals cannot be properly understood, unless it be studied in connection with that of plants" (vi). In between, plants occupy a central position. Plants share commonalities with both minerals and animals, while these two polar life forms have only plants to resemble.

The defining feature plants and animals share, which distinguishes them from minerals, is the possession of cells and organs. Unlike rocks, plants and animals therefore exemplify "unity in multeity," a composition of parts that Coleridge argued was the definition of beauty. "In the stone or mass of metal," Carpenter writes, "every part is similar to every other part," while "any common Vegetable...is composed of a number of parts" (14-15). The interdependence of these parts means that plants and animals form organic wholes; damaging any part of them does damage to the entire organism. "Break the tiny stem of a rose, and it soon withers," Cutter explains; "or girdle the bark of a forest tree, and it dies, because it cannot receive support from the ascending sap. So, in man; amputate an arm, and its vitality ceases, for the vessels communicating with it have been severed" (16). When New Critics returned to Coleridge's definitions of organic form, they were taken with this notion of self-supporting, holistic beauty, interpreting organicism as a formal hermeticism, sealed-off from forces external to a poem. A poem might be internally complex, composed of parts (even ones held in tension via irony) as a plant's body is composed of organs; but that complexity was inward looking, removed from history, society, or the emotional inflections of either authors or readers.

Poems were not so sealed off for Coleridge, however, and not so sealed off for writers like Emerson and Thoreau, who combined their reading with afternoons spent wandering through actual fields. Rather, for these authors, a self-evolving unity among parts indicated "life" within aesthetic objects, a vitality that was the same as the life animating nonhuman bodies outside of poems. Coleridge could therefore describe "meter, and measured sounds" as "a fellow-growth from the same life, even as the bark is to the tree" ("Shakespeare" 52). This affiliation between poetry and plant-life was hardly new. In his "Preface to Shakespeare," Samuel Johnson framed the poet's work as "a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and branches, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses." For Johnson, however, this metaphor expressed irregularity as well as vitality. Shakespeare's forest wasn't only to be admired for its verdure; Johnson contrasted its wilds to the "work of a correct and regular writer" whose "garden accurately formed and diligently planted" is "varied with shades, and scented with flowers" (316-317). When Schlegel and Coleridge reframed this forest-imagery

in a positive light, they made a claim not only for a "wilder" Romantic nature in opposition to the neoclassical garden, but also for the artist over his artwork. In his *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1833), which Coleridge drew from for his own lectures on Shakespeare, and which Emerson owned and annotated, Schlegel blames Johnson for popularizing the idea of Shakespeare as "a rude and wild genius, who poured forth at random, and without aim or object, his unconnected compositions" (347). For Coleridge, it was Shakespeare himself that was "a wild heath where islands of fertility look greener from the surrounding waste, where the loveliest plants now shine out among unsightly weeds, and now are choked by their parasitic growth, so intertwined that we cannot disentangle the weed without snapping the flower." If other readers found the lovely verdure and weeds a problem, Coleridge celebrated Shakespeare's resemblance to an entire vegetal eco-system. Shakespeare was "a nature humanized," and a human naturalized, Coleridge argued: a human acting like plants ("Shakespeare" 52-53).

And one of the ways plants most obviously differ from animals, including humans, is by their metabolic relationship to their surroundings. Carpenter, drawing from Aristotle, describes this difference in metabolism as an inversion: a "plant may be regarded as an animal turned inside out, whilst the animal is a plant turned outside in" (19-20). While both plants and animals are finally made of the same stuff as the inorganic matter they ingest, so that "there is no element entering into the composition of organized bodies, which is not also found in the world around," the organs of animals are internal, while the metabolic organs of plants are found along their edges; their "lungs" are stoma on the bottoms of leaves; they absorb their nutrients directly through roots or chlorophyll-filled epidermal cells (16). Animals must seek out their food, and process it internally, but plants "are nourished by the substances immediately around them," Cutter explains (17). Coultas calls roots and leaves "absorbents beautifully adapted to the media in which they develop." This receptivity makes plant bodies "easily impressible." Their bodies record atmospheric, seasonal, or other circumstantial occasions, a living history which recently has made it possible for scientists to chart the effects of climate change in the differences of bloom times between plants recorded by Thoreau those growing around Concord today. 91 Shifting circumstances leave "an indelible impression in the solid parts of its fabric. All the bright and stormy days of its life, every wind that has shaken its foliage, and every rain-drop that has wetted its roots, have helped to mould its physical organization" (Coultas 100-104). This receptivity, and the simplicity of their needs—soil, light, moisture, air—makes plants more contiguous with their environment than are animals. "This mass of vegetable matter is only earth and air which has undergone transmutation!" Coultas exclaims. "The material alike of wandering zephyrs and rushing storms, of gently descending night-dews and angry thunder-showers, has been here, on this spot, metamorphosed!" (13).

Coultas's emphasis of "here," "this spot," draws attention to another defining feature of plants. While animals wander in search of resources, plants stay, mostly, still, bound to a particular spot. Despite their relative fixity, however, plants do move, slowly and slightly, toward or away from light, into and out of the ground. Because these motions are almost always in response to some external stimuli, plant movement has been theorized, both in the Romantic period and more recently, as a reflection of sensitivity or irritability, a receptivity and responsiveness that bears resemblances to how animals will spring back from excessive heat or recoil to avoid touch. "The only idea we have of feeling in the lower animals arises from our attributing the same sensation to animals when they move as we experience ourselves," Carpenter argues; therefore, he postulates, when plants move, they seem also to be demonstrating effects of feeling (18). Unlike animals, however, plants are presented in

these accounts as having no interiority, as demonstrating the effects of feeling without any indication of some hidden locus of experience, or without the suggestion that effects and experience differ from one another. This complete collapse between experience and effects, a relationship that can also be thought of as a collapse between appearance and reality, made (and makes) plants particularly unsettling figures for both aesthetic experience and aesthetic objects; indeed, theories of the organic make this slippage easily apparent by eliding actors into their objects and mistaking artworks for artists.

This perceived relation between movement and feeling in plants made *Mimosa pudica*, more commonly known as the "Sensitive Plant" a popular denizen of Romantic botany and poetry. Carpenter explains the unusual responsiveness of this plant to darkness and to touch:

One of the most interesting of all the Vegetable movements, however, is that displayed by the Sensitive plant (*Mimosa pudica*). This is a Leguminous plant of the Acacia kind, which has its leaves very much subdivided into leaflets. When spread out in sunshine, they present no peculiarity of appearance; but at night they fold together as in sleep, more completely perhaps than the leaves of any other plants. If, when expanded, one of the leaflets be slightly touched, it will close towards its fellow; the neighbouring leaflets will presently do the same; the vein upon which these are set will bend downwards, and meet the one on the opposite side of the midrib; the midrib itself will afterward bend down upon the stem; and, if the plant be in a very irritable condition (from its functions being in a state of great activity), the other leaves are sometimes affected in a similar manner" (244-245).

That the leaves of *Mimosa pudica* contract and expand in response to darkness and light is not surprising. Most plants demonstrate such responsiveness to differing degrees. Rather, the fact that this plant shrinks back—its Latin name (pudica) indicates "shame"—from touch (and generally, in such descriptions, from human touch) makes its motions seem more willful or expressive. *Mimosa pudica* (and other flinching plants of its ilk) therefore troubles the Linnaean maxim designating "feeling" as the one-thing animals have that plants haven't got. And the appearance of feeling in a plant unsettles the experience of feeling in humans. "[M]ost men," Chapin writes, though they agree that they feel, "confess their inability to decide where feeling begins or where it ends" (26). Set within a context of vegetable anatomy, this discussion of feeling's fringes has a material referent that further troubles the limits of what it means to feel, or for an individual to possess his own feelings. These accounts ask: to what body does feeling, any feeling, belong?

In Shelley's parable of summery exuberance and wintry blight, "The Sensitive Plant," *Mimosa pudica* is a liminal figure, with allegiances to animal, plant, and human life, as well as a solitary witness, a plant apart. The plant feels more, "its deep heart it full," Shelley writes, and yet its feelings, to a human observer, are finally uncertain. Toward the end of the poem, after stanzas of plants beaming and weeping, the poet admits that he does not know what the Sensitive Plant felt, nor where the locus of its feeling resides: "Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that / Which within its boughs like a spirit sat / Ere its outward form had known decay, / Now felt this change, I cannot say." The difficulty of locating the exact organ of plant feeling, and the resolute physicality of this feeling, only visible through material changes or effects in a plant, raises questions about continuities between plants and animals, particularly humans. These continuities not only unsettle ideas of plants as passive or diminished; rather, both plants and humans are intensified by their resemblances to one another. Plants seem most plant-like, that is, when they convey sensitivities, while humans experience themselves as most humans when they experience their thinking as if it were

evolving elsewhere, in the body, or bodies of a plant. This portrait of mental activity in terms of vegetal bodies suggests that some experiences of thought and feeling *feel* as if they are taking place in a body that is not the body of the thinker or feeler alone; at the same time, far from inducing an out of body experience, organic metaphors for human thinking suggest an embodied experience, an experience of feeling like a particular body that in very few of its features resembles that of a human.

Shelley's poem can therefore conclude with the endurance of emotion and experience cut off from bodies, particularly the "organs" that define both plant and animal life. "For love, and beauty, and delight," he writes, "There is no death nor change: their might / Exceeds our organs, which endure / No light, being themselves obscure." The bodies that Shelley describes here are human bodies, hiding their organs, rather than plant bodies, whose organs, for the most part, open directly toward the light. But the feelings are somewhere else, something else's. This final quatrain simultaneously invokes the material composition of life, a composition shared by both plants and animals, and sets this materiality in relation to feeling. I call this expression of emotion and cognition in relation to bodies whose individual endurance is limited the "vegetable unconscious."

Vegetating

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was fascinated by Goethe throughout his career, may have drawn some of his thinking on plants from this earlier poet-naturalist. 22 In The Metamorphosis of Plants (1790), Goethe distinguishes between two manifestations of "vital force": plants make more of themselves "first, through vegetative growth, by development of stems and leaves; and next, through reproduction, which is completed in the formation of flower and fruit." Whereas reproduction extends species being, producing new offspring from a parent plant, vegetation manifests through a simple extension or development of what already exists: the not entirely inert body of an individual plant. Though there are obvious correspondences between these two developments—flowering and fruiting as the continuation of earlier stages of vegetative self-extension—Goethe distinguishes between the two based on their participation in, or disruption of, time. While reproduction affirms that time is proceeding in a particular direction, vegetation prolongs, upsets, or even discontinues a sequential progression of time. Vegetative growth is "successive instead of sudden," Goethe clarifies, "appearing in a series of individual developments"; it "exerts itself gradually" rather than emitting a new form "in one step." Reproduction either keeps time or accelerates it (as when bulbs are "forced" indoors in winter to bloom). Vegetation slows or stops time. "Under certain circumstances," Goethe writes, "a plant can be forced to vegetate continuously" (Botanical Writings 76). Reproduction indicates not only that time is passing, but that potentials pent up in time have reached a terminus in expression, while vegetation works with the given, irrespective of time.

These two forms of vegetable growth graft onto the two applications of botanical metaphor within theories of organicism. Reproduction correlates to aesthetic production, while vegetation corresponds to a mind's shaping of itself. While reproductive energies are eruptive, ornamental, and determined by particular units of time—a season, a day (a stanza, a line)—vegetative growth is gradual, successive, sometimes even dormant. In *Walden*, Thoreau recalls a "season" in which he is "reminded of the lapse of time" only by the descending light, "or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway." Such obvious indications of time passing—a sunset, a journey—recall Thoreau from a vegetative

"revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs," in which his mind grows, he writes, "like corn in the night" (*Walden* 91). Though Thoreau's growth, like corn, seems distinctly intellectual, the effects of this growth remained obscure in metaphor, displaced onto materials, placing emphasis finally on experience. As an intellectual experience, vegetating takes place somewhere below the baseline of reason and responds directly to the pulsations and fluctuations of materials outside of the mind.

Descriptions of plant anatomy during the period are full of a latent vocabulary of the unconscious. Plants are like "animals when asleep," Chapin writes, "their functions proceeding during the time without consciousness" (22). Or, plants act from "a kind of instinct," Phelps explains, "similar to that which appears in animals from their first moments of existence" (104). These suggestions of the lower intellectual functioning of plants culminates later in the century in Charles Darwin's late work on *The Movement of Plants* (1880), in which he speculates that plants possess a "root-brain" with similar functions to that of a human brain. 93 Darwin correlates the "movements of plants" explicitly to "actions performed unconsciously by the lower animals" (571). Sleepy, instinctual, or unconscious, plants are once again figured in terms of faculties that seem more apparent in animals. Though these comparisons affiliate plants and animals, they also implicitly distinguish between them. Animals are conscious, while the "feeble and apparently conscious tendril, that seeks to elevate itself and adopts various and curious expedients to obtain its objects," is only apparently so (Chapin 26). From a human perspective, plants are thus analogous to works of art. In plants, as in art, seeming is being and form is content. That plants should be such common metaphors for aesthetic objects, therefore, is less surprising than that they should be, just as commonly, metaphors for aesthetic experience, or that these two should become conflated. When plants become metaphors for kinds of experience, however, these experiences become coded as external to a subject rather than as interior to that subject's being. To say that I think like a plant, in other words, is to suggest that my thought has no inside. If I believe at least some part of human experience involves an interiority that meets, interprets, and initiates responses to external phenomenon, then saying that thought is like a plant suggests that some portion of my thinking is taking place without me.

The vegetable unconscious that surfaces in many descriptions of plant-like thinking in the nineteenth-century differs from contemporary notions of the unconscious because it is a superficial unconscious—an unconscious experienced as other to an individual self and even taking place somewhere apart from the self—rather than an unconscious of depth. Contemporary ideas of the unconscious, post-Freud, are generally of a *sub*conscious: forms of thinking that take place either below or within conscious thought and that nevertheless belong to a particular individual. Prior to Freud, and yet after articulations of a "vegetable unconscious" I am most concerned with here, when William James defined the "stream of consciousness" in 1890, he bemoaned the inability of English grammar to express the notion of thought that takes place as impassively as rain or wind. Because we cannot say "it thinks," as we say 'it rains," James argued, we revert to saying that, "thought goes on" in order to describe the feeling that thought happens to a subject rather than the belief that thought is consciously ordered and generated by an individual (224-225). James's "stream of consciousness" is closer to the nineteenth-century vegetable unconscious than Freud's subconscious because it presents thought as an experience rather than a possession (as well as something that is given rather than inflicted). Furthermore, the version of the subject James paints is one in which multiple forms of thinking co-exist; streams of consciousness flow and swerve among more incisive forms of thinking. Thought for James is like rain, wind, or flowing water. Thought for Freud is archeological; the subconscious is a pit to be

dug. For both these theorists, however, thought is fundamentally disembodied. Rain, wind, water, and rocks, as inorganic forms of matter, do not have bodies as plants and animals do. The vegetable unconscious, on the other hand, has a body, even if that body lacks a subject.

Michael Marder, who has recently attempted to reframe "Western philosophy as a sublimated and idealized plant-thinking," comes closer to articulating such a version of the vegetable unconsciousness I find in nineteenth-century literature. Marder defines, "plantthinking" as "the subjectless vegetal it thinks" that lies at "the core of the subject, who proclaims 'I think" (124, 139). As such, plant-thinking describes experiences belonging to both plants and humans. Plants demonstrate a "thinking without the head, a "non-conscious intentionality," and a "thinking before thinking." So do humans. But while these forms of thought may be "proper" to plants, they comprise only a part of human thinking, a thinking within thinking. While another recent philosophical project, Elaine Miller's The Vegetative Soul (2002), seeks to recuperate plant-life as "the metaphor of metaphors" within nineteenthcentury German philosophy (11), Marder actively troubles the status of plants as metaphors within this tradition.⁹⁴ Marder argues that, "human thinking is, to some extent, dehumanized and rendered plant-like" via actual "encounter with the vegetal world." Looking at plants, in other words, will make you think more like a plant; an "ongoing symbiotic relation" persists between human thought and "the existence of plants" (124-126). While I find it unlikely that humans with deeper botanical knowledge or who have passed more of their life in the presence of plants would necessarily think differently from other humans, I nevertheless find that Marder's proposition excavates something in the nineteenth-century vegetable unconscious that is easy to overlook. Claiming a connection between human thought and plant "existence," Marder affiliates human thought with a body that is not its body and ascribes to such thinking an experience that does not belong to a single subject. As I've shown above, this premise depends upon figurations of plant and human bodies in terms of one another. This non-individuated but embodied thinking (Marder calls it "contextualized thinking"), also depends upon the belief that thinking feels like something, and that what it feels like resembles the body of a plant (138).

Plant-thinking initiates a logical circularity that is dizzying. At the heart of this spinning is an experience of thought processes that feel like they belong to non-individuated bodies: grass, poppies, corn. Another way to say this is that interiority experiences itself as environmental. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, William Carpenter developed a theory of an "adaptive unconscious" that incorporates many of the principles of what I have been describing here as a vegetable unconscious. In *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1875), Carpenter draws from his earlier work on animal and plant physiology to produce a "materialist," as opposed to a "spiritualist," account of intelligence, in which the mind is necessarily grounded in the body. The mind for Carpenter is a "Material Instrument, or Physiological Mechanism," whose work is to intervene between the "Ego and the Non-Ego," or to bring "the individual Consciousness and the External World...into mutual communication" (1). Carpenter's "adaptive unconscious" is surprisingly un-individualized, inexpressive, and elsewhere. Extending a theory of psychology from how animal and plant bodies manifest instinct, sensitivity, or irritability, Carpenter developed a theory of an unconscious produced within experiences of embodiment that do not belong to a particular human body. His use of the term "adaptive" has much in common with Darwin's description of adaptation two decades earlier.

In *The Origin of the Species* (1859), Darwin uses adaptation to describe both the process by which individuals come to express particular traits that make them more capable of success within particular ecosystems, and these changes themselves; adaptation, that is,

describes both a process and an individual trait. In both usages, the interaction between individual and environment is paramount; an adaptation is not an adaptation in a vacuum (there, it would only be an aberration, a swerve in genetic composition). At the same time, however, adaptations do not respond to particular sets of environmental conditions or constraints. Darwin's theory has to do with chance rather than achievement, and, ultimately, with environment more than with particular species. Within the processes of natural selection and finally speciation which Darwin describes, surrounding environmental factors possess more agency than do either individuals or species. Nature, composed of multiple species, minerals, climate, weather, nevertheless makes choices as a collective agency: who lives, who reproduces, who carries on. Darwinian adaptation describes a process of transformation in which forces outside an individual body ultimately determine the significance of that individual body in terms of a whole; the embodied experiences of an individual cannot be regarded as significant without attention to this full connectivity, and the decisiveness finally exerted by that wholeness on individual being. Adaptation is therefore both expressed by a particular body and determined (or interpreted) by environmental pressures and possibilities. Within the mechanism of natural selection, in other words, experience and effects become muddled; the make-up of a body determines its experience within a particular environment; the success or failure of this experience prolongs effects, and so on. Experience becomes refracted away from individuals into species; shared effects define species.

When Carpenter describes the unconscious as "adaptive" he is similarly positing that the unconscious is neither an experience (disembodied and particular to an individual) nor an effect (perceptible to environment, including other individuals). Rather, within the adaptive unconscious, as in what thinkers earlier in the century explored via metaphor as a vegetable unconscious, an entire ecosystem exerts pressures on and within an individual mind. Unlike the idea of "vegetable genius," which suggests a centralized agency with ownership over thoughts and growth, the vegetable unconscious does not belong to any one thinker. Grounded in metaphors that claim direct correspondences between plant bodies and the feeling of human thoughts, the vegetable unconscious suggests that human intelligence enters dynamic collusion with surrounding environmental factors. Unlike some recent critiques of the human or work in the posthumanities, this nineteenth-century vegetable unconscious does not imagine that it can imagine what it is like to be in the world as anything other than a human. In fact, it does not imagine at all. If a plant is "an animal turned inside out," than the vegetable unconscious is similarly thoughts turned outward: surfaces open to soil, sun, air (Carpenter 19-20).

We encounter such a vegetable unconscious in Thoreau, vegetating like corn, sending down roots, and sending off sentences. In a journal entry dated May 20, 1851, Thoreau speculates at length about the "perfect analogy between the life of the human being and that of the vegetable—both of the body & the mind." His investigation of this analogy draws directly from language in one of Asa Gray's botany manuals. Thoreau copies, and elaborates:

The botanist, Gray, says—

"The organs of plants are of two sorts:—1. those of *Vegetation*, which are concerned in growth,—by which the plant takes in the aerial and earthy matters on which it lives, and elaborates them into the materials of its own organized substance; 2. those of *Fructification* or *Reproduction*, which are concerned in the propagation of the species."

So it is with the human being— I am concerned first to come to my *Growth* intellectually & morally; (and physically, of course, as a means to this, for the body is the symbol of the soul) and, then to bear my *Fruit*—do my *Work*—*Propagate* my kind, not only physically but *morally*—not only in body but in mind (224).⁹⁵

In Gray's account and in Thoreau's reading of it, the same distinction that Goethe makes between vegetation and reproduction is drawn. Thoreau makes the difference sequential: "first...Growth," "then...Fruit." Although one expects vegetation and reproduction to break down into a process and a result, or an experience and an effect, both vegetation and reproduction involve self-extension. Thoreau sees fruition as equivalent not with outcomes but with labor, drawing a direct parallel between "my Fruit" and "my Work." By deemphasizing exactly what the effects of his labor is, and emphasizing labor as something ongoing and productive, Thoreau extends vegetation into fruition.

As the journal entry proceeds, however, Thoreau dwells on vegetation. He is drawn to what Gray calls the "organs of vegetation," the "Roots, Stem & Leaves." In particular (like Darwin), he writes of roots:

So the mind develops from the first in two opposite directions—upwards to expand in the light & air; & downwards avoiding the light to form the root. One half is aerial and the other subterranean. The mind is not well balanced & firmly planted like the oak which has not as much root as branch—whose roots like those of the white pine are slight and near the surface. One half of the minds development must still be root—in the embryonic state—in the womb of nature—more unborn than at first. For each successive new idea or bud—a new rootlet in the earth. The growing man penetrates yet deeper by his roots into the womb of things. The infant is comparatively near the surface. just covered from the light— But the man sends down a tap root to the centre of things.

The mere logician the mere reasoner who weaves his arguments as a tree its branches in the sky—not being equally developed in the roots, is overthrown by the first wind (225-226).

Thoreau splits the mind into metaphorical halves: "aerial" and "subterranean," earth supporting air. Both sides vegetate, expanding upward or down. Only the upper half of the mind, however, explicitly thinks: its buds correspond to "each successive new idea," and "arguments" may be woven "as a tree" twists "its branches in the sky." Meanwhile, the metaphorically earth-bound half of the mind remains resolutely material; in fact the more the mind thinks, the more the mind's other half burrows into a body that is not its own; this part of the mind is increasingly "embryonic," "more unborn than at first," and extending into "the womb of things." Thoreau muddles his metaphors by importing the physiology of animal reproduction into vegetal thinking. Above ground, thought is all branches and buds, vegetation and reproduction, while below ground, thought grows "uterine," a mixed metaphor, both "wombed & rooted in darkness" (226-227). Thoreau is not suggesting here that a certain kind of thinking is itself feminine; male thinkers in the passage argue into branches and send "down a tap root." Rather, thought approaches but does not enter a body that is not its own. Thoreau suggests that thoughts have an unindividuated undergrowth that is experienced as bound to the earth in ways that are not always apparent. Even "the most clear & ethereal ideas," he writes, "readily ally themselves to the earth" and "are eager to be soiled" (226). Thoughts have feelings for dirt.

Responding to Gray's general descriptions of plant anatomy, Thoreau's expansions on the feelings of thought remain general. Later in the summer, however, he wonders whether this figuring of thought in terms of plant bodies might become more specific. On August 20, 1851, Thoreau compares the specificity of botanical language to the paucity of language available for describing human psychology, sentiment, morality, and character:

How copious & precise the botanical language to describe the leaves, as well as the other parts of a plant. Botany is worth studying if only for the precision of its terms—to learn the value of words & of system. It is wonderful how much pains has been taken to describe a flowers leaf—, compared for instance with the care that is taken in describing a psychological fact. Suppose as much ingenuity (perhaps it would be needless) in in [sic] making a language to express the sentiments, We are armed with language adequate to describe each leaf in the field.— or at least to distinguish it from each other—but not to describe a human character—with equally wonderful indistinctness & confusion we describe men— The precision and copiousness of botanical language applied to the description of moral qualities! (382).

This journal passage is flanked on either side by sightings of particular plants (and the disappearance of a particular bird). "The rhexia Virginica is a showy flower at present," Thoreau notes just before commencing this paragraph, and acknowledges, following his observations on psychology and botany, "The neottia or ladies tresses behind Garfields house. The Golden robin is now a rare bird to see. Here are the small lively tasting blackberries" (382). 6 Although Thoreau celebrates the "precision and copiousness of botanical language" and seems to suggest that a similar specificity of language is lacking in articulations of human qualities, he also remains unresolved about what such precision would accomplish. First, he parenthetically wonders whether such "ingenuity" applied to describe "the sentiments" might be "needless"; then, he qualifies the "indistinctness & confusion" with which "we describe men" as "equally wonderful" to the precision by which plants are named and known.

Language affixed to the bodies of plants is primarily descriptive. Botanical language begins with generalities: plants possess cells and organs; they vegetate and reproduce. From there, particularities proliferate. Botanical language overfills with stating what seeing knows. Metaphorical language, in contrast, is blind. It only speaks and cannot see what it says. Metaphor is a rhetorical gesture (pure linguistic surface) that has no correlation to actual states of existence or correspondence and yet purports to stand in for experiences of affiliation. If botanical language is an enumeration of effects whose abundance never quite completely states what it is to be a plant, then metaphorical language describes the experience of not having access to what takes place within such resolute surface effects. As botanical language migrating into metaphor becomes increasingly particular, the distance between what can be seen and what can be experienced intensifies. Saying that thinking is like vegetating introduces a general sense of thinking that takes place apart from the self; the rooted thinking that Thoreau describes in his journal, while more specific in language, is actually harder to account for in non-metaphorical terms. As the language of botanical metaphor becomes more closely affiliated with particular plant organs, or even with particular species of plant, it becomes difficult to say what such vegetative human feeling actually feels like. One of the most disconcerting examples of such a moment is in Emerson's essay "Experience," in which a highly specified metaphorical language conceals experience from itself. In Emerson's articulation of mourning in "Experience," we

encounter another facet of the vegetable unconscious, one in which the aesthetic correlates not to feelings of imaginative expansion or possible futures, or even to extended vegetation, but rather to particularized losses, both invoked and held at a distance by the language that seeks to approximate them.

Vegetable Mourning

Emerson's grief in "Experience" is notably neither here nor there. The first four sprawling paragraphs of the essay—Sharon Cameron calls this opening "relentless"—begin with disavowals (54). In the famous passage that concludes this section, Emerson bemoans the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest," as "the most unhandsome part of our condition." He ascribes this slipperiness to a Heraclitian sentiment: "Nature does not like to be observed" (471-473). And yet, nature, as Emerson presents it here, can only be observed. "All things swim and glitter," Emerson writes. In the next paragraph, when Emerson introduces grief, this experience falls within nature's shadow play: grief, which, "like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality" (472). Though Emerson's grief is in fact particular—the loss of his son—the "unhandsome" condition that these paragraphs portray has to do with the disappearance of that particular devastation within everything else in nature that flickers and goes out. Emerson sets his most unsettling disavowal—the disavowal of grief itself, and seemingly through this, the value of his son's life as an individual life to be mourned—among fleeting phenomena. As an account of life and death, "Experience" is insufficient. Its true focus is semblance and the pains of what can be seen but not quite felt, what can be experienced as effects though not entirely as experience.⁹⁷

"Our life is not so much threatened as our perception," Emerson writes. But Emerson's experience of his son's death, as well as the other more mundane losses he chronicles in the essay as aesthetic, has the effect of inverting the unsettling transparency that aesthetic objects conjure, in which they seem to articulate appearances while at the same time remaining invariably aloof. These opening passages substitute an aesthetics of grief for grief. Grief only comes in to being when it realizes that the thing for which it mourns was never really there to begin with, a possession that was never possessed. Emerson accumulates surfaces in the form of metaphors, which mediate between him and an unknowable "real nature." He relates the loss of his son to the loss of a "beautiful estate"; he typifies "us all," who must experience such losses, in the "type" of an "Indian...laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him"; he calls the "dearest events" a "summer-rain," and "we the Para coats that shed every drop." These figures are deflections, one after the other. "Direct strokes [nature] never gave us power to make," Emerson concludes the section; "all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents. Our relations to each other are oblique and casual" (473). No one image actually stands, in an allegorical fashion, for Emerson, his son, his readers, or even for nature. Emerson's litany of metaphors illuminates processes rather than frozen effects—procedures of loss, the impersonal shedding of moisture by a coat (473). This accumulation of figures stands between Emerson and his loss, performing the very obliquity that is, Emerson says, the actual object of his grief.

Among these metaphors, after the loss of "a beautiful estate," and before the Tantalus-Indian (after his son and before us), Emerson turns to a particular vegetal process to describe "this calamity": "It was caducous," he says of the event that has befallen him:

So it is with this calamity: it does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature (473).

Three word sentences are unusual in Emerson, and this one—"It was caducous"—stands like a burl in the paragraph's otherwise effluvial grain. Caducous comes from Latin (cadere), to fall or to fleet. Its primary usage is zoological or botanical, descriptive of "organs or parts that fall off naturally when they have served their purpose." The most common example given of this process is the calvx of a poppy, a two-leaved prong that pops to the ground as the four petals of the flower unfurl, but before they have entirely flung open. Descriptions of the caducous nature of a poppy calyx appear in the same botanical handbooks I drew on above. Phelps writes that the poppy possesses "a 'calyx of two leaves,' but these fall off as soon as the blossom expands, and are therefore called 'caduceus'" (24). Chapin describes the meaning of "Caducous" as "Falling off early; as the calyx of the poppy" (xv). And Amos Eaton, in Manual of Botany for North America (1829), a book owned by Dickinson, defines the term as "Any part of a plant is caducous, which falls off earlier, compared with other parts of the same plant, than is usual for similar parts in most plants. As the calvx of the poppy falls off before the corol is hardly expanded."99 The term describes an easeful, though uncommon, severing, a loss required by flowering—a plant shedding its earlier form before its final achievement has been reached. This process sits uncomfortably between vegetation and fruition: not required by the former, making way for the latter, without being actually synonymous with flowering itself. A caducous calyx is a predictable untimeliness.

The death of a child is always untimely, failing to adhere to what time seems to promise—a full life, all the hopefulness of narrative charting ahead. Early deaths slam sequences shut. By the introduction of this shuttered sentence—"It was caducous"— Emerson transforms calamity into metaphor, however, thereby making it common, far more common than calamity itself. What is painful here is not pain itself but the common, untransformative, procedures in which pain finds and loses a body. The self that survived the loss of Waldo is the same self (as much as any Emersonian self is self-similar, which is to say, a wave) that woke yesterday, that walks in the woods tomorrow. Grief is un-educational and un-epiphanic. But grief's effects do not mean, of course, that nothing has happened. Through these motions, "souls never touch their objects," Emerson writes. Studies of atoms have shown the world to be full of space, bodies to approach one another without ever meeting. 100 Loss approaches the self and leaves it surprisingly, devastatingly, resilient. Emerson clangs this endurance as if it were a bell about to shatter. At each caesura in the clause following calamity, another "me" slams against a syntactical abruption: "it does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me." And yet despite all this stated violence against the self, the sentence, and the experience it enacts, resolves and "leaves no scar."

At the same time, the "caducous" nature of Emerson's "calamity" cuts against this seeming continuity of this self, figuring grief as a thing with its own body, the world's body, a calyx dropping from a poppy before it is time and in keeping with its own time. The "untimeliness" of the death of his child becomes the encasing of a flower dropping away before the flower reaches its full potential, displacing Emerson's grief into the recursive processes of the natural world, presenting the time that nature operates by as timeless. The pace at which living things experience loss, or flowering, does not adhere to one strict

measure. Each thing has a metronome in its chest that circumstances warp or regulate. Cameron concludes her essay on Emerson's "Experience," "Representing Grief," with reference to one of the concluding passages of the essay. "Experience" insists, she argues, on "the isolated, the alien, the rootless, the excluded" (78). Like Thoreau, Emerson is particularly interested in a rooted thinking that supports other forms of thought. In "Intellect," he describes the progression from "instinct" to "an opinion, then a knowledge" as a plant's body: "root, bud, and fruit" (419). "Experience" is about acknowledging that human life, like all animal life, is un-rooted: that human roots only extend into soil within linguistically elaborate dreams.

"The imagination delights," Emerson begins this final passage of the essay, in dreaming of deeper reciprocities between humans and nonhumans. Emerson turns to Native Americans, with their knowledge of "wood-craft," as "trappers, and bee-hunters," as humans seemingly more intimately involved with the earth. But this connection, like everything Emerson accounts for in the essay, is illusory, the effect of imagination. All humans, all unrooted, living things, are "superficial tenants of the globe." Emerson writes:

We fancy that we are strangers, and not so intimately domesticated in the planet as the wild man, and the wild beast and bird. But the exclusion reaches them also; reaches the climbing, flying, gliding, feathered and four-footed man. Fox and woodchuck, hawk and snipe, and bittern, when nearly seen, have no more root in the deep world than man, and are just such superficial tenants of the globe. Then the new molecular philosophy shows astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom, shows that the world is all outside: it has no inside (480-481).

We imagine connections between humans and nonhumans that we have been shut out from; we "fancy" that we are the ones that have been shut out. But mourning shatters illusions and delusions. "Experience" is about feeling that the world "is all outside" and "has no inside," like the body of a plant. When humans experience thinking as the body of a plant or plants, they experience a mode of thinking that is neither imagination nor fancy, neither a consideration of what exists nor a wrangling of existent parts into a composite whole. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine memory as a cognitive function in opposition to imagination or fancy. Memory accumulates impressions of material events, storing past experience as effects, and returning to these within a continuous present.

Mind & Matter

I understand Emerson's "Experience" to be about the usurpation of experience by effects. In contrast, Emerson's writings on nature—both his treatise of 1836 and the essay included in his second series of essays from 1844 (the same series as "Experience")—explore participation in material phenomenon that renders aesthetic effects thin. Both objects and interiority become "transparent" in these accounts; in the "Language" section of *Nature*, Emerson explains this transparency as the result of "the light of higher laws" that "shines through" substances and the self, lighting them up from within (25). Emerson's "transparent eye-ball," appearing in the first section of the treatise, exemplifies this process. In this well-known passage, effects (the "bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky") and experience ("I am glad to the brink of fear," "I am nothing," "I see all," "I am part and particle of God") resemble one another. The eyeball's transparency is also the

common's transparency; "currents of Universal Being circulate" through mind and matter alike (10). Although Emerson offers this moment as one in which "all mean egotism vanishes," the bizarreness of a body becoming an eyeball emphasizes the human observer in the scene. Metonymy, as a linguistic effect dependent on exaggeration of a particular feature, makes Emerson less transparent than he feels.

In the following passage, egotism returns. Emerson concludes the next paragraph by asserting that "power" "does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both." Human power is claimed; harmony between this power and a disempowered nature is suggested. But the sentences preceding this declaration-suggestion expand what such harmony might feel like. Emerson calls it "delight":

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right (11).

While the transparent eyeball focuses on inorganic materials (bare earth, snow, puddles, light, cloud, sky), in this passage about delight, Emerson turns to plants. Attention to plant-life produces different effects. Rather than growing thin as experience expands, natural effects grow further animated: fields and woods nod, wave, acknowledge. Correspondence ensues. But it is important to note that the correspondence Emerson describes here—"the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable"—is not a projection of predetermined selfhood into the landscape, not merely a personification of boughs. Rather, plants affect him before he knows it, and their "effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over [him]." Effects transmigrate into experience. Something seemingly material takes up sudden residence in the mind; thinking vegetates.

In his 1844 essay "Nature," Emerson sets "man vegetative" in relation to other forms of inhumanity. "Man imprisoned, man crystallized, man vegetative, speaks to man impersonated," he writes (555). These forms of the human, Emerson says, "speak" to one another. Using "impersonated" adjectively, Emerson suggests that this conversation turns man into something resembling a person, rather than into a person per se. Personhood, like imprisonment, crystallization, and vegetation, remains an effect: a fluttering around an indefinite central figure that nowhere in this set of relations comes to stand in simply for itself. Man is mediated, that is, by the idea of what it means to feel human. Though the refrain of this set of relations is the recurrence of "man," at the same time, these modifying adjectives keep man from himself. Moving through relations to matter—from imprisonment, through rocks and plants, into a figuration that only seems released from matter—this man remains dependent on an experience of material otherness endemic to his self.

Emerson's description of this relation within man between states of matter that feel affiliated with different experiences of the self depends upon Locke's description of human intelligence as grounded in direct encounter with material phenomena. Locke establishes a direct link between sensory experience, empirical observation, and both simple and more complex ideas, or, in other words, between matter and cognition. For all of Emerson's idealism, and for all the Transcendentalists' enthusiasm for a freshly imported German philosophy, a Lockean interest in experience as a result of material phenomena permeates

Emerson's work. The violence done to this epistemological view accounts for some of the pain in "Experience," in which the educational impetus of empiricism entirely breaks down through encounters with experiences that seem based outside the individual's capacity to sense or apprehend, and the universe floods with disconnection. In "Nature," Emerson is more sanguine, and more in keeping with Locke, writing: "Every moment instructs, and every object: for wisdom is infused into every form. It has been poured into us as blood; it convulsed us as pain; it slid into us as pleasure; it enveloped us in dull, melancholy days, or in days of cheerful labor; and we did not guess its essence, until after a long time." Emerson endows nature with a surprising degree of agency. Earlier in the same paragraph, however, he seems to invert this relationship, writing that "[n]ature is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to a thought again, as ice becomes water and gas. The world is mind precipitated." Here, it is mind that seems to form nature. Emerson establishes a relational dependency between mind and matter, but the influence exerted runs both ways, so that "natural objects, whether inorganic or organized" exert a "virtue and pungency" of influence "on the mind," and at the same time, the mind sees itself everywhere in nature, thoughts taking on physical form (555). If Locke's description of the formation of ideas is necessarily progressive, Emerson's is circular, a compounding feedback loop of matter-mind, mind-matter.

As I have explored throughout this chapter, plants occupy a privileged space between inanimate matter and animate life. Consequently, of the four versions of man that Emerson portrays in "Nature" as speaking to one another, vegetative man is exemplary of an inbetweenness that also characterizes man imprisoned, man crystallized, or man impersonated. None of these are purely matter or life, but it is plants (and not prisons, crystals, persons) that most clearly bring together matter and life. Thinking of humans as vegetative suggests an interest in thinking the human in terms of the nonhuman, and of human thought itself as a meeting of matter and cognition.

Harland Coultas's *What may be learned from a tree* (1860), for example, investigates resemblances between humans and trees through their shared participation in matter as something greater and more determining than any individual person or plant. "Matter and the forces which govern it are eternal," Coultas writes, "and human life (I mean that life which we have in common with plants), is a mere integral portion of eternity" (101-102). This "life," shared by humans and plants, goes beyond Lockean connection of matter and mind through human sensation (though Coultas, like Emerson, also speaks of sensation in language reminiscent of Locke). The difference is that Coultas's equation of humans and plants does not require a human perspective. Rather, plants and humans emerge from and participate in the same materials. "Like the trees," Coultas writes, "we are inseparably connected with the material world, from whence our organization derives impressions. We are a part of the universe. The matter of which our bodies are composed, like that of trees and flowers, is held together by attraction, and after a while, like them, the present living generation will disappear from the landscape,—dissolved into earth and air" (100).

Coultas's insistence of the primacy of matter is hardly distinctive. But such common affiliations between humans and plants nevertheless invite radical (or maybe just Epicurean) readjustments of human "individuality" or even death. Coultas equates "individuality" with organicism. By "individuality," he means simply that we are "like the plants around us," that, like them, we "possess, to a certain extent, an organizing power within ourselves" (100). Individuality means simply the ability to grow, expand, succeed or fail according to laws as predetermined as a plant's struggle toward light and water, and chance occasions as unpredictable as storms, drought, or rising temperatures. Claiming for humans an organic intelligence akin to plants, that is, makes human individuality no more individual than blades

of grass, groves of trees, or even a lone tree composed of boughs (which Coultas compares to the citizens of a mutually-supporting democracy, rather than to a single human). Coultas understand vegetable being as collective being.

In a long footnote to the proposition that "matter is thus imperishable," Coultas imagines a world without humans as one recent eco-critic has imagined "The World Without Us." Through this apocalypse, matter and its machinations, persists, passing through yet another organic transformation:

It is not impossible for the matter of our earth to have existed in some other form anterior to its attraction together about the earth's centre, and when the earth shall have answered the purposes of its creation, when she shall grow weary in her diurnal march, and the ocean roll its last billow, the winds breathe their last gasp, may not the matter of the earth, like that of one of the beautiful trees and flowers which have disappeared from its surface, still be in existence, and reappear again in some other form, to beautify the heavens and go through another grand cycle of change?" (101).

It is worth noting that though this future is implicitly non-human, Coultas does not mourn (by imagining) the disappearance of humans from the landscape. Most of what he imagines is inorganic: water, winds, earth. He does imagine, however, the death of "the beautiful trees and flowers which have disappeared from [earth's] surface." Even in a world without plants, Coultas turns to these mediating life forms as representatives of matter. "Vegetation" as a process of growth without individuation persists into "some other form" that cannot yet (and that will never, by human eyes) be perceived. Coultas's imaginations spin off from the proposition that "matter is imperishable." As a faculty responsive to the given, memory more directly turns toward what endures, and with this, toward matter itself.

Vegetating Memory

Emerson's *Nature* is obsessed with eyes as organs that do more than see. The "transparent eyeball" that appears (or begins to disappear) in the opening pages is only one of many eyes roving through this early treatise. Before Emerson's eyeball, however, Sampson Reed, whose influence on Emerson is widely acknowledged, described the eye as an organ subservient to "another" "kind of consciousness which pervades the mind." Reed's "Observations on the Growth of the Mind" (1826) distinguishes between the eye as "the point, at which the united rays of the sun within and the sun without, converge" and "the whole body" as "pervaded with nerves which convey perpetual information of the existence and condition of every part." The nervy, full-bodied, consciousness that Reed describes is "coextensive with every thing it actually possesses"; it reflects, that is, on what it already owns. Memory, accordingly, is *the* defining activity of the mind for Reed. He re-iterates this language of preservation and pre-possession in the passage immediately following his thoughts on consciousness as a more extensive sensing. Memory, Reed writes,

is not a dormant, but an active power. It is rather the possession than the retention of truth. It is a consciousness of the will; a consciousness of character; a consciousness which is produced by the mind's preserving in effort, whatever it actually possesses. It is the power which the mind has of preserving in truth, without actually making it the subject of thought; bearing a relation to thought, analogous to what this bears to the actual perception of the senses, or to language.

Thus we remember a distant object without actually thinking of it, in the same way that we think of it, without actually seeing it (37).

Reed forms an analogy between memory as outside thought and thought as outside of seeing. Just as thinking does not actually conjure its objects of attention, memory makes nothing happen. Memory is an action of the mind apart from thought, or visualization, an action that has to do with maintaining rather than creating. Memory in this sense is a non-event, despite Reed's specification that, as an "active" power memory requires "effort." This effortlessness memory (much like the *poiesis* Thoreau explores in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack*) is uncreative. It makes only what already exists and what it already knows.

In this way, memory is antithetical to the reformulating, projective, energies of the imagination. Rather, in terms of the language I have been examining here, memory vegetates: it remains with what already exists, expanding within what is already known. Unsurprisingly, then, memory becomes an important feature of discussions of the meeting of plants and humans, both in the nineteenth-century and today. In *What may be Learned from a Tree*, Coultas defines memory as both a relapse "into a former state" and an expansion: "we are ever expanding ourselves over the long series of our past sensations," Coultas writes, "and the use of reason becomes more and more apparent, as these sensations from the external world are increased in number and variety" (103). Memory accumulates and preserves sensation for reason to order. In this sense, memory may seem passive: absorbing and responsive, gathering information for some other faculty to process and turn to use. But Reed casts this process in a different light. The responsiveness of memory is itself a kind of action. When memory stirs, it stirs in response to the feeling that lost things still have a life.

Furthermore, as an active faculty responsive to an accumulation of present conditions rather than to the not-yet achieved, memory inverts the imagination as a faculty bound to what is not yet, what might, or even should be, including versions of the self or the social that have not yet been achieved. 103 And yet, Reed describes memory as responsible for "the growth and expansion of the mind" (42). Memory produces an experience of selfgrowth that extends beyond simply recalling past events. Reed calls memory the "effect of learning." He compares two men, both of whom have a read a book. One of them repeats the book, word for word. The other cannot recall the exact wording of what he has just read, but finds that his thinking has changed. While the first man is "encumbered" even "oppressed" by the "burthen" of his knowledge, the second finds that he is changed. Reed relates this process to a physical one, comparing it to digestion: "in the one, the food is absorbed and becomes a part of the man; in the other it lies on the stomach in a state of crude indigestion" (30). And memory itself, Reed suggests, is both a cognitive and a physical experience. Memory is intimately connected with "the affections," Reed argues. The mind is fed by physical experience, so that the blood is responsible for "strengthening and nourishing" intellectual man (29, 30). By emphasizing effects, Reed also paradoxically draws attention to experience, prioritizing the processes of learning (and of memory) and the effects of this process over the content of particular books or memories.

For Reed, memory and all that is bound up with it, has a resolutely physical component, as regular and organic as the digestion of food or the circulation of blood. As much as possible, Reed seems interested in thinking of the mind as matter: "[m]ind and matter are not more distinct from each other than their properties," he writes. These properties are another version of effects: what mind and matter can be seen, by someone or something outside them, to produce. Among these properties are both time and space,

which Reed calls "the effect of matter." It is so difficult, Reed says, to say what time is because we have "ascribed so many important effects to that which has no real existence." Though "all things in the natural world are subject to change," and although we think of these changes in terms of time—a season, a year—"it requires but a moment's reflection to see that time has no agency in them." The changes that we witness in nature, Reed writes, are not the effects of time, but of matter, doing what matter does. "They are effects of chemical, or more properly perhaps, of natural decompositions and reorganizations. Time, or rather our idea of it, so far from having produced any thing, is itself the effect of changes" (31-32). Our experience of time, therefore, "is continually changing," Reed argues, "as the mind becomes conversant with different objects, and is susceptible of different impressions" (33).

Because our experience of time and our use of memory as an active function have, in Reed's summation, a material component, then, in our relation to material processes, we experience both different versions of time, and different reactions of memory. "The oak over which may have passed a hundred years," Reed writes, "seems to drive from our minds the impression of time," while we are intimately cognizant with time as a process of wreckage in the "half consumed remains of some animal, once strong and vigorous." Therefore, in an invocation of attention that resonates with Emerson's loss (and with many present accounts of mourning environmental damage or the effects of climate change), Reed counsels the cultivation of "a memory of things": a memory of "that which is not used, which seems farthest in the memory, and which is held by the most doubtful tenure; that which is suffered to waste and decay because it wants the life of our own affections; that which we are about to lose because it does not properly belong to us." In "Experience," Emerson acknowledges that, as a possession, his son did "not properly belong to [him]." Reed suggests an alternative to the glinting surfaces of "Experience," however, it is possible for the mind, he argues, to "preserve its own possessions without using them" (34). What the mind "actually possesses" it possesses through simple attention, the experience of memory as an active process that does not belong to anyone in particular and that has less to do with time as an abstraction than with attending to the transformations of matter. Attending to such transformations means rejecting intellectual projection into some timeless future. It means looking to the small daily changes of an oak, rather than being soothed by the breadth of its rings after it has been cut down. This memory as an "active power" that seeks to "preserve" without "using" also signals a language of minimal use or impact: a language that has become a principle of modern environmentalist discourse.

In *Nature*, Emerson sees through nature; in "Experience," those same surfaces grow flinty and impenetrable. Emerson may have found the "relation between man and the vegetable" delightful, but he also found the proximity of matter and spirit in both humans and plants disturbing. Later in the treatise, the effects of Reed's language surface, even within a passage that proclaims how "behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present." While Reed sees the action of spirit through the effects of matter, Emerson worries, "Whence is matter? and Whereto?" Emerson's emphasis on the self produces a more unsettling version of the relation between plants and humans. The "Supreme Being," Emerson argues, "does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God" (41). Though Emerson in this early work circles round and round the self as the primary locus for spirit, in this passage, branches and leaves puncture the primacy of that self. The feeling of vegetating is not obviously an empowered one. Vegetative man does not act.

In Vegetable Anatomy, William Carpenter draws a false distinction between attending to organic and inorganic life. While the latter appears mechanical, the former, full of "wondrous mechanism" implicit to life, "seems at first sight more extraordinary and mysterious"; however, Carpenter argues, we must view all transformations of matter, whether organic or inorganic, as symbiotically involved:

The processes which are constantly taking place during the life of each being, and which are necessary to the maintenance of its own existence, are no less wonderful, and no less removed from anything which we witness in the world of dead matter. When the tree unfolds its leaves with the returning warmth of spring, there is as much to interest and astonish, in the beautiful structure and important uses of these parts, as there is in the expansion of its more gay and variegated blossoms; and when it puts forth new buds, which by their extension prolong its branches over a part of the ground previously unshaded by its foliage, the process is in itself as wonderful, as the formation of the seed that is to propagate its race in some distant spot. Thus it is that scientific knowledge heightens our interest in Nature, by showing that, in those things which seem most common, there are as many sources of interest and instruction, as in that which from its apparently mysterious character, is usually regarded with more curiosity (247).

Carpenter distinguishes between the various processes of organic extension in a tree—vegetation ("When the tree unfolds its leaves with the returning warmth of spring"), and reproduction ("the expansion of its more gay and variegated blossoms," its "new buds" and "the formation of the seed")—and unites these under the effects such processes are capable of invoking in human observers: "no less wonderful," "much to interest and astonish," "beautiful structure and important uses," "gay and variegated," "as wonderful," he writes. These processes are "most common," Carpenter observes. And yet, the commonness of such processes—as common as plants growing, or the use of plant metaphor to describe a mind growing like a plant—often half-conceal pervasive experiences of connection between human and nonhuman lives.

If these nineteenth-century accounts of memory describe vegetative qualities within processes of human cognition, Marder's recent account of vegetable thinking considers the possibility of memory as something belonging to plants. "Vegetal memory," Marder argues, arises "at the site of material inscription on the body of the plant and contributes to the register of physical stimuli (touch, exposure to light or darkness, etc.) that, having already affected the plant, may be retrieved after a delay, when the actual stimulus is no longer present." Plant memories are therefore, "imageless and non-representational material memories," Marder writes. Stored in the cells of plants, these memories "retain a trace of the remembered thing itself" (126). Memory as it is "proper to plants" is buried in the body of the plant, bearing reference to external events or objects. Plant-memory, like human memory, therefore, responds to worlds that are no longer immediately available. In this sense, Marder's definition of memory responds to the world without "knowing" whether or not the world continues to be there. Plant memory has no future, but nor does it really turn toward the past. Accumulating the physical effects of sensation, plants remember through present, physical, expression.

Considering not only plant memory, but also human memory, in these terms affects how we might conceive of an alternative to what Lawrence Buell called the "environmental imagination." For Buell, this imagination was primarily scientific and ecological; he faulted Melville, for example, for not paying the kind of attention to the Galapagos that Darwin did

(5). And yet for all the nineteenth-century writers I have considered here—both literary and scientific, and sometimes difficult to categorize according to such branches of knowledge—plants were compelling objects of attention and inquiry not only in themselves, but also because their particular bodies and functions offered ways of figuring "inhuman" experiences, moments in which a subject seemed other to itself, sometimes painfully, but also, just as often, expansively so. At such moments, plants are not so much personified, as humans are turned toward plants. For authors like Emerson and Thoreau, attending to these experiences of "vegetation" had not only to do with conceiving of what it meant to feel, to think, to mourn, and remember, but also with understanding their work as writers. In this regard, writing became a way of practicing an environmental attention and attentiveness; within this attention, writers could approach "nature" as a space of vast and particularized non-human bodies and forces, but also a space in which the human—with all its self-strangeness—was equally at home. In this version of environmental attention and the vegetable unconscious, a writer is characterized not by the potency and singularity of the Romantic genius but rather by, as Sampson Reed would have it, a "humility that exalts" (22).

"Alms for oblivion."

'Youth is the proper, permanent, and genuine condition of man.'

Nathaniel Hawthorne

'Yes, decay is often a gardener.'—Anonymous"

—Herman Melville, Weeds and Wildings Chiefly, with a Rose or Two, ca. 1890-1891

Herman Melville considered including these three epigraphs at the beginning of his final manuscript of poems, Weeds and Wildings Chiefly, with a Rose or Two (1891). In the first, Ulysses addresses Achilles in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. The second falls in Hawthorne's final unfinished manuscript, The Dolliver Romance. The final epigraph—"Yes, decay is often a gardener"—comes from Melville himself, in the manuscript these epigraphs precede. These three quotations form a garland, twining together contrary visions of the passage of time in relation to human lives. Ulysses bemoans time's greediness, warning Achilles of how little may be remembered of valor and heroism, while Hawthorne suggests that the experiences of youth persist into the present, and Melville abandons the time-scales of human lives for the perennial cycles of plant death and rebirth. Summarized another way, these three epigraphs move from time that overwrites all human accomplishments, through time preserved in memories that experientially contradict the effects of this ravaging, to resolve in non-human time: green and seasonal. While humans mourn or remember the loss of their youthful accomplishments, in the green world, decay feeds youth as youth offers itself to the mulch.

In the interlocking of these epigraphs, Melville—who compared Hawthorne to Shakespeare and himself to Hawthorne in his review "Hawthorne and His Mosses" resurrects a triangular relationship from earlier in his career. In doing so, Melville also relates these three quotations to one another not only through ideas of time, but also through the way each differently negotiations the relation between the literary and the biographical. The unnamed character (Ulysses) of the first quotation corresponds to the "Anonymous" speaker of the last. In The Odyssey, that same character, under a different name, announces himself as "No One," stepping into a negative identity in order to protect himself from a Cyclops. Character dissolves into literary expression in these two "No Ones" in different ways: performing its own disappearance within one text concealed within another, and made to disappear behind a sign of anonymity in the quote from Melville. Meanwhile, Hawthorne's quotation, ascribed to him, seems to escape the literary entirely and come straight from the author's mouth, though, as with everything Hawthorne wrote, this snippet of ink actually comes from the mouth of a carefully constructed narrator. The framing of Hawthorne's quotation as closer to life than fiction is further deepened by the intertextuality of both Shakespeare's and Melville's quotes. Shakespeare draws his image of time with a wallet collecting "Alms for Oblivion" from Spenser within a play that was a rewriting of Chaucer; in the part of Weeds and Wildings in which decay is declared a gardener, Melville pulls from Washington Irving and from Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse. Finally, Melville varies the relation between each of these quotations and authorship itself. In the

first, Shakespeare's language floats free of his name and timeless, while Hawthorne's, tethered to his name, rests within a still approachable history, and Melville, the only author of the three alive and authoring, performs a disappearing act within the present. With these three quotations, Melville establishes a complex relation between time and intertextuality, personal memory and literary history, as defining features of *Weeds and Wildings*.

For Melville, Hawthorne was both an author and a person. The intensity of his feelings for Hawthorne, and the effects of this relationship in his writing, needs to be viewed as a tangled response to both these sides of Hawthorne; for Melville, Hawthorne became a particularly important figure for the unsteady relationship between literature and life. The effect of Melville's intimacy with Hawthorne on the Shakespearian language and allegorical bent of Moby Dick is well known. Critics have suggested that Hawthorne serves as the romantic model for Isabel in *Pierre* (1851). Others have argued about whether "Monody," a poem Melville began writing in 1864, the year of Hawthorne's death, and which expresses distress over the loss of a male beloved from whom the speaker had been estranged in life, is a poem about Hawthorne. And scholars generally acknowledge that the Vine character in Melville's epic poem, *Clarel* (1875), has a Hawthornian demeanor. ¹⁰⁵ Despite these possible signposts, the biographical effects of Hawthorne on Melville remain difficult to trace. 106 Yet one thing remains certain. Melville's relationship with Hawthorne brought together the textual and the lived. Throughout this dissertation, I have been exploring how some nineteenth-century American authors imagined literature as responsive to life through figurations of plant-life as a sign for literary form or authorship. Rather than focus on life as a generalizing vital force, these authors grounded their attentiveness to life in particular plant-forms—collecting honeysuckle or milkwort, or imagining their losses as the caduceus calyx of a poppy. Melville also thought of the connection between literature and life in relation to plants. But Melville's investment in plants, and thus to literature's responsiveness to life, is even more particular. For him, life was ultimately rooted in human experience; among the most important experiences of his life was his connection to Hawthorne: a man and an author with the name of a plant.

I have been arguing that the experiences of authors with material plants—observing, studying, gathering, planting, tending, or sprawling amidst them—alter the status of plant metaphors in their work, making metaphor permeable or "bare": literature opening toward the material. But with Melville, this is not quite so. While he examines other material or cultural phenomena—the physiological make-up of tortoises in the Galapagos or the taboos surrounding tattooing outside the south Pacific—with the blustery gusto of an author willing to tip out of a literary mode into science or anthropology, when he turns to plants, Melville becomes reflexively "literary," even though, as a farmer, and later rose-gardener, he had a practical knowledge of plants. ¹⁰⁷ For him, plants—even real plants—bear a rich history of past meanings, recitations, and literary rewriting. Whether a rose appears in print or in a garden, Melville is well aware of the fact that a rose, when affixed to its name, smelling sweet or not at all, invokes centuries of books gone by. Although Melville evinces an interest in the hyper-literary nature of plants before meeting and reading Hawthorne, this encounter transformed his subsequent literary treatments of plants.

Melville and Hawthorne first met on a literary picnic with other authors and acquaintances, on a summer day in Western Massachusetts, 1850. Shortly after this meeting, Melville read Hawthorne for the first time. "Hawthorne and his Mosses," Melville's anonymous review of Hawthorne's short-story and essay collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, records this second encounter as ecstatic, electrifying, thrilling: a "shock of recognition" connects Melville the reader to Hawthorne the text. Melville's reading of Hawthorne is also,

like Hawthorne's portrait of the home in Concord where he produced many of the stories and essays included in his first published volume, thick with moss. From this period forward in Melville's writing, the presence of moss, and eventually vines, and eventually roses, mark moments of intertextual and biographical engagement first with Hawthorne, and then, more generally with the idea of the literary as a means of mediating experience.

When Melville writes of moss, he invokes both Hawthorne's work and Hawthorne's uncanny ability, as an author, to dissolve into his work. Like Ishmael grappling with the idea of the ocean as surface all the way down, Melville was both intrigued and unsettled by Hawthorne's biographical surfaces. By mixing both text and memory into his invocations of plants, Melville complicates the possibility of literary accounts of human lives as separate from lived experience. The frontispiece of Melville's copy of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* aptly illustrates the kinds of material-literary and biographical-textual intersections Melville conjured when he wrote of plants. Inside the front-cover, Melville attached what resembles a herbarium page (albeit with more writing than most). At the center of the page a reddened tangle of seaweed sprawls; over time, its position has shifted, leaving doubled shadows across the page. In the bottom left hand corner, Melville has written in now faded ink:

This moss was gathered in Salem, and therefore I place it here for a frontispiece.

P.S. It may be objected that this is sea-moss;—but then, it only went to sea—like many young mortals—in its youth, and to my certain knowledge has been ashore ever since. 108

To the right of this script and post-script, what appears to be Melville's hand—though this time in pencil, signaling probably a different writing occasion—notes "August 1850," the month and year in which Melville and Hawthorne met. Melville's note says nothing directly of Hawthorne, only that the "moss," like Hawthorne, hails from Salem. At the same time, however, this "sea-moss," which journeyed to sea "in its youth" and back to shore "ever since," resembles Melville. Finally, the strange form of this note, addressed to no one in particular, and anticipating objections, recalls the teasing and exaggerated tone of some of Melville's letters to Hawthorne. This single page gives a sense of how charged with the material, the literary, the textual, and the remembered Melville's treatment of plants can be.

Culminating in a reading of Weeds and Wildings, my final two chapters show how Melville's use of plants, particularly moss and flowers, reworks images and language from Hawthorne's writing into a kind of shorthand for intersections of memory and intertextuality more generally. As the epigraphs above suggest, Melville became most interested in moss and flowers not as vegetal opposites, but as continuations of one another. For the first time in this dissertation, I will consider vegetable growth in terms of culmination, as well as culmination's aftermath, rather than as prolonged vegetation, the preservation of growth without eruptive achievement or resolution. While the activities I have written of so farloafing, gathering, vegetating, mourning, remembering—present experience of authorship as passive or peripheral to willful agency, flowering erupts as a primary event: the teleological horizon toward which vegetation tends. But flowering betrays itself in this regard; though it seems like an ending, its showy displays unfold entirely for the purpose of subsequent futures; once pollinated, flowers retire into fruits or bulbs or seeds. With the future of a species stored up in these deliberate capsules, individual plants wither. Among metaphors of vegetable growth, therefore, flowering contests authorship perhaps most of all by initiating authorial decay. Rather than the sign of an end, we might view flowering in this regard as a

transition, poised between an authorial self and the collective readers into which that self will resolve. Melville considered flowering and decay in these terms. Before turning to flowering in my final chapter, however, I will consider here Melville's rewritings of Hawthorne's moss.

At a turning point in his career, just after the publication of *Moby Dick* (1851), Melville wrote to Hawthorne that he feared he was like a seed that had sprouted, grown, flowered and "must soon fall to the mould" (Correspondence 193). The remainder of Melville's career—a period in which he turned from first person novel-length narratives toward relentless migrations through different forms (third-person novel, tale, diptych, poetry, prose-poems)—has sometimes been figured as a period of aesthetic decline, a prolonged season of formal "moldering." Like some of the other terms I am interested in here, however—loafing, genius—the action of "molding" has an almost paradoxical set of meanings: to mold is either to decay or to construct. Reading both these meanings onto the course of Melville's career allows us to see how decay of a certain kind of authorial standing correlates with Melville's expanding use of varied literary forms. Melville's growing investment across his career in the interdependency of growth and decay—a feature he first fixated on when reading Hawthorne's Mosses—shows Melville reworking the relationship between literary form and life. While F.O. Matthiessen claimed that the influence of Romantic organic form on American authors produced "formlessness," however, Melville's writing became increasingly preoccupied with form in direct relation to his investment in literature as in service of life (134). As Melville grew older, and as his audiences waned, he wrote increasingly for himself, and yet, this seeming insularity only deepened his commitment to the practice of constructing forms. Melville developed these paradoxes of form and decay, literature and life, out of the moss he borrowed from Hawthorne: a vital form whose greenness fed directly on decay.

Plants before Hawthorne

"It is strange how inanimate objects will twine themselves into our affections," the narrator of Typee (1846) remarks while staring at three bread-fruit trees, "especially in the hour of affliction" (244). The novel's narrator, Tomo, is the first of several characters that bear resemblance to Melville (Taji in Mardi, Redburn and Pierre in the novels named for each, and Ishmael in Moby Dick are Tomo's heirs). As a captive among the natives of a Polynesian island, Tomo has ample time to observe, speculate about native customs, and emote. In this context of isolation, he considers trees. Unlike many of his other memories, however, Tomo's memory of the trees stands in different relation to his current situation. "Even now, amidst all the bustle and stir of the proud and busy city in which I am dwelling, the image of those three trees seems to come as vividly before my eyes as if they were actually present, and I still feel the soothing quiet pleasure which I then had in watching hour after hour their topmost boughs waving gracefully in the breeze," he relates (244). While much of what happened to him in the South Seas seems remotely distant from his present life, the memory of these trees, strangely tangled in his "affections" feels "actually present." The conflicting emotions Melville associates with these trees—planting themselves in his "affections" during an "hour of affliction" and yet recalling, in the present, a remembered "soothing quiet pleasure" within that past affliction—are indicative of the complex ways plants become twined with memory in Melville's work.

Melville's early works—*Typee* and *Omoo*—are not overly concerned with plants; they turn from the ocean, to humans, and back to the sea again. Plants make a pronounced

appearance, however, in Melville's third novel—Mardi (1849); this book is also Melville's first foray into poetry or mixed-formal writing. The poems of Mardi are prolific, comprising almost as many as those in Melville's first book of poetry two decades later. Before the novel falls into poetic digressions, a "plot" begins. After an opening buddy-adventure-escape-from-a-whaleboat narrative that resembles the beginning of Typee and has elements of the opening chapters of Moby Dick, the rest of the novel consists of a sustained and fruitless quest for a white woman among a set of islands that become increasingly imaginary as the novel progresses. This elusive woman, Yillah, is associated with plant-life from the first moment we are introduced to her. Since Yillah doesn't speak English (though she seems to recognize and remember speaking something like it), the novel's narrator, Taji, who introduces himself to the island natives as a god and from this moment forward grows increasingly unreliable, steps in to translate her tale. Yillah's origin story is therefore doubly mediated. In this story, plants become agents of translation themselves, shuttling her from mortality into immortality, and from one mythical island to another:

She declared herself more than mortal, a maiden from Oroolia, the Island of Delights, somewhere in the paradisiacal archipelago of the Polynesians. To this isle, while yet an infant, by some magical power, she had been spirited from Amma, the place of her nativity. Her name was Yillah. And hardly had the waters of Oroolia washed white her olive skin, and tinged her hair with gold, when one day strolling in the woodlands, she was snared in the tendrils of a vine. Drawing her into its bowers, it gently transformed her into one of its blossoms, leaving her conscious soul folded up in the transparent petals.

Here hung Yillah in a trance, the world without all tinged with the rosy hue of her prison. At length when her spirit was about to burst forth in the opening flower, the blossom was snapped from its stem; and borne by a soft wind to the sea; where it fell into the opening valve of a shell; which in good time was cast upon the beach of the Island of Amma.

In a dream, these events were revealed to Aleema the priest; who by a spell unlocking its pearly casket, took forth the bud, which now showed signs of opening in the reviving air, and bore faint shadowy revealings, as of the dawn behind crimson clouds. Suddenly expanding, the blossom exhaled away in perfumes...Condensing at last, there emerged from this mist the same radiant young Yillah as before; her locks all moist, and a rose-colored pearl on her bosom (137-38).

This story stands in for another story, and the plant-imagery, tied to both Yillah and narrative mediation more generally, highlights the artifice of the tale. Later, once this verdurous lady has disappeared, Taji relates her directly to the green lands they travel through in search of her: "Was not Yillah my shore and my grove? My meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbor? Of all things desirable and delightful, the full-plumed sheaf, and my own right arm the band?" (145). The vines and blossoms associated with Yillah invoke femininity as a form that fails to simply speak for itself. Later in the novel, Melville employs this imagery of vegetating femininity to describe the emasculated king, Donjalolo, who lies tucked away on his island, surrounded by verdure as "the husk-inhusked meat in a nut; the innermost spark in a ruby; the juice-nested seed in a golden rinded orange; the red royal stone in an effeminate peach; the insphered sphere of spheres" (240). Even more vegetative than this sensuous king is his harem, who are "buried in a grove; so overpowered with verdure; so overrun with vines; and so hazy with the incense of flowers;

that they were almost invisible, unless closely approached" (242). In all these cases, a proliferation of verdure indicates both sensuousness—Yillah as an object of Taji's sexual interest, Donjalolo and his women, hidden in the trees—and unavailability; the greenery keeps us from knowing what *actually* happened to Yillah; the harem girls lie "almost invisible" in the shrubs.

Plants throughout *Mardi* are thus associated with femininity, narrative and epistemological mediation, and the employment of forms anterior to the narrative thrust of the novel. Plants are the verdurous padding for myths, and eventually, the impetus for disrupting narrative with poems. Yoomy, the poet character, expands on Yillah's mythical plant-capture and rebirth through a story he tells about a plant-people, "manikins" with "a green, lance-leaved vine" sprouting from their heads, and their maidens "all wreathed and festooned with verdure." These "little maidens" hold their "diminutive" green men "not with their arms, but with their viny locks; whose tendrils instinctively twined about their lovers, till both were lost in the bower" (282-3). In this case, there are violent effects to becoming "lost" in the shrubbery. These little ladies die, as women often do in the nineteenth century, once their blossoms bloom. Yoomy's parable of green men and women exaggerates tropes of femininity as a flowery affair. The novel's obsessive pursuit of heterosexual fulfillment throughout returns to flowers repeatedly to signal male-female coupling as conventional, over-wrought, cloaked in an aura of misdirected imagery and expectation that does not really conceal much, and with after-effects—the falling of blossoms—that are rank and unavoidable. 110

Mardi's preoccupation with poetry evolves within this context of ambivalence about femininity as unreliable, yet as predictable as the progression of a morning glory from vine to bud to flower to seed. Once Yillah disappears, handmaidens of Queen Hautia regularly confront the pursuing party of men. These ladies show up in a canoe and throw flowers, peppering the men with taunting singsong. The first time the flowers appear, one of the other adventuring men, Media, notes that the "dumb show...looks like poetry," and turns to Yoomy to translate. Yoomy's translations involve things like the "golden, pining jonquil, which you hold, buried in those wormwood leaves, says plainly to you—Bitter love in absence." Or, "The thrice waved oleanders," that mean, he says, "Beware—beware—beware" (215). Or, at a later meeting, "Iris mixed with nettles," a "cruel message"; or, finally, "Taji...the lily you seek is crushed" (309). Yoomy is responsible not only for producing poems that misdirect the narrative's attention, but also for translating a poetic, and feminized, language of flowers for Taji, who is substantially more prosaic.

The confluence in *Mardi* of flowers, femininity and formal variation, particularly with recourse to verse, all indicative of increased textual and experiential mediation, sheds light on such figures in correlation with one another in works like *Pierre* and *Weeds and Wildings*. These later works have another significant strain of plant images, though. "Well, the Hawthorne is a sweet flower," Melville wrote to his friend in July of 1852; "may it flourish in every hedge" (*Correspondence* 203). Hawthorne sent mosses and shocks into Melville's work.

Mosses & Letters

In his ecstatic, anonymous review "Hawthorne and His Mosses," published in *The Literary World* in 1850, Melville associates his subject (as his title suggests) with moss. He takes this association from Hawthorne's characterization of himself. In *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Hawthorne luxuriates over the brilliant, plush, green growth swathing the roof of his

house, a structure erected during an earlier period of American history; in Hawthorne's work, moss epitomizes a flourishing that feeds on (and decomposes) the past. Compared to Melville's bread-trees in *Typee*, which are both painful and pleasant when remembered in the present, Hawthorne's moss is far less personal, substituting the depth and decay of history for feelings infecting memory. Though Hawthorne seems to introduce moss in relation to his life, his possessions, and the house where he writes, he does so only to direct attention away from himself toward histories that surpass him. Look for Hawthorne, and you shall find green eating away at straw, and a library of poorly insulated, musty old books. Responding enthusiastically to this confluence of verdure and darkness, however, Melville mistakes moss for the man, conflating the two into "this sweet Man of Mosses" this "Mossy Man" (*Piazza Tales* 241). Melville introduces his discovery of Hawthorne as a transition from one form of plant-life (flowering, fruiting, feminine) to another (mossy, literary, Hawthorne-specific), mediated by a woman who is an allegorical "Cherry":

At breakfast the other day, a mountain girl, a cousin of mine, who for the last two weeks has every morning helped me to strawberries and raspberries,—which, like the roses and pearls in the fairy-tale, seemed to fall into the saucer from those strawberry-beds her cheeks,—this delightful creature, this charming Cherry says to me—"I see you spend your mornings in the hay-mow; and yesterday I found there 'Dwight's Travels in New England'. Now I have something far better than that,—something more congenial to our summer on these hills. Take these raspberries, and then I will give you some moss."—"Moss!" said I.—"Yes, and you must take it to the barn with you, and good-bye to 'Dwight.""

With that she left me, and soon returned with a volume, verdantly bound, and garnished with a curious frontispiece in green,—nothing less, than a fragment of real moss cunningly pressed to a fly-leaf.—"Why this," said I, spilling my raspberries, "this is the 'Mosses from an Old Manse." "Yes" said cousin Cherry "yes, it is that flowery Hawthorne."—"Hawthorne and Mosses," said I "no more: it is morning: it is July in the country: and I am off for the barn" (240).

Cherry's excessively fruity loveliness, "delightful," "charming," redundant, and utterly imagined, enables Melville's encounter with a different kind of "flowery" figure, one whose blooming encompasses both a floral fancy Melville would continue to affiliate with the feminine, the floral, and the formally mediated, and some dark palpable quality that will prove harder to digest. In his first letter to Hawthorne, Melville staged another encounter with the older writer as a sparking of lived literary response. Staging a reading of *The House of Seven Gables*, he imagines wandering through the house itself, coming upon a black book bound in a corner, entitled: "Hawthorne, a Problem" (*Correspondence* 185).

Melville's reading of Hawthorne's *Mosses* extends across two days; on the first go, he is particularly preoccupied by plant-life as a foil for Hawthorne himself; during his second reading, he considers the meaning of genius and particularly American forms of literary expression. Melville's readings, therefore, move from the specific to the general, and from an inquisitiveness about literary biography to a polemic about literary value: from particulars of a natural world as foils for Hawthorne to Hawthorne as a figure within a political and literary world that, by overlooking the depth of meaning within Hawthorne's natural particulars, has misunderstood Hawthorne's position as an American man of genius. Generally, critics have focused on the second half of Melville's essay; in writing about Hawthorne's genius, it has been argued, Melville is writing about himself, covertly asserting a comparable greatness. ¹¹² But the first half of the essay, in which Melville seems to be responding in almost real-time

to a remarkably transformative reading experience is essential for understanding the effects Hawthorne had on Melville at this particular moment in his career and the traces of these effects in the rest of Melville's work. In this first section, Melville attends particularly to Hawthorne's more biographical, and verdant, pieces: the opening essay, "The Old Manse," and "Buds and Bird-voices" especially.

"The Old Manse" is a remarkable essay, an "introduction" to the "author's place of dwelling" that weaves together literary and political history, natural scenes—the banks of the Concord River, an orchard—and domestic inhabitation in a space populated by "mouldy" books, ghosts, and the pleasures of family life. Plucking up the common affiliation of literary works as flowers and fruits at the end of the essay, Hawthorne, describes the works gathered in his *Mosses* as "idle weeds and withering blossoms" that have "blossomed out like flowers in the calm summer of my heart and mind," and with which he was "intermixed" earlier labors, "old, faded things, reminding me of flowers pressed between the leaves of a book." Hawthorne offers this rangy "bouquet" (of weeds and wildings living, wilting, and fully dead) "to any whom it may please" (26). This bouquet of mixed forms epitomizes different forms of vegetable growth, gathered in one bundle, that Hawthorne continues to explore through the essay.

First, he considers the Concord River and the plants that grow along it: "the long meadow-grass," "the overhanging boughs of elder bushes and willows or the roots of elms and ash trees and clumps of maples," the "rushes," "the yellow water-lily" and "the fragrant white pond-lily." The river is the most nonhuman space that Hawthorne describes; its "incurable indolence" renders it "happily, incapable of becoming the slave of human ingenuity" (5-6). Excused from powering looms or grinding grain, the river instead feeds non-instrumental plants, whose reflections in the "sluggish" water represent, for Hawthorne, the epitome of what art should aspire to: pure representation, idealized and aloof and independent of (the appearance of) human labor: "Each tree and rock and every blade of grass is distinctly imaged, and, however unsightly in reality, assumes ideal beauty in the reflection. The minutest things of earth and the broad aspect of the firmament are pictured equally without effort and with the same felicity of success" (6). This apparent easefulness, and uselessness, is commensurate, for Hawthorne, with the highest forms of art.

At the end of this catalogue of inhuman vegetation and its aesthetic allures, Hawthorne eddies around the water lilies, comparing the white to the yellow, and wondering that, given their shared material circumstances, these flowers can appear so differently to the senses:

It is a marvel whence this perfect flower derives its loveliness and perfume, springing as it does, from the black mud over which the river sleeps, and where lurk the slimy eel and speckled frog and the mud-turtle whom continual washing cannot cleanse. It is the very same black mud out of which the yellow lily sucks its obscene life and noisome odor. Thus we see, too, in the world that some persons assimilate only what is ugly and evil from the same moral circumstances which supply good and beautiful results—the fragrance of celestial flowers—to the daily life of others (6).

In the rank luxury of the white water lily, Hawthorne offers his readers instruction. Do not neglect, he coyly suggests, the dank and murky "moral circumstances" nurturing this bouquet (composed of specimens not always as luscious as the lily). What may appear saccharine sprouts from "black mud"; its roots mingle with amphibians and eels. Good and

evil, ugliness and beauty, spring from the same river bottom, irrespective of human requirements and desires.

Melville took the hint: a lily is not always a lily. Reading beyond the green surface of Hawthorne's opening essay, Melville turns to another form of vegetation that Hawthorne considers in the piece, the "orchard of the Old Manse," which, Melville observes, "seems the visible type of the fine mind that has described it." In the apple trees of Hawthorne's orchard, Melville reads a paring of "twisted, and contorted old trees," "grotesque forms" with "ripe" and "ruddy" "thoughts and fancies" (*Piazza Tales* 241). In the first flush of his reading, Melville attends acutely to this emergence of sweetness from something ancient and dark. In his review, he describes this quality as Hawthorne's "blackness," and defines this "blackness, ten times black" as the central feature of Hawthorne's writing. Though the surface of this work may seem lit by an "Indian-summer sunlight," rich with "bright gildings," Melville argues that "the world is mistaken in this Nathaniel Hawthorne" if they think he is all fancy and surface. A murky deep peat nurtures these growths, Melville learns from his reading, and this darkness "fixes and fascinates" him, he confesses (243-44).

Preoccupied by this play of light and dark, however, Melville overlooks another aspect of plant-life in Hawthorne's opening essay: a sustained fascination not only with how plants emerge from dark, unlovely places, but also with this emergence as irrespective of human use. In his account of the orchard that Melville takes to be an image of its author's mind, Hawthorne expresses a delight in plucking "the fruit of trees that he did not plant," stumps set in the ground and branches grafted by some distant predecessor, fruits that are almost like tropical plants that "grow spontaneously" on "summer islands," as close to the fruit "that grew in Eden" as a nineteenth-century Anglo-New Englander is apt to get (Mosses 10-11). Hawthorne "relish[es]" the absence of labor required by this harvest. Just as the reflections of the plants growing along the sluggish Concord River introduce one version of aesthetics—pure semblance, utterly nonhuman—the apples of the orchard represent another version of aesthetic labor: informed and enabled by past labors, yet, in the present, an easeful token, whose connection to a singular author has been lost. These apples belong to the tree more than the planter or picker. Here it is worth noting how different this aesthetic is from Melville's; though Melville, like the other authors I consider here, takes up organic imagery—the heart of which is the suggestion of aesthetic labor as an easefulness, and plantproductivity as a kind of non-event—nowhere in his work does authorship appear as unbelabored vegetation, fruition or fruiting.

Hawthorne's exploration of plant-life as a form of aesthetic production doesn't end in the orchard. He next turns to the vegetable garden, to plants closest to the circle of other forms of labor that define and dictate human life. In "the light toil" of his vegetable garden, Hawthorne experiences both a "squeamish love of the Beautiful" and "a hearty enjoyment" in the production of "real and tangible existences which the mind could seize hold of and rejoice in." The garden is both an aesthetic space and a practical one. Unlike the plants growing along the river, or the trees in the orchard that no longer require human attention to blossom and fruit, the plants in a kitchen garden depend upon human intervention. A certain sense of human accomplishment therefore attends their success; "I felt that by my agency something worth living for had been done," Hawthorne writes of his squashes. And yet, unlike the production of a woolen blanket or the construction of a cart, plants, though invited and tended by human hands, also emerge due to their own internal directives and surrounding conditions. Gardening, then, as Hawthorne describes it, offers not a counter to natural growth—the garden is not exactly the opposite of the forest or the untilled field—but an extension of wilderness into the backyard. The swelling of a cabbage "is a matter to

be proud of" because "we can claim a share with the earth and sky in producing it." Though the garden is the most explicitly aesthetic plant environment that Hawthorne describes in "The Old Manse"—he celebrates the "graceful" form of his squashes as surpassing the inventions of art, and yet dreams of a set of "delicate porcelain" squashes rendered in their exact image—the garden is also, like the river-bank and the orchard, a space governed by observation and attendance more than active human involvement, where "each individual plant becomes an object of separate interest" yet minimal intervention (11-12). The gardener is an observer, an attendant, and also a collaborator; he is never solely responsible for his art.

Even when he describes his intimate involvement with plant-life, Hawthorne uses plants to deflect agency away from himself as an author. For Melville, however, the plants populating Hawthorne's writing, particularly in the essays of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, become an approximation of the author's soul, a suggestive biographical flicker. In "Hawthorne and his Mosses," Melville's focus is by no means Hawthorne's use of plantimagery. He wants to get at Hawthorne himself. Accordingly, he imitates Hawthorne's use of plant-life in order to approach the author, looking through a green screen toward a more concrete image of a self. One of the facet of that self that most preoccupied Melville in his review, particularly in the second half, is how Hawthorne stands in relation to "genius."

Both Hawthorne, in "The Old Manse," and Melville, in his review, comment directly on genius. Hawthorne writes: "[g]enius, indeed, melts many ages into one," affecting "something permanent, yet still with a similarity of office to that of the more ephemeral writer. A work of genius is but the newspaper of a century, or perchance of a hundred centuries" (16). Melville responds: "great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring" (Piazza Tales 248). In these passages, Hawthorne and Melville employ different meanings of "genius," even as they seek to describe the relation between genius and history. Hawthorne uses an older form of the word, an animating spirit, a force, or a quality, while Melville uses a newer nineteenth-century meaning: a genius as an extraordinary individual. Accordingly, Hawthorne places more emphasis on the "work of genius" while Melville mulls over the artist responsible for such a work. Genius, for each, also stands in different relation to time. For Hawthorne, the specificity of "the age" is only apparent in reports, rather than imaginative works: "It is the age itself that writes newspapers and almanacs," he writes, while genius participates in a larger swathe of time, or dissolves time altogether (Mosses 16). For Melville, a genius is almost the opposite: he is a mirror of the time, and place, in which he lives. 114

In the second half of his essay, Melville explores the particular American-ness of Hawthorne's genius. Melville's elaboration of Hawthorne's genius draws on and eventually blurs both meanings of the term. In one of the most famous passages of the review, he begins by extolling his "countrymen" to acknowledge Hawthorne as a contemporary—and American—Shakespeare, and yet ends up in a far more democratic account of genius as an impersonal, animating force, that sends "one shock of recognition" through "the whole brotherhood":

And now, my countrymen, as an excellent author, of your own flesh and blood,—an unimitating, and perhaps, in his way, an inimitable man--whom better can I commend to you, in the first place, than Nathaniel Hawthorne. He is one of the new, and far better generations of your writer. The smell of your beeches and hemlocks is upon him; your own broad prairies are in his soul; and if you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far roar of his Niagara. Give not over to future generations the glad duty of acknowledging him for what he

is. Take that joy to yourself, in your own generation; and so shall he feel those grateful impulses in him, that may possibly prompt him to the full flower of some still greater achievement in your eyes. And by confessing him, you thereby confess others, you brace the whole brotherhood. For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round (*Piazza Tales* 248-9).

This passage is often taken to be an indication of Melville's declaration of his own genius: the shock of recognition as a Melville-specific shiver. Given the intensity of his response, it seems certain that reading Hawthorne was an electric experience for Melville. But he hardly seems to have imagined this connection as a closed circuit; and Melville's pantheistic celebrations elsewhere ("A Squeeze of the Hand" in Moby Dick, for example) suggest far more comprehensive fraternities of feeling. Melville is quite capable of reflecting explicitly on his self, and of being clear about this self-consideration. In the same essay, for example, he writes: "I cannot but be charmed by the coincidence; especially, when it shows such a parity of ideas, at least, in this one point, between a man like Hawthorne and a man like me" (252). And in his letters to Hawthorne, Melville frequently though often fatuously gives his correspondent fair warning when he begins to wax wildly on his self and experience. In one of these letters, he teases: "I talk all about myself, and this is selfishness and egotism. Granted. But how help it? I am writing to you; I know little about you, but something about myself. So I write about myself,—at least, to you. Don't trouble yourself, though, about writing; and don't trouble yourself about visiting; and when you do visit, don't trouble yourself talking. I will do all the writing and visiting and talking myself' (Correspondence 192). Less teasingly, and in a later letter, he writes, "The divine magnet is on you, and my magnet responds" (213). But Melville's emphatic egotism in these instances is partly a ploy, a response to an elusiveness in Hawthorne (a "blackness" and a "problem") that fascinated him. He puffs himself up to show Hawthorne in relief. 115

The cloaking of identity is a recurrent theme across Hawthorne's fiction. "The Minister's Black Veil," the elaborate thicket and alley windows through which Coverdale spies on his fellow farmers in *The Blithedale Romance*, and the "veiled lady" of that same novel, are some of the most obvious examples. In "The Old Manse," Hawthorne holds the veil to himself in a passage spelling out his relationship to his reader:

Has the reader gone wandering hand in hand with me through the inner passages of my being, and have we groped together into all its chambers and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. We have been standing on the green sward, but just within the cavern's mouth, where the common sunshine is free to penetrate, and where every footstep is therefore free to come. I have appealed to no sentiment or sensibilities save such as are diffused among us all. So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face, nor am I, nor have I ever been, one of those supremely hospitable people who serve up their own hearts delicately fried, with brain sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public (Mosses 25).

As Hawthorne covers his "individual attributes" with a veil, withdrawing his reader, it's easy to overlook what is yet offered: "the green sward," the "cavern's mouth," "the common sunshine," and, equally common, a participation in shared "sentiment and sensibilities." Hawthorne reminds his readers that, if their interest lies in art and not gossip, such common grounds are, after all, all that they can hope for from a book. While Hawthorne seems so much more reserved than Melville, the two authors are similarly invested in a commonness

of feeling "diffused among us all." What readers have to hope for, in other words, is what they already feel; Hawthorne may lead them to some bracing ledge from which they can peer into both light and dark, but the sentiments they encounter while faced with these views will be at once theirs, and also everyone's: cordoned off in a particular heart (that is not the author's heart) and also opening from that same space to a more pantheistic set of connections.

Melville would come to know this feeling. Responding to Hawthorne's letter in response to *Moby Dick*, Melville writes that he "felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's." "Ineffable socialities are in me," he continues; "I speak now of my profoundest sense of being, not of an incidental feeling" (*Correspondence* 212). Though the heat of Melville's responsiveness to Hawthorne—"I shall leave the world, I feel, with more satisfaction for having come to know you. Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality"—seems so intimate, tied to this particular individual to whom Melville corresponds, part of what accounts for the intensity of these feelings is the sense that such human connection has meaning beyond individuals: hearts beating outside of their own ribs, and even into some divine rib-cage. A "shock of recognition" shoots between Hawthorne and Melville, but that tremor extends "the whole circle round," resulting in an "infinite fraternity of feeling" (*Piazza Tales* 249, *Correspondence* 213).

Melville's "shock of recognition" is a diffusing force, rather than a solidifying one; far from consolidating a sense of genius, it opens the self to participation in currents and communities larger than a single person. And though he is struck by Hawthorne's singularity in "Hawthorne and his Mosses" and fascinated by him as a man, Melville is also thrilled by the possibility of genius as a participatory force extending beyond one man, or even two men, who might find one another's company, both in language and in person, electric. Towards the end of his review, Melville wonders, "May it not be, that this commanding mind has not been, is not, and never will be, individually developed in any one man? And would it, indeed, appear so unreasonable to suppose, that this great fullness and overflowing may be, or may be destined to be, shared by a plurality of men of genius?" (Piazza Tales 252). Still struck by the idea of genius as a possession of particular persons, Melville nonetheless expands the field not only toward "a plurality" but also toward an impersonal force that becomes synonymous with the feeling of genius itself: "this great fullness and overflowing." Melville's interest in genius as a form of plurality, a participation in something larger than the self, becomes more apparent when he turns to human capabilities as inhuman latencies, waiting to be activated.

At the end of his review, he writes, "I somehow cling to the strange fancy, that, in all men, hiddenly reside certain wondrous, occult properties—as in some plants and minerals—which by some happy but very rare accident (as bronze was discovered by the melting of the iron and brass in the burning of Corinth) may chance to be called forth here on earth, not entirely waiting for their better discovery in the more congenial, blessed atmosphere of heaven" (253). Melville uses the same word—"occult"—Emerson employs to describe a "relation between man and the vegetable" in *Nature* (1836) (*Essays* 11). At the end of his first intensive reading of Hawthorne, Melville imagines genius not as the possession of an individual, or even, necessarily, as a force available to a "fraternity" circling the globe, but as a material property activated by "rare accident," a dormancy that may stay slumbering, or may be startled to sprout or to spark.

In one of his letters from 1851, the most intensive period of friendship between the two authors, the time during which they saw each other the most, and exchanged letters with

the most frequency, Melville examines one version of this encompassing inhumanism in the context of Goethe, and of grass:¹¹⁶

In reading some of Goethe's sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, "Live in the all." That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,—good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must live in the all, and then you will be happy!" As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.

H. Melville

P.S. "Amen!" saith Hawthorne.

N.B. This "all" feeling, tho', there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying in 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. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion (*Correspondence* 193-194).

Within the letter itself, Melville critiques a dream of merging with grass, a dream which earlier in the same epistle he presents as the ideal condition for producing works of literature—the "calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose"—before telling Hawthorne that it is precisely that grassy moodiness which "circumstances" have denied him (191). Melville's signature splits the letter in half. Before signing, he is a skeptic; in the post-script, a romantic. The "all" that spans this split conveys two forms of thingliness. The first "all" is humble, passive, depersonifying, while the second seeps toward the sublime. Both have that particular blend of jocular pathos Melville is so capable of whenever he wants to suggest one thing while letting its alternative flash in the seriousness beneath his humor. Two readings exist simultaneously, neither one canceling the other out.

This tension pivots on the grass. From the moment of encountering Hawthorne both in person and in print—Melville would continue to approach plant-life as a space for examining such contradictions: grass as impersonal and yet available; moss as a growth dependent on decay. In his letters, Melville routinely set Hawthorne (as Hawthorne set himself in his non-fictions) in the context of greenery. He describes one letter as "a passing word said to you over your garden gate" and writes that the letter from Hawthorne to which this one responds has "refreshed all my meadows, as the Housatonic—opposite me—does in reality" (199). Melville's repetitive questioning in his letter to Hawthorne after *Moby* Dick—"Lord, when shall we be done growing?" and, in the next paragraph, "Lord, when shall we be done changing?"—invokes growth as a vegetative development that extends perpetually without culmination (213). In the light of his observation in an earlier letter—"I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould"—the questions of this last, long, ecstatic letter to Hawthorne (the only one Melville signs, simply, Herman), seem to, almost desperately, want to swap out some other model of development for the cycle of moldering and flowering that Melville would, eventual, embrace and make central to his poetics (193).

In "The Old Manse," Hawthorne describes the anticipation of decay. He begins by opening environmental conditions toward human conditions: autumn follows summer, and something follows the "flowers" produced when a person is at their peak:

How early in the summer, too, the prophecy of autumn comes! ... There is no other feeling like what is caused by this faint doubtful yet real perception—if it be not, rather, a foreboding—of the year's decay, so blessedly sweet and sad in the same breath. Did I say that there is no feeling like it? Ah! but there is!—a half-acknowledged melancholy like to this—when we stand in the perfect vigor of our life, and feel that time has now given us all his flowers, and that the next work of his never-idle fingers must be to steal them one by one away! (Mosses 27).

By the mid-point of his brief peak of personal connection to Hawthorne, Melville already sensed some autumn in the air. This fruition would not last. The period during which Melville could call Hawthorne, as he does with frequency in his letters, "My dear fellowbeing," "my fellow-mortal," would be a brief season, a summer in the Berkshires, a period of lightening and effusively opened trees and precariously balanced rocks (*Correspondence* 190, 192, 199). With the passing of this lived intimacy, Melville's career begins its dramatic shift toward new forms—an unraveling of the novel, and then a turn to the tales, and finally, poetry. But Melville would continue to write to, from, and amidst Hawthorne long after this season passed.

In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville described the sense of Hawthorne's impending influence on him as a seed. In one of the most tremulous passages in all of American literature, Melville writes:

To what infinite height of loving wonder and admiration I may yet be borne, when by repeatedly banqueting on these Mosses, I shall have thoroughly incorporated their whole stuff into my being,—that, I can not tell. But already I feel that this Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul. He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further, and further, shoots his strong New-England roots into the hot soil of my Southern soul (*Piazza Tales* 250).

Those roots still had far to go, and long periods of dormancy and silence, before, at the end of Melville's career the thorny vines they sprouted above ground came bearing, and dropping, roses.

Plants in Pierre

In *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (1852), Melville transposed some of his post-script to Hawthorne about the "all" feeling ("You must often have felt it, lying in 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") into the language of one of his characters (*Correspondence* 193-194). There, Isabel Banford tells her brother, Pierre Glenndinning, how she dreams of becoming a plant: "I pray for peace—for motionlessness—for the feeling of myself, as of some plant, absorbing life without seeking it, and existing without individual sensation. I feel that there can be no perfect peace in individualness. Therefore I hope one day to feel myself drank up into the pervading spirit animating all things (*Pierre* 119). In his letter to Hawthorne, Melville documented both the excessive self-absorption and the self-obliterating allure of the "all."

Isabel's language internalizes this excess by running adjectives into overburdened nouns: "motionlessness," "individualness," and elsewhere, "bewilderingness." The blustery language of *Pierre*, like Melville's own epistolary blusteriness at times, or the recurrence across his career of what one critic has called "bad writing," draws attention to itself, creating distance between speaker and speech. Language this highly wrought is meant to do more than convey meaning. On both a sentence and global level, Melville's novel makes visible the imaginative counter-currents of "becoming plant." The novel's many other "ambiguities" play out across a comparable structure: the highly agitated stylistic qualities of Melville's writing never quite amount to the significance they hyperbolically invoke, like heat-lightening that seems to portend a storm but instead only draws attention to friction in the sky.

This blistering pastoral turned gothic thriller, peopled with more female characters than most of Melville's other works combined, marks a significant point of rupture in Melville's career. It may also, as James Creech has suggested, be the work in which Melville worked through sexual feelings for Hawthorne most intensively. At the animating heart of *Pierre* is the possibility of incest between the novel's half-sister and brother, the dark and bewildering Isabel Banford, and the heroic yet bumbling Pierre Glenndinning. Creech considers this incest theme as "a Trojan horse for homosexual meaning," reading Hawthorne—with his darkness, both physical and intellectual, and "wild witch voice" as Melville describes it in "Mosses"—as an "erotic model" for the gypsyish, guitar-strumming Isabel (86, 119). Seeing Hawthorne in Isabel invites us to read other women in Melville (like plants in Hawthorne) as not really women (and not really plants). 121

Central to the novel is the difficulty involved in attempting to know another's interiority as one's own. In his first readings of Hawthorne, Melville was fascinated by a darkness that seemed always only half-concealed beneath a surface of lightness and ease. In *Pierre*, he tests the relation between surface and depth; but his surfaces, like his depths, are too emphatic. Melville's sentiment shoots upward as if to see just how far it can ascend before the cord binding it to the earth twists and breaks. When Isabel arrives, what is achieved is not balance, but a puncturing of the novel by a not quite nameable desire. Isabel's first-person narration breaks through the brittle veneer of narrative distance; her dizzying interiority seems caught in all surface even as she tries to excavate personal depths that would give some sense of continuity to her life. Submitted to these pressures, Melville's novel becomes something else. ¹²²

Before this shift happens, though, and on his way to meet Isabel, Pierre encounters an impressive and ominous set of plants. Before and after begins to splinter, and fiction feeds on life (like moss and vines feeding on deadening wood) as Melville describes the approach to the house where Hawthorne lived in the Berkshires and where Isabel lives in *Pierre*:

Where he stood was in the rude wood road [...] just where the out-posted trees formed a narrow arch, and fancied gateway leading upon the far, wide pastures sweeping down toward the lake. In that wet and misty eve the scattered, shivering pasture elms seemed standing in a world inhospitable, yet rooted by inscrutable sense of duty to their place. Beyond, the lake lay in one sheet of blankness and dumbness, unstirred by breeze or breath; fast bound there it lay, with not life enough to reflect the smallest shrub or twig. Yet in that lake was seen the duplicate, stirless sky above. Only in sunshine did that lake catch gay, green images; and these but displaced the imaged muteness of the unfeatured heavens.

On both sides, in the remoter distance, and also far beyond the mild lake's further shore, rose the long, mysterious mountain masses; shaggy with pines and hemlocks, mystical with nameless, vapory exhalations, and in that dim air black with dread and gloom. At their base, profoundest forests lay entranced, and from their far owl-haunted depths of caves and rotted leaves, and unused and unregarded inland overgrowth of decaying wood [...] from out the infinite inhumanities of those profoundest forests, came a moaning, muttering, roaring, intermitted, changeful sound: rain-shakings of the palsied trees, slidings of rocks undermined, final crashings of long-riven boughs, and devlish gibberish of the forest-ghosts.

But more near, on the mild lake's hither shore, where it formed a long semicircular and scooped acclivity of corn-fields, there the small and low farm-house lay; its ancient roof a bed of brightest mosses; its north front (from the north the mosswind blows), also moss-incrusted, like the north side of any vast-trunked maple in the groves. At one gabled end, a tangled arbor claimed support, and paid for it by generous gratuities of broad-flung verdure, one viny shaft of which pointed itself upright against the chimney-bricks, as if a waving lightning rod. Against the other gable, you saw the lowly dairy-shed; its sides close netted with traced Madeira vines; and had you been close enough, peeping through that imprisoning tracery, and through the light slats barring the little embrasure of a window, you might have seen the gentle and contented captives—the pans of milk, and the snow-white Dutch cheeses in a row, and the molds of golden butter, and the jars of lily cream. In front, three straight gigantic lindens stood guardians of this verdant spot. A long way up, almost to the ridge-pole of the house, they showed little foliage; but then, suddenly, as three huge green balloons, they poised their three vast, inverted, rounded cones of verdure in the air.

Soon as Pierre's eye rested on the place, a tremor shook him (Pierre 110).

The landscape that Melville describes here drips with symbolism, and yet is also quite literal. Just as Hawthorne in "The Old Manse" positions himself in relation to his reader in a liminal space—"standing on the greensward, but just within the cavern's mouth," so Melville here seems to seek out a similar balance between greenery and darkness (Mosses 25). "[P]rimeval woods," "mysterious mountain masses," a dumb lake and a mute sky surround the pastoral opening in which the house where Isabel is staying stands. This house—with its size, gables, and dairy fixed to one end—resembles the cottage that Hawthorne rented during the summer of 1851. 123 The house's position in the landscape also corresponds to the scene that Melville describes. Walking from Arrowhead, Melville's house to the north, one would pass through forests before coming to a long slope descending toward a large lake, the Stockbridge Bowl, on the other side of which stands Monument Mountain, where Melville and Hawthorne first met. Mountains in fact do surround the spot, particularly to the east and the south, where today Beartown State Forest connects October Mountain State Forest and the Monument Mountain Reservation (though these low-lying peaks would only appear so gothic and ghostly to a mind, such as Pierre's, deeply susceptible to Romantic impressions). The shape of the lake, also, is accurate; the Stockbridge Bowl curves softly along its northern edge, a "long" semi-circle, while its southern edge points away, the location, today, of the Stockbridge public beach. The house that Hawthorne lived in was later destroyed by fire so it is impossible to verify whether "the brightest mosses" Melville describes did indeed grow along its roof, or cover its northern face, but such an emphatic mossiness indicates a pervasive Hawthorneness regardless of fact or fiction. Within the passage, Melville extends this vegetable imagery into vines, a plant he would later associate with Hawthorne as the Vine character in *Clarel* (1875). This winding together of life and literature, real yet overdone, excessive yet affecting, is characteristic of Melville across his career. The portrait of Isabel-Hawthorne's house, like the mossy frontispiece to Melville's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, or his overblown self-portraits in his letters to Hawthorne, exemplifies Melville's tendency to mingle material, memory, and literary playfulness. (As, later in his career, his finely wrought rendering of a real slave uprising in "Benito Cereno" would make this flagrant cloaking of truth by performance its central paradox.)

The images Melville chooses to adorn Isabel's cottage invoke these double worlds. The vines creeping over the surface of the cottage do two things. The first vine we see, "one viny shaft...point[ing] itself upright against the chimney-bricks, as if a waving lightning rod," is a phallic figure, a plant in search of fire, either from hearth or from heaven, chimney or lightning. Suggestive as this vine is, it isn't particularly creepy (only silly); it participates in "generous gratuities of broad-flung verdure": an aspiring, if unsatisfied, plant. The other vine is more ominous; its netting and "imprisoning" of the dairy corresponds with the sudden appearance of a non-specified voyeur in the scene. Here is the "rural bowl of milk" that Melville promised Hawthorne's wife Sophia he was composing in *Pierre*. ¹²⁴ Yet this pastoral innocence is imprisoned by a vine and spied on by an obviously uninvited and unwanted reader. Melville introduces the second person into this scene. Perhaps while you are peering through windows, you can confirm for me whether the trees growing in front of the cottage—which was reconstructed and is available to classical musicians in residence during the summer at Tanglewood, but not open to the public—are lindens. Based on the image of them on Google Earth, they look large enough to have been planted at least in the nineteenth-century, though the trees Melville described would have been at least 100 years old themselves; yet lindens are long-living, so perhaps the trees you see are the same as those Melville imagined were seen by Pierre?

Whether or not the lindens are real or imagined, they carry such potent literary connotations that it is difficult, given the logic of the passage as a whole, in which almost every detail is burdened by both memory and imagination, to disbelieve that they were real. Lindens, with their crooked heart-shaped leaves, are the proverbial trees of the Romantic cult of climactic sadness: Goethe's Werther lies buried beneath one, while Coleridge, like the cheese here, stands imprisoned in his linden bower. That three lindens stand "guardians of this verdant spot" also seems significant; unlike Melville's other novels, which mainly eschew central characters for pairings or relations between individuals and collectives, and unlike Hawthorne's major novels, which have a quadrangle of characters at their center (Hester, Dimsdale, Pearl, Chillingsworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, Zenobia, Coverdale, Priscilla, Hollingsworth in *Blithedale Romance*; Miriam, Donatello, Hilda, and Kenyon in *The Marhle Faun*), *Pierre* is a novel of unstable triangles: Pierre, Isabel, Lucy; Pierre, Lucy, Mary; Pierre, Isabel, Delly; Pierre, Glen, Lucy: the arrangements shift, reform, and remained unresolved. Herman, Nathaniel, Sophia? Or trees that break fully into fiction, towering above the overwrought house like "huge green balloons."

In this seemingly innocuous landscape passage, therefore, Melville is writing from memory at least as much as imagination. The collision of fiction and fact contributes to hyperbolic tensions that animate the novel as a whole: suffusions of lived experience into scenes that can scarcely contain the magnitude of emotions and memories they are asked to represent, and yet which also apparently succeed in concealing these references to life. Melville sets up signs of Hawthorne everywhere while knowing that not everyone will read mosses and vines and a pastoral break in a "devilish" forest as belonging more to Hawthorne than to Melville. Melville is writing in a language that is not entirely his own, and yet, at the same time, more privately than he has yet dared in his career as an author. This

textual-biographical confluence expands the space of reference that plants invoke as intertexts in Melville's work.

Melville extends this train of thinking in the paragraphs that follow. Turning inward from the lindens, Pierre reflects on "two dependent and most strange coincidences" that he experienced earlier in the day. In the morning, Pierre, plagued by "presentiments," goes to break the news that he has an illegitimate half-sister to his mother. Before he can introduce his discovery, however, the Reverend Mr. Falsgrave interrupts their breakfast; the Reverend and Pierre's mother fall to discussing a local girl, Delly Ulver, who has recently been seduced by a local boy; their disapproval of this dalliance and condemnation of Delly give Pierre a clear sense of his mother's feelings concerning unsanctioned love; he storms out saying nothing. Going to find Isabel, and seeing her house tucked amid the forests, mountains, and lakes, Pierre realizes that it is the same house where Delly Ulver lives. Several illegitimate loves are housed under the same mossy, gabled, ceiling. Melville describes the effect of these "coincidences"—moments in which experience seems to anticipate his imaginings, and fate seems to write a story more fortuitous than any Pierre could imagine—on the young hero's heart and mind:

Strangest feelings, almost supernatural, now stole into Pierre. With little power to touch with awe the souls of less susceptible, reflective, and poetic beings, such coincidences, however frequently they may recur, ever fill the finer organization with sensations which transcend all verbal renderings. They take hold of life's subtlest problem. With the lightning's flash, the query is spontaneously propounded—chance, or God? If too, the mind thus influenced be likewise a prey to any settled grief, then on all sides the query magnifies, and at last takes in the all-comprehending round of things. For ever is it seen, that sincere souls in suffering, then most ponder upon final causes. The heart, stirred to its depths, finds correlative sympathy in the head, which likewise is profoundly moved. Before miserable men, when intellectual, all the ages of the world pass as in a manacled procession, and all their myriad links rattle in the mournful mystery.

Pacing beneath the long-skirting shadows of the elevated wood, waiting for the appointed hour to come, Pierre strangely strove to imagine to himself the scene which was destined to ensue. But imagination utterly failed him here; the reality was too real for him; only the face, the face alone now visited him; and so accustomed had he been of late to confound it with the shapes of air, that he almost trembled when he thought that face to face, that face must shortly meet his own (111).

The effects that Melville describes go beyond those called for by the facts, and that is precisely the point: "imagination utterly failed him here; the reality was too real for him." What *Pierre* feels himself caught in seems to be fiction on a grand scale: too comprehensive to comprehend, too real to be real. That Melville tangles "grief" and "suffering" into these effects, that he describes them as isolated, portioned off and only available to certain humans—"poetic beings," "miserable," "intellectual" "men"—is instructive. Like the figure of the nineteenth-century poetess, who stereotypically turns inward, speaking lyrically to herself of a secret grief, so Melville's language in *Pierre* tests and is tested by a new kind of fraught interiority. These passages set up Pierre's introduction to Isabel; Isabel then further internalizes the conceit.

Isabel's knowledge of her surroundings—of what she isn't—predates knowledge of herself. Until late in her childhood, Isabel cannot distinguish between herself and the inhuman things that surround her. Sequestered from language of all forms, both written and

spoken, and raised in "desolate" surroundings, Isabel's context for understanding herself as human is limited socially and, in compensation, imaginatively wild; she is fantastically unfinished. When she does at last learn to make this distinction, the natural world she distances from herself is spooky and alarming, archetypal and symbolically resonant: "When I saw a snake trailing through the grass, and darting out the fire-fork from its mouth, I said to myself, That thing is not human, but I am human. When the lightening flashed, and split some beautiful tree, and left it to rot from all its greenness, I said, That lightning is not human, but I am human. And so with all other things" (122). Isabel's inhumanities are not purely vegetal, though a blasted tree stands at their center, mediating between animal (a snake) and inanimate forces (a lightening bolt). The inhumanities for Isabel are themselves a form of strange mediation—not quite other, not quite self. In this sense, through Isabel Melville extends the confluence of femininity and slight, non-human, things we saw him make in Mardi. Although Isabel claims that she applies this formula—"That thing is not human, but I am human"—to "all other things," cracks in her schema allow the inhuman to wander from lightening into the "stares" of humans that seem to dislike or judge her, or from the goodness of human hearts into the brightness of a "human summer" or "human sun." Between the human and the inhuman stands a permeable boundary that I have examined in earlier chapters as a form of "bareness." Isabel herself exemplifies a version of this substantive thinness in which a material and imaginative fullness collide.

The threat that the inhumanities seem to pose to Isabel therefore has less to do with their otherness than with their proximity to humanness. Isabel speaks of the inhumanities as if they precede humanness; eventually, she comes to know herself only through the "general feeling of [her] humanness among the inhumanities" (123). "I can not speak coherently here," she tells Pierre, "but somehow I felt that all good, harmless men and women were human things, placed at cross-purposes, in a world of snakes and lightnings, in a world of horrible and inscrutable inhumanities" (122). The antithesis Isabel presents between "men and women" and "a world of snakes and lightnings" is not a true dichotomy; Isabel also refers to men and women as "human things." More than in any of his other novels, Melville investigates in Pierre the confluences of a precarious balance between the human and inhuman and the capabilities of literary language not only to depict this precariousness, but also to enact it. While mid-century writing about nature drew heavily on the Romantic sublime, Isabel's inhumanities are not sublime as Melville's "inhuman whale" is, 126 or the "inhuman solitudes" of Andes, "Antarctic seas," or "an unbounded prairie sheeted with driven snow," other examples Melville gives in the "Whiteness of the Whale" chapter in Moby Dick of man "half-shipwrecked" by the terror of natural expanses. The "inhuman," in its brief appearance in *Moby Dick*, is a place where one would fear "to lose oneself," nature that negates the human by leaving him conscious of how profoundly he is alone (210-211). Isabel's inhumanities also have to do with a rarifying loneliness, but they cannot shatter her as the sublime aesthetically shatters subjects because Isabel has no solid center to break apart in the first place.

During the course of his interviews with Isabel, Pierre is pulled into the proximate wild, a backyard sublime in which she is subject to fits of "bewilderingness." After their final meeting, Pierre leaves his half-sister full of "thoughts and fancies never imbibed within the gates of towns," inhuman thoughts and fancies that are "only given forth by the atmosphere of primeval forests" or "the eternal ocean" (*Pierre* 139). He has experienced the wild in the context of the human, and, like Isabel, now has trouble distinguishing between the two. Transformed by this encounter, Pierre emerges from romantic adolescence, his Wordsworthian explanations of his soul's correspondence to nature irrevocably disoriented

by the suggestiveness of a human face. Melville withdraws from his hero in the wake of this transformation: "We know not Pierre Glendinning's thoughts as he gained the village and passed on beneath its often shrouding trees" he writes (162).

Pierre's retreat from Isabel is almost the opposite of the spanning from wilderness to civilization that Hawthorne traces in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) when Arthur Dimmesdale returns to town after his interview with Hester and Pearl in the forest. There are significant resonances between these scenes, Hester and Pearl as characters mediating between wildness and civilization, and Isabel, caught between humanness and inhumanities. Dimmesdale's interview in the forest intensifies his perception of "wildness" when he returns to town. Retracing his steps, he notices that "[t]he pathway among the woods seemed wilder, more uncouth with its rude natural obstacles, and less trodden by the foot of man, than he remembered it on his outward journey" (*Scarlet Letter* 188). Dimmesdale's alteration is most apparent in his relation toward other humans. He feels lured to whisper temptations in the ears of those that pass, to be an agent of disorder. Hawthorne sums the change: "That self was gone! Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter kind of knowledge that!" (194).

Pierre's new knowledge, after speaking with Isabel, is similarly bitter, and internal. The world has not changed, though he has. Rather, Pierre experiences his internal transformation as rewritten in the landscape. Though Hawthorne gives us more of Dimmesdale's interior state at the moment he returns from the forest to town than almost anywhere else in the novel, Melville intentionally retreats as a narrator during Pierre's comparable return, diffusing his protagonist's interior state into what he has just absorbed from Isabel, and what he senses now in the world around him. Instead of telling us what Pierre sees and hears and feels, Melville gives us a series of negations, trying on another technique of Hawthorne's: "say[ing] NO! in thunder" (Correspondence 186). As Pierre wanders back through the forest, Isabel's inhumanities dominate the landscape; he "saw no light from man, and heard no sound from man, but only, by intervals, saw at his feet the soft groundlightnings, snake-like, playing in and out among the blades of grass; and between the trees, caught the far dim light from heaven, and heard the far wide general hum of the sleeping but still breathing earth" (Pierre 162). These surfaces that Isabel feels, and fears, and which constitute her interiority, become Pierre's inner and outer world as well. The plants of Pierre are haunted; the novel's characters are far less human than any Melville had yet composed (though they anticipate the flatness of Bartleby, The Confidence Man, and Billy Budd). In Pierre, Melville intensifies tensions between literary surface and experiential, emotional, or truthful depths—a tension at the center of imagining plants—that will continue to define his later work.

Ruins & Plants: Form & Decay

Although Melville's career remains one of the most varied in American literature, continuities of theme and image emerge across works of otherwise great stylistic difference. One of these recurrent motifs is that of a decaying structure, almost always man-made, covered by the verdure of moss or vines. We have seen how Melville was drawn to Hawthorne's mossy old manse, and how a sister-image of this house appears as Isabel's dwelling in *Pierre*. Recall how moss, for Hawthorne, is a sign of time's material ravages; he associates his "moss-covered mansion" with "the ghost of the gray past." Though

Hawthorne finds these signs of history omnipresent and oppressive, he veers toward the Transcendental when he claims that an animating "spirit" counteracts such forces of decay with the return of "verdure" and "freshness" each year (Mosses 144). Hawthorne associates a spiritual decrepitude with the persistence of history into the material present, and a spiritual vitality with the material renewal of flowers and new spring grass. The "verdure" of moss is therefore almost paradoxical; it stands on the side of history and culture rather than nature. This contradictory feature of Hawthorne's moss appealed to Melville as much if not more than Hawthorne's floweriness. For Melville, moss began as representative of a gap between Hawthorne's surfaces and secrets, and eventually, between literary surface and experiential depth.

Following Melville's review of Hawthorne's mosses, the next published appearance of decaying structure, swathed in green, appears in *Moby Dick*. In the chapter on "A Bower in the Arsacides," a narrator swerves from Ishmael and his lot to describe a visit among natives of the Arsacides who have transformed the skeleton of a sperm whale into a shrine. From the moment the whale washes up on shore, his remains begin to mingle with the island's plant-life. The native find the whale "dead and stranded" after a storm "with his head against a cocoa-nut tree, whose plumage-like, tufted droopings seemed his verdant jet" (422). Once the whale's flesh deteriorates and the sun bleaches his bones, his discoverers transport the skeleton beneath "a grand temple of lordly palms" where the whale's remains grow increasingly green:

It was a wondrous sight. The wood was green as mosses of the Icy Glen; the trees stood high and haughty, feeling their living sap; the industrious earth beneath was as a weaver's loom, with a gorgeous carpet on it, whereof the ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and woof, and the living flowers and figures. All the trees, with all their laden branches; all the shrubs, and ferns, and grasses; the message-carrying air; all these unceasingly were active. Through the lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving the unwearied verdure. Oh, busy weaver! unseen weaver!—pause!—one word!—whither flows the fabric? what palace may it deck! wherefore all these ceaseless toilings? Speak, weaver!—stay thy hand!—but one single word with thee! Nay-the shuttle flies-the figures float from forth the loom; the freshet-rushing carpet forever slides away. The weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened, that he hears no mortal voice; and by that humming, we too, who look on the loom are deafened; and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it. For even so it is in all material factories. [...] Ah, mortal! Then, be heedful; for so, in all this din of the great world's loom, thy subtlest thinkings may be overheard afar.

Now, amid the great, white, worshipped skeleton lay lounging—a gigantic idler! Yet, as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver; himself all woven over with the vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure; but himself a skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life; the grim god wived with youthful Life, and begat him curly-headed glories (423-424).

In this passage, Melville compares moss to the trees that feel "their living sap"; these trees, "ground-vine tendrils," "living flowers," "shrubs, and ferns, and grasses," all green, convey the "fresher verdure" of life. Melville again revises Hawthorne's image by figuratively tangling moss with these other forms of plant-life. Another indication that he has Hawthorne in mind is his metaphorical moss's location in the very real "Icy Glen," an area

in the Berkshires, south of the Stockbridge Bowl and due east of Monument Mountain, where Melville and Hawthorne first met. Following Hawthorne, Melville tries out what it would be like to associate this verdure with "spirit." But Melville's silent "unseen" "weavergod," like the "vast impersonality" Ahab threatens, withdraws, producing only material indications of an unapproachable immateriality. The comparison Melville draws between this god's productions and the invisibility of workers laboring in "all material factories" is another reminder of Melville's disinclination to equate material productions with unseen hands. In Melville's passage, material is not a sign of spirit, but rather a reminder of spirit's retreat. The whale's skeleton—an "idler"—supplants the immateriality of an industrious god; bones and vines mingle, and no Transcendental symbolism inscribes this greening corpse.

In contrast to a Transcendental vision of nature's language, Melville substitutes modes of measurement and transcription that are more responsive to materials as materials. First, his narrator enters the whale's skeleton—"brushed the vines aside—broke through the ribs"—to measure its insides. Like Theseus with Ariadne's thread, the narrator wanders the labyrinths of the whale's interior with a ball of unwinding twine; finding his way out again, he then returns with "a green measuring-rod" cut from one of the surrounding trees. Though the carcass is swathed in greenery, and though the narrator recruits more of that green as a measuring tool, the measurements he takes further reinforce the inert materiality of the skeleton: far from a web of signifying life, "naught was there but bones," the narrator concludes. In contrast to the tumult of vegetable life outside its ribs, the barrenness of the whale's interior resembles an architectural structure; the narrator wanders its "shaded colonades and arbours" (423). Measuring the whale as if it were a building, the narrator treats the material remnants of biological life like human manipulations of stone.

Rather than see vines, flowers, and bones as symbols of nature's language, the narrator maintains distinction yet proximity between language and material by later tattooing the whale's "skeleton dimensions" onto his right arm. It is not only "valuable statistics" the narrator has written on his body; he keeps these numbers simple (nothing so small as an inch) in order to allow "the other parts of [his] body to remain a blank page for a poem [he] was then composing." At this revelation of bodily transcription, the narrator, whose "untattoed parts" are scarce, becomes definitely distinguished from Melville (whose much closer avatar Tomo in Typee shudders at tattooing) (424). By distinguishing author and speaker along this line of writing, Melville winks again at Hawthorne's biographical reticence, his use of literature as a "veil." Cloaked in his own disguise (one of his favorites, the swashbuckling sailor), and connecting nature's materials of vine, flower, and animal bone with the human body, Melville at the same time contradicts Hawthorne, asserting a closeness rather than identity between writing and life in a more general sense, both nonhuman and human. It is significant that at this early stage in his career, in the thick of long-winded fiction, Melville chose poetry as indicative of this split between author and voice yet fusion of language and life.

This greening, architectural, whale carcass of *Moby Dick* is a revision of Hawthorne's mossy house. In *Pierre*, Melville again revisits this image. *Pierre* is Melville's novel most concerned with Romantic nature; and, under the effect of Melville's hyper-attention to the natural, the natures of *Pierre* splinter and fray. Nature grows profoundly cultured: a surface of peaks, forests, and pastoral fields that echo back the highly rhetorical, intertextual, psychological and emotional instabilities of the characters, sending reverberations through the novel as through a valley flanked by stone. (Pierre and Isabel's names draw attention to this hollow ringing; *Pierre Glen-dinning*: a stone sending sound waves through a glen; and Isabel, who of course, is-a-bell.) Similarly, then, when greenery and structure appear in *Pierre*,

they have migrated further away from nature toward culture. Melville describes "the democratic element" in America to a corroding element that wears away the past and compares this to the production in France of "grape-vinegar poured upon copper plates" to produce "verdigris, the primitive material of one kind of green paint." While this version of structure and decay may seem like more of a stretch than the shift from mossy house to monumental greening whale, Melville reminds us of the very same contradictions he relishes in these earlier instances. Though "in general nothing can be more significant of decay than the idea of corrosion," he writes, "yet on the other hand, nothing can more vividly suggest luxuriance of life, than the idea of green as a color; for green is the peculiar signet of allfertile Nature herself." Green is only a sign of nature, and Nature itself appears as a wobbly sign for culture. Though Melville suggests that in democracy "America seems to possess the divine virtue of...the most mighty of nature's laws...that out of Death she brings Life," yet, in the next paragraph, he uses nature in a social Darwinian sense to draw distinctions between Americans: "the vast mass of families be as the blades of grass, yet some few there are that stand as the oak" (Pierre 8-9). Though there are cycles of life and death in grass and trees, Melville considers the unevenness of nature as a single signifying image. As a sign for culture, the diversity of natural forms draws attention to the artifice, rather than the organic development, of political and social structures.

From Melville's reading and review of Hawthorne's Mosses, through Moby Dick and Pierre, structure migrates from a private house to an animal to a public institution, and the green image of decay that reinvigorates life transforms from moss to verdigris to oak and grass. Since Melville may have first begun to develop this complex of images through his reading of Hawthorne, it makes sense that literature itself would become another one of these structures, subject to decay. Just as the layered contradictions of meanings in these images—decay subsumed into a living green, language divorced from material yet written on the body, nature rendered hollow by culture—so Melville's interest in literary structure grows increasingly complex in the second half of his career, from Moby Dick through the late poetry. Melville may have already been thinking about intertextuality and textual memory as a feature of literary structure when he first read Hawthorne. The electric shock he felt while reading of Hawthorne's house and moss in 1850 may have been informed, for example, by descriptions of monumental ruins and vegetation in the Holy Land in Thomas Hope's Anastasius, or Memoirs of a Greek (c. 1790s), a book Melville obtained in 1849. There, Melville marked a descriptive passage of monuments around the ancient fortress at Rhodes, ruins that were both covered with vegetative life and "mouldering," the same word he would use later to describe himself as a writer to Hawthorne:

Monuments that have already been so long in a state of progressive decay, as less to retain the regular forms of art than they assume the ruder semblances of nature; as to offer less of a mode of existence gone by than of a new one commencing; less of a lapse into death than a return to a different shape of life; less of a dissolution than of regeneration: as again on all sides to let in through their crumbling walls the broad glare of day; again everywhere to show their mouldering joints clothed in fresh vegetation, and again, at every step, to display their many precincts tenanted by the buzzing insect, and the blithe chirping bird,—such monuments have their gloom irradiated by at least an equal portion of gaiety; and resemble the human [single marked] frame so entirely returned to its original dust as to preserve no trace of its former lineaments, and only to break forth afresh from its kindred clay, in the shape of plants and flowers more luxuriant and more gaudy....[double marked]...such edifices preserve their sadness unaltered; they chill the sense, oppress the heart, and

make the blood run cold: for they resemble the human body just abandoned by the vivifying soul; just stiffened into an insensible and ghastly corpse; just displaying the first awful signs of fast approaching corruption" (Anatasius 205-206 in *Marginalia II* 77).

Hope's description of the ruins as resembling "the human body just abandoned by the vivifying soul" anticipates Melville's passages in *Moby Dick* on the sperm whale's body abandoned by its own life, yet surrounded by the forest's living green. Hope turns his attention to a disorienting timelessness of the ruins. The brighter moss is the more it seems to bespeak life and overlook decay; the more ancient a ruin is, the less it seems to invoke "a mode of existence gone by" than to invoke "a new one commencing," "a different shape of life," "regeneration." The deep time of ancient edifices makes them seem like works of nature, rather than of human construction, and, at the same time, this history appears out of step with the perpetual present of plants, insects, birds. These more fragile instances of present life in conjunction with the almost geological timescale of the ruins leads Hope to speculate on human death; ruins are like buried humans whose decomposing bodies feed "plants and flowers more luxuriant and more gaudy." Both ruin, and non-human life—both deep past and (what still seemed in the nineteenth-century like) the eternal present of natural cycles—occlude human time, referring to human lives or bodies that are no longer there, inviting ghosts that are only felt through the absence of their form. ¹³¹

It is probable that Melville would have recalled these descriptions of ruin and vegetation in the Holy Land when he read Hawthorne's Mosses; similarly, it is probable that he had both Hope and Hawthorne in mind when, in 1856, following what would be his final interview with Hawthorne, Melville undertook a visit to the Holy Land himself. While Melville's journal entries documenting the days he spent with Hawthorne in England are sparse, concluding deflatedly with "Tired of Liverpool," his writing revives as he turns to descriptions of the towns and ruins he visits in Turkey, Egypt, and modern day Israel-Palestine (Journals 51). In particular, he lingers over descriptions of his visits to the pyramids at Cairo, whose vast simplicity he compares to the ocean: "As with the ocean, you learn as much of its vastness by the first five minutes glance as you would in a month, so with the pyramid. Its simplicity confounds you." Melville was struck by how much the pyramids seemed like a work of nature; the ruins do not seem human-made, and yet, Melville calls the Egyptians the "[o]nly people who made their mark": "As long as earth endures some vestige will remain of the pyramids. Nought but earthquake or geological revolution can obliterate them" (75-79). Melville is particularly struck by the lack of vegetation on the ruins. "Grass near the pyramids, but will not touch them," he writes, "as if in fear or awe of them"; (more likely, the scrambling of tourists kept away the green). Later he adds, with emphasis, "Color of pyramids same as desert. Some of the stone (but few) friable; most of them hard as ever. The climate favors them. Pyramids not in line. Between, like Notch of White Mountains. No vestige of moss upon them. Not the least, Other ruins ivied, Dry as tinder. No speck of green' (76, emphasis Melville's). Melville makes note of the "Cedar & Cyprus" as the "only trees" growing in Istanbul; he notices the "Evergreen vines mantling" the walls outside the city, a contrast everywhere between "desert and verdure" (65, 62, 74). In a section of his journal titled the "Barrenness of Judea" Melville compares the stony facades of the city to a "skeleton" beneath the surface of a "living & rosy man." He elaborates: "No moss as in other ruins no grace of decay—no ivy—The unleavened nakedness of desolation" (84). In the desert, Melville's attention to the living "grace" moss gives to ruins is yet another instance of a

sustained investigation of structural decay and vitality, of architecture and non-human nature, and of literary structure and experience.

This same image of structure and decay turns up repeatedly across Melville's poetry: from the section on epitaphs and unmarked graves in the "wilderness" at the end of *Battle-Pieces*, through the ancient ruins covered with vines that form the backdrop for *Clarel's* action, and the decaying mailbox of "John Marr" set in the American prairie. In Melville's poetry, the image of an ancient structure covered with life that both destroys and enlivens it constellates the ideas of nature and culture, history and present vitality, and literary structure and experience that we have seen Melville explore in *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*; the image also becomes a concentrated reflection of Melville's thoughts on poetry itself. Melville "turned" to poetry in the later half of his career because the architectural history of poetry—its predetermined forms, an inheritance of meter, line, and sound—offered a useful structure against which to play out the messiness of life. Melville was interested in poetry that gave an impression of both established form and decay; this tension accounts for the awkwardness that characterizes much of his verse.

The composition of Melville's late poetry—John Marr, Timoleon, and Weeds and Wildings—overlaps with the development of literary "naturalism" in the late nineteenth-century, and with the interest of other writers in forms of social "degeneration." Yet Melville's interest in poetry as structure and decay differs from these authors' interests in a new kind of novel focused on human lives as determined or degenerate. As Melville's career became increasingly out of synch with literary trends of the period, his work turned inward; in this regard, Melville's late poetry epitomizes some qualities of lyric poetry—particularly John Stuart Mill's "overheard speech," a quiet speaking to the self—qualities that would become influential in twentieth-century debates about the lyric, debates from which Melville's poetry was mostly excluded. At the same time, however, while Melville's poetry seems to resist a reader, his poetry is also more open than these models of lyric allow for—opened by intertext, by memory, and by the implications of poetry as a form combining inherited structures with the decay of a certain version of authorship itself.

Melville marked another passage in *Anastasius* in which the author describes humans as "wholly passive," "an instrument in the hands of Providence as the insentient plant, or the unorganized mineral" (379). This image corresponds strikingly with Emerson's description in Nature of man "rest[ing] upon the bosom of God" like "a plant upon the earth," with life put "forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old" (Essays 41). While the primary writers I considered in the first half of this dissertation—Dickinson, Higginson, Thoreau, Emerson—were drawn to images of plants as figures of passive absorption and reception, Melville extended organic imagery beyond vegetation through flowering to decay. Plants, for Melville, were not only figures of agentless development—he was far too canny to imagine he could see any force in nature without wearing culture-colored glasses—but also agents of decay and renewal. Thus, as I began this chapter, when Melville told Hawthorne after Moby Dick that he had sprouted, vegetated, flowered and "must soon fall to the mould," this self-description declared not so much an end to achievement, but the activation of a new phase for Melville of investigating literary structure itself (Correspondence 193). In Pierre, he let moss wear away fiction; the careful tales of his mid-career evince a new form of cultivation; and his poetry combined rigid structure with unruly history and experience. By the time he was writing Weeds and Wildings and Billy Budd, Melville had moved on to a very different version of flowering.

But here arrest the loom—the line. Though damask be your precious stuff, Spin it not out too superfine: The flower of a subject is enough.

— Herman Melville, Weeds and Wildings, Chiefly with a Rose or Two (1891)

One of Melville's drafted subtitles for Weeds and Wildings was and other inutilities (Weeds 169). In my reading of Hawthorne's "Old Manse" in the previous chapter, I showed how Hawthorne's plant-metaphors—the lilies along the bank of a river, the fruit in an untended orchard, the gourds in his garden—became figures for aesthetic labor as non-utilitarian: extravagant embellishments. Through the bulk of his career, Melville did not view artproduction in these terms. Rather than a blithe breathing in of perfume, Melville's work evinces the effects of writing as the effortful compression of attar. Weeds and Wildings culminates with a comparison between these two visions of art making in "The Rose Farmer"; my reading of Melville's plants culminates with a reconsideration of the posture of ease that Melville strikes in this late manuscript: the closest he ever gets (after his first sprawl in the hay with Hawthorne's Mosses) to Whitman-like "loafing" in the grass. But first, I wish to draw attention to this posture as a posture. Melville puts on a Hawthornian gait of aesthetic easefulness in these poems. We should not mistake the costume for the content, though. While the overt themes of Weeds and Wildings are domesticity, love, nostalgia, and the seasons, the manuscript's embedded themes are the ways authorship as an "inutility" may forfeit desire for an audience in exchange for a kind of open secret. The manuscript explores the relationship between these themes as a negotiation of form, moving back and forth between poetry and prose.

When read through these themes, the manuscript's surface attention to domestic bliss grows insecure. Weeds and Wildings has largely been taken to be a collection of harmless ditties, a "bouquet" of flowers that Melville, contented after years of psychic wrestling and unhappy domestic life, bequeathed to his wife before his death. 134 Yet, the primary piece of textual evidence linking Melville's wife to the manuscript is a hand-written note, "Lizzie," beside a dedication "To Winnefred" placed at the beginning of the book. The most authoritative edition of Weeds and Wildings to date, however, describes the handwriting of this note as unidentified—not clearly belonging to Melville or to Lizzie, the two hands otherwise most visible across the text (Weeds 136). Furthermore, Melville's employment of a fictional name—"Winnefred"—indicates the striking of a pose. Elsewhere, his dedications are direct; he gave Moby Dick to Hawthorne and Timoleon to the artist Elihu Vedder. He also, on other occasions, took the dedication as a literary space in its own right, a space capable of absorbing irony as easily as sincerity. His extravagant dedication of *Pierre* to "His Majesty, Mount Greylock" is a useful intertext for his dedication to "Winnefred." In Weeds and Wildings, Melville returns to his memories of Arrowhead, the setting of Pierre. He has not entirely shaken off the irony he first tried on there.¹³⁵

What's more, "To Winnefred" is not the only dedication included in the manuscript. The third section of the manuscript, "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," begins with an address to Washington Irving, "To a Happy Shade." By addressing Irving, Melville initiates a more direct thematic shift to writing as a process of rereading: a rendering of already received

materials, rather than the transcription of particular scenes from memory. Like the "tears of the happy" in "To Winnefred," the happiness extended to Irving is a little too much like complacency to entirely ring true. Melville imagines that Irving in the autumn of the afterlife probably cares little that someone is rifling through his stories, plucking out characters to remake as his own. But the final sentence of the dedication, while expressing the expectation of bestowing pleasure, also introduces uncertainty: "For aught I, or anybody, knows to the contrary, thy vision now be such that it may even reach here where I write, and thy spirit be pleased to behold me inspired by whom but thyself' (*Weeds* 25). Dead writers read over our shoulders; if we cannot know whether this is true, similarly, we cannot know what their response might be. In the space of this growing uncertainty, Melville's final assertion—that the work that follows is inspired "by whom but thyself'—begins to echo. (And as we will see, it is not only Irving that Melville imagines alongside his writing desk.)

In another work from the end of his career, "At the Hostelry," Melville extends this ironic attention to a preface. Again, there is precedence in Melville's career for this emphasis on literary intensification of what would seem like peripheral textual moments, when the "sub-sub" archivist that precedes *Moby Dick* draws our attention to a model of authorship as an under-acknowledged burrowing in the texts of others. In the "Preface" to "At the Hostelry" Melville also forswears claims to authorship, asserting the resemblance between himself and the two first-person figures of the following piece: the Marquis, and Jack Gentian:

And yet, in the truest sense, author am I none. For is he who is at the pains of working into literary form the sallies of an improvisator, suppressing his more flighty pyrotechnics, and endeavoring to methodize into unity his detached inspirations delivered at various times; can such a mere craftsman lay claim to authorship? Hardly, since that implies origination.

Now origination is just the case here. The Marquis is the originator of *At the Hostelry*, and, for that matter, he is the originator of *An Afternoon in Naples* as well; for Jack Gentian, its narrator, is not only his friend, but his admiring disciple, getting all his inspiration from him, rejoicing in nothing more than that at one of his own sallies a hearer exclaims—'Jack, that's just like the Marquis!' (*Poems* 352-353).

This preface, disavowing authorship as "origination," opens onto another specious dedication, in which Melville's narrator describes writing as an experience of being "possessed" by the Marquis's spirit; "this possession in effect amounted to an impersonation of you," he writes (355). These self-conscious opening literary gestures reveal how Melville saw the edges of literary works—dedications, prefaces—as moments at which to draw attention to literariness more generally as a performance. Why, then, when these other instances are so expressively layered, is "To Winnefred" taken to be confessional? If authorship is always a conscious performance in Melville—even a performance of being possessed, as he suggests at the beginning of "To the Hostelry"—then the "inutility" he puts on in *Weeds and Wildings*—art-making as easeful, uninhibited as a flower—is hardly as easy as it seems.

Melville is performing. But who is his audience? Dedications strangely elect an audience of one (or a select few): this book is for posterity, but it is also, especially for *you*. A reader to whom a book is dedicated must read differently then the reader who approaches the same book with no expectations of predetermined intimacy. Dedications thus transform a text into a code, legible only to one pair of eyes. But when dedications draw attention to

themselves as fictions—as "To Winnefred" and "To a Happy Shade" do—then this reader is made impossible—a fictionalized spouse, an author long-dead. In my reading of *Weeds and Wildings*, Hawthorne is yet another figure toward whom Melville directs his text. The invitations authors make to readers are openings in texts: "O reader mine," Melville writes at the end of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," the piece in *Weeds and Wildings* in which invocations of Hawthorne are most direct (*Weeds* 333). By fictionalizing moments of dedication, by conjuring the ghosts of particular readers who cannot actually engage with his work, Melville performs an abdication of readership. Without special invitation, the text sets out to avert us. This is why intertextuality is such an important facet of the manuscript. Melville makes a trope of his lack of readership; in the wake of readers, entering conversation with other texts became the means by which which writing remains open to the world. Authors generally write for the readers of the future, but Melville writes for the texts of the past.

Finally, given his interest in authorship as a performance of other texts, it makes sense that the limitations and possibilities of received form, particularly verse, became so interesting to Melville at the end of his career. ¹³⁶ One of the perennial problems facing readers of Melville's poems is the question of why Melville "turned" toward to poetry at all. While some readers see a progression from an early "poetic" prose to a more formalized poetics as indicative of continuity rather than rejection or reinvention, others take the shift in form as an invitation for theorizing a difference in Melville's beliefs and practices, particularly considering the relationship between art-making and experience. ¹³⁷ Building on this work, I believe that Melville's turn toward poetry was neither inevitable nor particularly sudden; nor should his swapping of sentences for poetic lines be taken as a single gesture. Melville's poetry, like his fiction, is many things: generous, thoughtful, faulty, and vast. The complex, patriotic, poetry of Battle-Pieces (1866), arising from recent history and Melville's most sustained effort at thinking through public experience with subjective forays submerged or even suppressed, differs greatly from Melville's next poetic endeavor, the epic Clarel (1875), which combines history, philosophy and the tangled lives of individual characters. This epic, again, is something other than the nostalgic disorientations and lyric concision of John Marr (1888), Timoleon (1891) and the unpublished Weeds and Wildings (c. 1890-1981); furthermore, Melville's poems, with the exception of *Clarel*, are rarely only verse. 138 Battle-Pieces, Timoleon, and Weeds and Wildings, like Melville's other late, unfinished, work, Billy-Budd, all combine poetry and prose. Poetry, for Melville, was not a settled form even if it was an inherited one, and even if the constraints of composing within metric and sound-systems placed new pressures on his modes of expression. Above all, poetry became for him a format in which to work through the dynamic balance between experience and writing that characterizes his oeuvre from beginning to end.

Melville reflects perhaps most directly on the relation between form and life as what stands outside of literature in the second section of *Weeds and Wildings*, "This, That, and the Other." There, prose precedes roughly half of the poems, bracketed apart as head-notes: a slight paragraph or even, in the case of "The Cuban Pirate" (a poem about hummingbird), a single, fluttering, sentence. The verse seems to stand outside of these prosaic introductions, as if composed at another time or even by another author. Each head-note is primarily descriptive. The poems emerge from facts: that the sapping of an immature maple damages the overall growth of the tree and intensifies its autumnal tints ("Time's Betrayal"), that some "West Indian hummingbirds are in frame hardly bigger than a beetle or bee" ("The Cuban Pirate"), or that the relatively long flowering cycle of Aloes (8-10 years) can be delayed for decades by "something retarding in the environment or soil" ("The American Aloe on Exhibition"). In these pieces, prose remains a space for observation and statement,

while verse animates birds and plants. In this section, Melville tries on prose and poetry through different forms of authorial distance: set aside in facts, projected into personification, or subsumed within the rigors of received poetic form. The mixed form of these pieces, and their combination of modes of attention—the objective, the literary—reveals how intimately the insides and outsides of literary works were entwined for Melville.

We see this interplay even more intensively in Melville's continued writing on plants. While Melville was acutely interested in how Hawthorne imagined and wrote of plants, as I showed in the previous chapter, he was also deeply cognizant of plants as figures of deep literary history extending far beyond Hawthorne's works, or even the nineteenth-century. While all the authors I have considered were influenced by previous accounts of the entanglement of literature and plant-life, Melville consciously pushed inherited organic metaphor beyond its standard vegetating and flowering. Extending plant metaphors through flowering and moldering so that decay might feed flowers to come, Melville produces plants not so much as emblems of linear growth or singular development, but rather as participants in cyclical patterns of life and death that go beyond individuals, and, at the same time, as metaphors for comparable experiences of intellectual and aesthetic growth; this thinking about plant-life culminates in *Weeds and Wildings*.

While my reading of this manuscript may seem to suggest that the formalism that characterizes Melville's late poetry is somehow categorically preferable to the open enthusiasms of Whitman with which I began, the difference between these two poets is complicated because Whitman transcends some nineteenth-century poetic categories while Melville, at the end of an uneasy literary career, in turning to poetry and to flowers, adopted some of his century's most popular literary genres and conceits in conjunction with the disappearance of his nineteenth-century audience. Melville's early work, like Whitman's, is characterized by openness and invitation: "Call me Ishmael," "Loafe with me." With the diminishment of Melville's readership, however, rhetorical openness to readers also diminishes, until, at last, we arrive at Weeds and Wildings, a document which, perhaps more than any of Melville's others, despite its conventional trappings, has so long resisted reading.¹³⁹ While Melville seems to step into nineteenth-century poetry at the end of his career, he hardly does so with anticipations of participation in the larger poetic commons critics have recently traced. 140 But Weeds and Wildings also remembers readers—Melville's wife, and Hawthorne—and the private experiences of reading that punctuate and give shape to some readers' lives. Even as this late work seems to withdraw into domestic or closeted reworking of scenes only intimately available to Melville's memory, intertext keeps the text open. Melville thus replaces a capacious, disinterested, and experiential openness with a particularized and invested form of openness, an approach that blends experiential and textual memory. 141 Despite their formal closures and lyricism, therefore, Melville's late poems exhibit a limited permeability. This restrained openness recalls the "bareness" of poetic labor I began by tracing.

Generally, Melville does not seem to have believed the fantasy—so seductive to many of his contemporaries as I have shown—of authorship as easeful, received, an inutility. He puts on this flowery costume, however, to write through what it might be to experience the work he had given his life to in such terms. Despite its disavowals and surfaces, however, *Weeds and Wildings* is, ultimately, an intimate book, and a far gentler one than any work by Melville that I know. I find the softness of its surfaces poignant and disarming: not like the soft-focus sentimentality of an Edward Stieglitz print or 1970s cinematography; rather, *Weeds and Wildings* is truly a work of "late style" that looks back on definitive experiences—of living, but especially of reading—and understands the very small ways such experiences

define literature, and literature swings outward onto lives. In *On Late Style* (2007), Edward Said draws on Adorno, who identifies a self-alienated quality in Beethoven's late work. Said refigures this self-alienation within his own terminology, as "a form of exile" (8). It is easy enough, he argues, to point to artists whose work at the end of their life seems to indicate an accumulation of a life devoted to creativity; Shakespeare, whose late plays are as great as his earliest, is one such artist. But for other artists, "the experience of late style...involves a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against*" (7). I find this contrary dissonance in Melville's late work. Yet one of the peculiarities, one of the most resistant thorns, of the final works of poetry and prose to which Melville devoted himself, is how he figured such exile in terms that most writers would, and have interpreted, as ease. The late flowers of Melville's literary form return to an earlier period in the author's career, as an exile, full of longing and resentful pride, recalls a time and place that, he only realizes, in the long shadow of its loss, was never quite his, even when, as a young man, he basked in its abundance and glow.

Memory & Intertextuality

Intertextuality arises from authorial memory. I remember *Moby Dick*. Yet authorial memory troubles intertextuality because memory itself is troubled, unstable and incomplete. It is not only *Moby Dick* I remember. I remember the beach where I ran away from the other vacationers to read. And the white and tan striped couch in Massachusetts where I opened it to read again. The field in San Francisco where Brian read passages of Ahab aloud in a salty voice (and the bike ride that followed in which Ahab periodically appeared in that voice to hurry us toward Ocean Beach. And the dogs and the kites). And so on. Authorial memory is the memory of a reader and the memory of life outside of reading, and so it is not ours, as readers, to own in entirety.

In this sense, authorial memory is very different from biography. Biography is made of all that remains visible of a life. Because the circumstances and experiences resulting in intertextuality are largely illegible—we have Melville's lists of books and his marginalia, which are clues but not memory itself—only its effects are apparent. Biography constructs depths out of surfaces. But intertextuality draws attention to texts skating along without plunging.

Biography sometimes gets in the way of understanding Melville the author. Critical obsession with Melville's "greatness" or genius, and with his own supposed obsession with genius, has affected criticism of Melville's poetry, resulting in claims for quality that are not always matched by substantial readings of the work. *Weeds and Wildings* has been subject to misreading because it has mainly been taken to be a document of biographical interest, indicative of a belated placidity Melville seemed finally to have achieved. The fact that this work is also his most "flowery" and self-consciously feminine perhaps accounts for another strain of bias in Melville criticism: a historic attention to Melville's more "manly," seaworthy, or war-themed works; this critical perspective provides one reason why a work like *Billy Budd* has been lauded for so long while "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," which shares much of the same formal complexity as *Billy Budd* and was composed during the same period, has been virtually overlooked. As Richard Bridgman observes, "Melville's "trail of roses...culminates in *Billy Budd*" (244). And the trail that leads to this culmination is worth considering in all its flowery variance.

Yet my insistence on the importance of Hawthorne to Melville's late formalism and particularly his final poetic work also may seem to take the biographical Melville and Hawthorne as providing necessary insight into Melville the author. The persistence of possible references to Hawthorne in this late work indicates several things. Firstly, that Melville's biographical involvement with this older writer was longer lasting and more complex than is always acknowledged. And secondly, that the textual effects of this emotional involvement reveal that negotiating the relationship between literature and life—in both a personal and a general sense—remained a sustained problem for Melville across his career. Given the obfuscations of historical difference, this second revelation is probably the more interesting, at least for the critic. In Melville's connection to Hawthorne as both human and author, we see the complexities of the relationship between personal memory and an impersonal intertextuality as if under magnification.

Suggesting that individuated memories might be tangled in intertextuality, or mimic the very structure of intertextuality itself, is, I admit, an unorthodox use of this literary term. Although memory and intertextuality might be said to resemble one another structurally—with the effects of past experiences composing a person the way the effects of past texts compose essays or a poem in a present—memory and intertextuality also stand as antitheses of one another, operating in separate spheres (the personal, and the purely textual) in which they share no common ground. The seeming contradictions of these two forms of relation—a shared structural organization, but within opposing spheres of meaning—interests me, particularly when we consider how the implications of memory or intertextuality, as forces contributing to composition, result in seemingly irreconcilable versions of authorship.

For Julia Kristeva, who coined the term in 1966, intertextuality fused a Saussurian emphasis on gaps between linguistic signs and material signifieds with Bahktinian dialogism. While maintaining an intensive textual focus, intertextuality opened a text to other texts: both solidifying a hermetically textual world, a hermeneutic vision in which, as Derrida famously quipped in Of Grammatolgy, "il n'y a pas d'hors-texte," while also inviting instabilities drawn from other texts into the literary object of study at hand. The year after Kristeva published "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," where the term intertextuality first appeared, Barthes published "The Death of the Author," in which he substitutes readers for writers as textual animators. Before celebrating reading, though, Barthes empties writing out. He describes writing as impersonal, even depersonalizing: "writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (1466). Two years later, in his 1969 lecture, "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault also described a writing "freed" from "the confines of interiority"; writing, Foucault argues, creates "an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears" (1623). While Barthes relishes the depersonalized author and the impersonalized reader, lingering on the text as a space of possibility, pleasure, and even self-realization (albeit of a neutral self), Foucault considers how, in the absence of an "author function," the social and historical forces contributing to the composition of texts come more readily into view. The idea of intertextuality is bound up in these declarations from the 1960s of freedom from a particular version of authorship and the critical and conceptual possibilities—of powerful readers or critics, and of social critique—that this emptying of authorship enabled. Reflecting on the term in the 1980s, Kristeva summarized: "The notion of intertextuality replaces that of inter-subjectivity" (qtd. Cheney 716). By legitimizing the text as a locus of meaning in its own right, and then tugging it open to the vectors and palimpsests of other

forces, these critics reshaped notions about the connection between authorial experience and the work of textual interpretation.

Rather than projecting intertextuality as a counter to inter-subjectivity onto my readings of nineteenth-century authors, by introducing the idea of intertextuality into my reading of Melville, I mean to illuminate a parallel between a critical disposition of this moment earlier in the twentieth century and what I have been examining here as a set of poetic expectations at work within the nineteenth-century. By figuring authorial experiences as vegetative, or works of art as comparable to plant-bodies, authors of this period participated in an imagination of the death of the author, a recession of the "author function" into the workings of sedges or branches. For Melville, I believe, intertextuality became a mark of this authorial absence, perhaps even a way to achieve it. Involving his late poetry so deeply with other texts, Melville enacted both an apparent retreat from the world into textuality, and, as Kristeva argues intertextuality enables, a form of dialogism that kept his texts open, in conversation with other histories, other voices. Of course, what intertextuality in the Kristevan sense—with its emphasis on depersonalized texts—doesn't quite account for is intertextuality as an act of will: an author's willful entry into conversation or poetic convention. The intensifying textual hermeticism of Melville's late work begins to resemble intertextuality as a critical concept, but with the problematic feature of an author still holding the strings, directing his own disappearance. Melville's late work thus also helps us to see how twentieth-century critics, in their eagerness to wrest the study of texts away from biography, and to shift attention away from the study of authors toward the experience of readers, side-stepped an important feature of literary agency: how do we read writers who many not want to be read?

Another useful critical counterpoint to Melville's late poetry can be found in some twentieth-century poets in an Anglo-American tradition institutionalization of compositional intertextuality, decades before continental poststructuralist critics sang the author's demise. T.S. Eliot's practices of compositional pastiche, collage, and reference in "The Wasteland," for example, transformed centuries of literary reference, borrowing, and rewriting by making the suture lines between texts visible. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921), Eliot explains his critical method by defining what he calls the poet's necessary "historical" sense and describing how this sense contributes to authorship as "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (38, 40). Rather than describing intertextuality as a replacement for "inter-subjectivity," Eliot suggests that intertextuality operates as a replacement for the singular subjectivity of an author, permitting an author to lay himself upon an altar and self-destruct (not unlike, as I argued in the first chapter, lying down in the grass to die). In order to achieve this obliteration, however, the author must first make the mechanical reception of culture feel organic. Eliot describes the "historical sense" as a consolidation of knowledge that solidifies within the author's "bones." This internalizing of tradition renders knowledge organic much as plant-metaphors for composition estrange the author's relation to his own labor; in Thoreau's version of this, as we have seen, unfolding thought grows a root; in Eliot's, received knowledge calcifies into parts of the human body whose powers are almost inhuman, beyond control. This transmutation from the cultural into the organic allows the poet to perceive himself, Eliot writes, as a subject-less "catalyst," comparable to "a bit of finely filiated platinum" when "introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide" (40). The endurance of this articulation of poetic composition can be seen in a diverse array of poets within a late-modernist or post-modern Anglo-American tradition: William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukovsky, Michael Palmer, Susan Howe, C.D. Wright, Brian Teare. As "texts" of all sorts—from the historical to the literary

to the scientific—enter the work of these poets, authorship is transformed by responsiveness to an archive; poetry becomes a space in which histories quite visibly apply their pressures on the present.

Both poststructuralist definitions of intertextuality and Eliot's influential account of the relation between individual poets and particular poetic traditions (and it is worth noting that Eliot's understanding of tradition, even within its Euro-centrism, is quite particular), describe ways in which texts come to stand for selves, revealing how works composed in a present remain preoccupied with distinct pasts, punctuated by other voices, textually open and distanced from their individual author. Similarly, I believe, Melville's late poetry engages intensively with other texts in order to alleviate authorship as a singular act. Recent critical work on historical poetics in nineteenth-century America has taught us to be wary of importing modern or postmodernist notions of poetry into our readings of a body of literature that, within its own context, remains relatively obscure to most readers in the present. And, indeed, Melville's late poems are firmly rooted within the tropes and the forms—leafing and flowering, rhyming and metrical—of the nineteenth century. The apparent conventionality of Melville's poetry has allowed for a biographical account of Melville the author in a state of creative exhaustion at the end of his life, giving up, and giving into to stanzas. But for an author who did not adhere to fictional conventions, it's worth considering what the conventionality of nineteenth century American poetry may have offered Melville that made turning from prose to poetry a compelling choice, rather than a defaulting into his own literary present.

After *Battle Pieces* (1866), which, by its historical and political engagement and hopes for an audience, differs from his later poetry, the composition of verse became for Melville an increasingly aesthetic and almost private affair. *Clarel* (1875), *John Marr* (1888), and *Timoleon* (1891) were all privately published; *Weeds and Wildings* remained unpublished during Melville's lifetime. We can see the progression across these volumes as a turning inward, a turning aside, a manifestation of what would later be aligned with a lyrical disposition: an author speaking to his self. ¹⁴² But, as I have tried to suggest, the intertextuality of Melville's late poems, and their preoccupation with memory in certain poems from *John Marr* through *Weeds and Wildings* unsettles the notion of a self-addressing voice. Rather than speaking to himself, Melville, particularly in *Weeds and Wildings*, is speaking to Hawthorne, an interesting interlocutor in 1891, given that, since 1864, Hawthorne had been dead.

Melville's writings for or toward Hawthorne combine memory and intertextuality, approaching Hawthorne both through his texts and through experiences or feelings Melville associated with this author-friend. Rather than replacing inter-subjectivity, in the case of *Weeds and Wildings*, intertextual connections to Hawthorne draw attention to an inter-subjectivity that had been. Melville's late poems conceal themselves in bare, flowering, sight, enabling a private conversation that is not really private or a conversation because it is constructed through authorial memory and textual reference alone. It is both entirely on the surface and not there at all.

Lilacs & Willows

"Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" is the center, literally and figuratively, of *Weeds and Wildings*; coming in the middle—neither here nor there, then nor now—is also a focus of the piece, and is reinforced formally. As the third section of five, it mediates between themes of commonness, domesticity, and seasonal recurrence in the first two sections and spirit, love,

and transcendence in the last two sections. The piece also spans literary modes, combining the longest prose section with one of the longest poems. Finally, by dedicating "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" to Washington Irving and taking Irving's own "Rip Van Winkle" as a narrative framework, Melville brings intertextuality as another "middle" into focus. As we have seen, intertextuality projects texts into relation with one another. Like the three epigraphs at the beginning of Weeds and Wildings, whose crossing intertextual wires I began the previous chapter by discussing, the intertextuality of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" draws on multiple sources. While Irving's *Sketchbook* is the most obvious point of reference, Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse provides at least as much structuring pressure. Melville returns once again to the Hawthornian image of a mossy house; and he returns more pointedly than ever before to flowering and moldering as dependent phenomena. In "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" Melville explores art-making as responsive to memory (textual, historical, and personal), and memory as an "active" faculty within the present; rather than following one another sequentially, flowering and moldering in "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" grow and wither simultaneously, within a present to which Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, and the reader all contribute.

The themes of Irving's story resonate with many of the themes of *Weeds and Wildings*: tensions between domestic life and dreamier idealizations of love or art, between personal memory, public history, and a mythic past, and between authorship as an individual impulse and authorship as informed by external sources. Along with "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "Rip Van Winkle" is the only piece in Irving's *Sketchbook* introduced as belonging to the writings of the late Dierdrich Knickerbocker. Knickerbocker is invented, as much a character as Rip. Concealing himself within this persona, Irving draws attention to authorial agency as a kind of masque. Writing within Rip, Melville deepens the layers of this costume, blurring lines not only between "legend" and fiction, but also between imagination and memory.

Melville's rewriting begins with a rupture in Rip's memory caused by Melville's own memories of the Berkshire landscape; this rupture produces a "disturbed imagination" in Rip that does not become fully apparent until the piece turns to poetry at the end. Wandering homeward after waking up from his long sleep in the mountains, Rip comes across "a view deeply stamped in his memory. Though yet unaware that he has been asleep for hundreds of years, Rip's experience of this landscape is nevertheless flecked with pasts he does not yet know are past. Rip "pauses in startled recognition" as he comes upon this vista of a mountain, whose silhouette, "the head of one distant blue summit peered over the shoulder of a range not so blue as less lofty and remote," resembles Mount Greylock, the mountain Melville could see from the window above his desk at Arrowhead, and to whom he dedicated Pierre (Weeds 26-27). This melding of memories—of Melville's, of Rip's—produces the first real disjunction between Rip and the present: he worries that the mountain he remembers so well has "forgotten him, and in a day" (27). The geological time of the mountain stands in contrast to what Rip experiences as a single night. In the wake of this disorientation between nonhuman and human time, Rip comes upon a lilac, a flowering tree that he does not remember, but that grows beside his old house in "the very spot which he could only recall as occupied by an immemorial willow' (27).

The irreconcilability of these two trees—willow and lilac, weeping and flowering, the first remembered, the second a shock of pink and fragrance in the present—turns the story further back, to Rip's courtship and early married life. While Irving's original tale unfolds around the "tyranny of petticoat government," Melville maintains the distinction between Rip as an idler and Dame Van Winkle as a diligent housewife without reducing Rip's wife to

a shrewish cipher. Instead, Melville revisits the early love of these two mismatched spouses: the Dame as a "winsome bride...with attractiveness all her own" and Rip as a romantically inclined but somewhat self-involved bridegroom. Irving plunks us down in the midst of marital discord but Melville traces the series of misunderstandings and broken commitments that lead relationships to unravel in the first place. Rather than an endless list of labors Rip has failed at, Melville gives his more justifiably irritable Dame two particular complaints: she wishes her husband would finish their house, sealing it off from elements of decay, and she wishes he would chop down the willow that sheds "rotted twigs and a litter of discolored leaves" like "tears" contributing to their "ever-greening roof" (29). She wants a separation between natural processes and human ones, between the seasons and her hearth.

Though utilitarian, in other words, Melville's Dame Van Winkle is hardly unfair. Her investment in utility sets her outside the themes of aesthetic "inutility" Melville works through elsewhere in the manuscript, including through Rip. Subjected to this ideal of art making as outside of use value, the Van Winkle's house begins to resemble Hawthorne's mossy manse. The house grows prematurely old, producing "a look forlornly human" (29). This melancholic humanizing recalls Melville's efforts in his review of *Mosses* to humanize and more particularly Hawthornize—Hawthorne's images of plant-life. While Melville once looked for allegoric correlation between Hawthorne and his plants, in the sad, human, mossy, house of the Van Winkles, Melville portrays the middling meeting of opposites rather than the one-to-one of allegory. Rather than a sharp division between inside and outside, nature and home, structures both built and natural begin to gather moss. The shingles that never made it to the roof remain in a pile and grow covered "with thin mosses"; the roof itself grows green with moss; and while Rip sleeps, the willow finally falls, forming "its own lowly monument; an ever crumbling one," "an umber-hued mound of mellow punk, mossed in spots, with wild violets springing from it here and there" (29). This melding of human structure, unused structural materials (a pile of shingles), and natural structures (a willow) through mutual processes of decay, reinforces structure and decay as co-dependent and temporally co-present. Not only moss thrives here; violets sprout from the rubble. This reemergence of violets, which first appeared in the story as metaphors for Dame Van Winkle's eyes which in the early years of her marriage were "as little capable of snapping as two soft sable violets," is another indication that the Dame is involved in this story of structure, flowering, and decay, whether or not she wills herself there (28). Melville folds Lizzie into these Hawthornian scenes.

For this imagery of flowering and molding, and of willows and lilacs in particular, Melville likely drew from Hawthorne's sketch in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, "Buds and Bird Voices." In his review of *Mosses*, Melville calls this sketch "a delicious thing," and quotes from Hawthorne: "Will the world ever be so decayed, that Spring may not renew its greenness?" (qtd. *Piazza Tales* 241). Though spring's greenness generally appears in new shoots, buds and blossoms, in this passage Hawthorne draws his readers' attention first to the "moss on our time-worn mansion" that "brightens into beauty" (*Mosses* 149). Moss, so often a sign of agedness of Hawthorne, in "Buds and Bird Voices" takes on the sense that Melville would ultimately most associate with it: an image of vegetal renewal co-temporal with decaying structure. While moss on the house signals springtime and renewal, however, Hawthorne dwells on the difference between moss on a structure and moss clinging to willow and lilac. On these plants, moss again indicates decay and age:

The moss-grown willow tree which for forty years past has overshadowed these western windows will be among the first to put on its green attire. There are some objections to the willow: it is not a dry and cleanly tree, and impresses the beholder with an association of sliminess. No trees, I think, are perfectly agreeable as companions unless they have glossy leaves, dry bark and a firm and hard texture of trunk and branches. But the willow is almost the earliest to gladden us with the promise and reality of beauty...and the last to scatter its yellow, yet scarcely-withered, leaves upon the ground. All through the winter, too... [b]eneath a clouded sky it faithfully remembers the sunshine. Our old house would lose a charm were the willow to be cut down, with its golden crown over the snow-covered roof, and its heap of summer verdure.

The lilac-shrubs under my study windows are likewise almost in leaf; in two or three days more I may put forth my hand and pluck the topmost bough in its freshest green. These lilacs are very aged, and have lost the luxuriant foliage of their prime. The heart or the judgment or the moral sense or the taste is dissatisfied with their present aspect. Old age is not venerable when it embodies itself in lilacs, rosebushes, or any other ornamental shrubs; it seems as if such plants, as they grow only for beauty, ought to flourish only in immortal youth—or, at least, to die before their sad decrepitude. Trees of beauty are trees of Paradise, and therefore not subject to decay by their original nature, though they have lost that precious birthright by being transplanted to an earthly soil. There is a kind of ludicrous unfitness in the idea of a time-stricken and grandfatherly lilac-bush. The analogy holds good in human life (142-3).

Though indicative of the age of each tree, moss affects the appearance of the two trees differently. On the willow, moss seems in keeping with the tree's mixed appeal: slimy, yet quick to come to leaf in spring, hardly the most beautiful of trees, but nevertheless adding "a charm" to the house beside which it grows. Where Dame Van Winkle objects to her willow's unruliness, Hawthorne finds a picturesque quality in both the tree's decrepitude and its yearly rebirths. In this mossy willow—a tree that, in the nineteenth-century language of the flowers connoted sadness and mourning—we have an image of Hawthornian melancholy, that darkness that so allured Melville. While Melville found Hawthorne's darkness riddled with flashes of light and floweriness, in this passage Hawthorne recoils from the combination of flowering and decay in the lilac. Representative of "first love" in the language of the flowers, an aged lilac seems particularly unseemly to Hawthorne. And while Hawthorne resists allegory with the willow, lingering only on its appearance, he launches into comparisons between the aging of flowery shrubs and a human old age that "is not venerable." People whose sole purpose is beauty, "who can only be graceful and ornamental—who can give the world nothing but flowers—should die young," Hawthorne writes (142-43). Beauty, he argues, should not appear "triumphed over by time." At the end of the passage, the allegory grows more explicit: "Human flower-shrubs, if they will grow old on earth, should, besides their lovely blossoms, bear some kind of fruit that will satisfy earthly appetites, else neither man nor the decorum of nature will deem it fit that the moss should gather on them" (143). This demand for utility—flowers with fruit—contradicts the language of aesthetic inutility that Hawthorne otherwise celebrates in Mosses.

In "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" Melville revises this image by celebrating a flowery old age in which flowering and decay form a single aesthetic. Furthermore, rather than opposing mossy willow and mossy lilac, Melville renders these in Rip's experience as substitutions for one another: the lilac merely stands where once there was a willow. With its flowers and fragrance, the lilac is an intensification of the willow: an appeal to senses outside of sight. But the only significant distinction between the two trees as far as Rip experiences is that

one exists in memory and one stands before him. Rip's activation of pasts within the present—the willow's, which he has personal access too, and the lilac's which (at least at this juncture in the narrative) he has no memory of—introduces another time-scale: while Rip was sleeping, two other figures stood before this house and this lilac tree, discussing art.

We are now introduced to "a certain meditative vagabond...a young artist" who comes upon "the pink lilac relieved against the greenly ruinous house" and sets out to "study" the scene in paint. For an author so concerned with the experience and significance of "writing" as a worthwhile labor, Melville rarely takes artists or writers as his primary characters; ¹⁴⁴ yet here, he tries on another of Hawthorne's conceits by developing his own "Artist of the Beautiful." While painting, the artist is accosted by "a gaunt, hatchet-faced, stony-eyed individual, with a grey sort of salted complexion like that of a dried codfish, jogging by on a lank white horse." After such an introduction, it comes as no surprise that this unsavory individual also happens to be a bossy zealot: a very Mellvillean version (hyperbolic, forward) of another Hawthornian figure: the fanatical minister. This figure directs the artist's attention to the new "tabernacle," freshly painted white on the hill, which the artist promptly pronounces a "cadaver." Rejecting the church as a suitable object for artistic attention, the artist tells the man that the thing has been "sufficiently painted already" (*Weeds* 30-31). This exchange ensues:

'You will stick to this wretched old ruin, then, will you?'

'Yes, and the lilac.'

'The lilac? and black what do-you-call-it—lichen, on the trunk, so old it is. It is half-rotten, and its flowers spring from the rottenness under it, just as the moss from those eaves does from the rotting shingles.'

'Yes, decay is often a gardener,' asserted the other (31).

While Hawthorne may have found moss on architecture picturesque and non-productive, Melville here suggests that the black lichen covering a lilac tree is a kind of "gardener." In "Buds and Bird Voices," Hawthorne claims: "There is no decay," even as he lingers over his weathered house and musty books. Signs of outward decay are counteracted by the "renewing power of the spirit," he writes (*Masses* 144). Rather than negating decay through these transmigrations of spirit, Melville lingers on materials, considering the dependencies, rather than the contradictions, between moldering and flowering.

"Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" thus catapults the endurance of youthful energies into a present in which old age is also visible. The mossy decay in the story makes the depth of time transparent, bringing past into the present, making flowers blow despite lichen and moss. As the sketch nears its conclusion, Melville returns from the sketching "Bohemian" to Rip. In Irving's story, Rip realizes his own age when he wanders into town, and is confronted by people stroking their chins and wondering at his rusty gun and rags; he mimics them and finds an overgrown beard. In Melville's version, however, Rip never encounters other humans, and faced instead with changes in the landscape that indicate both decay and renewal, he never realizes his own age. Rip sees "fields rusting with young grain where he seemed to remember waving woods" (32). Yet these changes are ahistorical; a forest might become a field, or a field a forest. Thus, Rip's memory focuses his attention on what he finds before him and how he experiences that present.

In the opening paragraphs, Melville described Rip's "present frame of mind, by no means normal" as a "disturbed imagination." The lines of verse that end the piece begin by

transferring the narrative into Rip's first-person account of his "bewildered" and "addled" state. The first stanza comprises Rip's only extended articulation:

Ay,—no!—my brain is addled yet; With last night's flagons-full I forget. But look!—well, well, it so must be, For there it is, and, sure, I see. Yon lilac is all right, no doubt, Though never before, Rip—spied him out! But where's the willow?—dear, dear me! This is the hill-side, sure—the stream Flows yon; and that, wife's house would seem But for the silence. Well, maybe, For this one time—ha! do I see Those burdocks going in at door? They only loitered round before! No,—ay!—bless me, it is the same! But yonder lilac! how now came— Rip, where does Rip Van Winkle live? Lilac?—a lilac? Why, just there, If my cracked memory don't deceive, 'Twas I set out a lilac fair, Yesterday morning, seems to me. Yea, sure, that it might thrive and come To plead for me with wife, though dumb. I found it—dear me—well, well, well, Squirrels and angels, they can tell! My head!—whose head?—Ah, Rip, I'm Rip, That lilac was a little slip, And yonder lilac is a tree! (Weeds 33)

Rip's realizations proceed in a chatty and wondering present tense. His repetitions and exclamations of "dear, dear me," "Lilac?—a lilac?," "dear me—well, well, well" and "My head!—whose head?—Ah, Rip, I'm Rip," designate this language as unfolding within a documentary "real time." Rip's language, though distinguished by lineation from the paragraph preceding it, nevertheless is tied to "the period of the present recital," which also begins by describing Rip's motions in a continuous present tense: "[r]iverward emerging," "he comes to a few raggedly cultivated fields detached and apart," "he pauses in startled recognition," and then, "proceeding on his path he, after a little, becomes sensible of a prevailing fragrance wholly new to him," "a wafted deliciousness growing more and more pronounced" (26-27). The other prose sections—Rip's courtship and marriage, the artist and his critic, as well as the other stanzas of the final poem—employ a past, or, in the last stanza, a future tense. Of all the figures that enter "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac"—authors, readers, characters, and through them, a remembered wife and a remembered friend—only Rip's encounter with the lilac takes place in the present.

But Rip's present experience is riddled by the past; faced with a lilac, he stutters through "cracked" memories of "last night," a general "before," and finally, "yesterday morning." The cracking of Rip's memory means that memory becomes active in the present: Rip *finds* a memory: of himself, *founding* a lilac ("I found it—dear me—well, well, well") (33). Rip's memory in the present acts as Sampson Reed's "active power," a revelation of what is

and was already there, an alternative to the imagination: uncovering rather than inventing. Whether this memory is "true" or not Melville leaves unresolved. What Rip remembers definitively, however, is that he is involved with the lilac. Remembering this does not confirm his sense of self, but rather, keeps him bewildered. While he can scarcely remember himself, he remembers that the lilac has an agency, "that it might thrive and come / To plead for me with wife, though dumb" (33). Rip's memory keeps him securely within a present bewilderment, reassuring him more of the nonhuman time scales of lilacs (and other nonhumans, squirrel and angels) than of his own history.

Aptly then, just as Rip realizes this lilac's past and present—"That lilac was a little slip, /And yonder lilac is a tree!"—the verse moves on (33). The next stanza returns to intertextuality as a force of resurrecting past articulations within the present, and of blurring boundaries between life and text:

But why rehearse in every section The withered good-fellow's resurrection, Happily told by happiest Irving Never from genial verity swerving; And, more to make the story rife, By Jefferson acted thus to life. Be here it behooves to tell Of things that posthumously fell (33).

Melville's choice of the verb "rehearse" frames storytelling as performance, rather than transcription—a particularly wobbly form of pre-opening night performance, a practice rather than the final enactment. The stanza pairs two different "author" figures: Irving, a writer, and Jefferson, an actor. Irving's written version of the tale is "genial" and sticks to "verity," while Jefferson, whom Melville saw play Rip in a production of Irving's tale, makes "the story rife" by acting not so much to truth as "to life." The double emphasis on Irving as "happiest" and "[h]appily" telling (rather than rehearsing) carries the same hyperbolic irony of Melville's dedication before his own authorial rehearsal to Irving's "happy shade." Perhaps Melville does recognize a kind of "happiness" in Irving's staid fictions—a happiness of completion, art-making sealed off from the uncertain impulses of memory and feeling but he aligns himself in this stanza with the actor, who amplifies his story by bringing it to life. Like this performer, Melville has brought his own life—Arrowhead, Lizzie, and Hawthorne as both author and friend—into "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac." And though this mingling of personal memory with intertexts both complexly personal and "happy" (which is to say aloof) may seem solipsistic, in mixing his particular life into the writing of others, Melville demonstrates (as he does across almost his entire career) the degree to which life and art inform one another. Through this involvement, the "personal" becomes depersonalized, and the textual is opened to materials and experiences beyond words on a page.

Melville's final line of this second stanza—"Of things that posthumously fell"—anticipates the volume's next section, of roses "As They Fell" (33). In that section, the falling of roses and the poems that enclose them connotes randomness, an unplanned scattering of petals. This claim for poems that fall as easily as petals recalls the poetic "gathering" as an alternative to active composition that I argued characterized Dickinson's understanding of poetry in "I dwell in Possibility." If roses are what fall after a "death of the author," in the final stanzas of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," Melville unsettles the grounds of that

"posthumous" position. The next three stanzas depict how Rip is succeeded by his lilac. Rip dies, a villa replaces his mossy house, and the owner of the villa grows old. Through this passage of years "Rip's lilac" remains "to its youth still true." This line reworks a quote from Schiller—"Stay true to the dreams of your youth"—that Melville pinned above his desk in these later years of his career. The "youth" of Rip's lilac, like the "youth" that characterizes *Weeds and Wildings* as a whole is not simply flowers. Rather, a "juvenile pink complexion soft" arrives annually and pops profusely against the "slant, ungainly trunk / Atwist and black like strands in junk" (33). This mingling of flowers and mold distinguishes this lilac from others. Just as, Melville suggests, ambiguities born of mingling life and fiction as performance distinguishes his own work.

Some have read the final stanzas of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac—in which neighbors and strangers, including a directly addressed "O reader mine," are drawn to this uncommon lilac, marveling at its aromatic blossoms and replanting its offshoots around the region—as Melville prophesying the "revival" of his career thirty years later (33). 147 Perhaps Melville, responding to recent signs of interest in his work by young men and an invitation to join the New York Authors Club, may have been dreaming of posthumous glory. 148 But this narrative may seem more transparent to us, who know that Melville's reputation did grow exponentially during the twentieth century, than it may have seemed to Melville. In the penultimate stanza of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," Melville overturns Rip's reputation in favor of his lilac; though "[s]ome think" the land where his lilac grows should be named after Rip, instead, "the blossoms take the fame" and the place is called "Lilac Land" (33). Like the other suggestions of non-authorial agency in vegetating literary productions I have explored throughout this dissertation, Melville here disayows the importance of the lilac's "author" I favor of the lilac as representative of literature itself. As I argued above, Rip only "remembers" his own involvement in planting the lilac once he begins to speak in verse; the shift to a form that Melville associated with a release from authorial ego allows Rip to realize his involvement with the lilac, even as the lilac as the poem's primary agent overtakes him. To me, Melville seems far more invested in this late work in writing as a process, and as a response to experience, than he seems invested in lasting grandeur in some future he would not live to see.

In the final stanza, Melville addresses his "reader," telling him to visit the land Rip's lilacs have transformed in some future June; there, under the influence of the plants' perfumes, that reader, Melville imagines—for here, in the only future of "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," imagination becomes a necessity—becomes infused with a "dream" of "Rip," an intuition that "there his heart flowers out confessed" (33). Responding to that flowery confession—a flowering we can read in keeping with the work of Weeds and Wildings as a whole—the reader will be thankful for the use "Nature" made of Rip. Art-making as an inutility, Melville concludes here, has a "natural" use by transmigrating personal experience into the flowers of literary form, thereby relinquishing authors from the particularity of their experiences even when that particularity remains a contributing material to literary work, as it is for Melville. Literature has its seasons and thus its yearly rebirths. By mingling textual and personal memory in "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," Melville gives his rehearsal a "life" of its own. Like Rip's lilac, it does not need him, and does not even need his memories. The hint of them—like perfume that redefines a space and references the person who recently exited a room—opens his text to suggestions of experience and materials outside of literature. In this way, Melville's writing fully internalizes the suggestions of an "occult connection between man and the vegetable" that this dissertation has examined. More than any of the other authors I have considered, Melville, drawing on his reading and memories of Hawthorne,

cared about how that connection between life and literature "flowered." For him, those flowers were heady with many kinds of love—not only the first love lilacs represent, but also the even more quintessentially literary love of rose petals and thorns, and perhaps most of all, I would argue, a love of how literature feeds both on its own history and on individual histories, bringing the personal into conjunction with the collective, unsettling the distances between words and their world.

Clover & Roses

Almost every reading of Weeds and Wildings at some point claims that the manuscript is primarily for and about Melville's relationship to his wife. As we have seen, this supposition largely relies on somewhat spurious manuscript evidence—the name "Lizzie" written in an unidentifiable name beside the dedication to "Winnefred." Furthermore, the poems of the volume seem to be so overwhelmingly about love that they have been read as a piece; in particular, the "rose poems" of the final two sections are read as continuations of the "Clover" poems of the first section. But this reading overlooks the differences between the two sections. The poems of the first section, "The Year," deal with domesticity, including marriage and children, with seasons and personal memory; the poems of "A Rose or Two, as They Fell," in contrast, supplant an impassioned love, erotic and chaste by turns, for these drowsy landscapes of spousal attachment, spiritual time for seasonal time, and history for personal memory. Finally, intertextuality intensifies across the manuscript, so that while the poems of "The Year" and "This, That, and the Other," are relatively free of textual referents, the poems of "A Rose or Two" and "The Rose Farmer" are thick with the palimpsestic traces of Melville's reading. The result of the tensions between these two sections is that "The Year" is far more coy and complicated than is generally acknowledged while "A Rose or Two" is more suggestive.

"The Year," the most formally eclectic section of the manuscript, moves from spring through winter and is governed by a tone of innocence. Children appear here more than in any other section, as the poems veer toward nursery rhymes. ¹⁴⁹ Yet the language also cuts against this overwhelming impression of juvenility. Melville creates fissures through distinctly un-childish turns of phrase. In "The Loiterer," for example, spring is "freakish and young." A syringa bush, in another poem is like "a grotto pranked with stars"; a child is "a fresco," or "an opal serene." When readers find these late poems complacent, innocent, happy, they have absorbed the performance of "The Year" perhaps a little too deeply. ¹⁵⁰

The chiseled innocence of William Blake, whose work Melville appreciated, and Emily Dickinson, whose first book of published poems arrived during the year Melville worked on *Weeds and Wildings*, offer instructive examples of how to approach these flowery, childish poems which, even for a reader well accustomed to the diversity of Melville's oeuvre, seem so distinctly un-Melvillean.¹⁵¹ A superficial cloyingness in Blake and Dickinson's poetry often covers something dark or off-kilter. Blake's "Songs of Innocence" are almost as frightening at times as his "Songs of Experience": a little boy is lost, only to be "found" by God, looking like "his father in white" and led to his mother, who has been waiting in a "lonely dale," "weeping" and searching for her son; a little black boy looks forward to a day that, once again, belongs only in an afterlife, when the "black" and "white cloud" of race will be lifted from him and a "little English boy," uniting them in love; a young chimney sweep lisps ("weep weep weep weep" he cries to advertise his sweeping) a dream of sweepers "lock'd up in coffins of black" and freed by an Angel to run, and laugh

and play. Though all the poems of Blake's "Songs of Innocence" share a similar tone of levity, their underlying topics cover suffering, injustice, and death. This ambiguity applies to the poems about nonhumans as well. In "The Blossom," the speaker addresses a "Merry Merry Sparrow" witnessed by "A happy Blossom"; first the bird flies to be cradled near the poet's "Bosom"; but in the next stanza, uncannily similar to the first, the blossom, still equally happy," inexplicably hears the "Pretty Pretty Robin" "sobbing sobbing" "Near my Bosom." Such sorrows, shrouded in singsong, are at the devastating heart of Blake's "Songs."

Dickinson uses almost identical strategies in many of her poems about children. "We don't cry – Tim and I," for example, begins with the speaker and Tim behind closed doors, playing at bravery (F231). The first two stanzas show the two "far too grand" to cry, while the object of their fear remains undisclosed. But in the fourth stanza, something like Dickinson's quotidian Heaven—"Cottages – / But, Oh so high!"—comes into view; the two begin to tremble and the speaker threatens tears. The fifth stanza has Tim reading "a little Hymn" for comfort, and the speaker appealing to a God-like "Sir": "Please, Sir, I and Tim – / Always lost the way!" In the penultimate stanza, they have begun to grow reconciled to death; the "Clergymen" predict it, and so, the two haltingly decide to die together: "Tim – shall – if I – do – / I – too – if he –." Yet, in the final stanza, in characteristically Dickinsonian manner, nothing remains as it seems. Tim, in the second line, is suddenly shy, and when the speaker asks the "Lord" to "Take us simultaneous," the final line makes the distinctions between them entirely uncertain: "I – "Tim' – and Me!" In this poem, as in many others, Dickinson puts on a childish tone that occludes matters of life and death.

In similar fashion, "The Blue-Bird" of Melville's "Year" sequence obliquely documents a death. Rather than naming death directly, the poem narrates a "transmigration" of color from a bird to a "Larkspur's azure bells." The only deviation from the otherwise perfect end rhymes is in the clinking of Fir/sepulcher in the second stanza, a slant Dickinson might have admired. Buried within formal simplicity lies a death and resurrection both entirely quotidian and supremely impossible. A dead bird, "stiff...beneath the Fir" is absorbed in March by the "Garden's sheltered bed" only to feed its "clear ethereal hue" in "June" to a plant—"the self-same welkin-blue" (the same blue that Billy Budd's eyes are): "The Bird's transfigured in the Flower!" (Weeds 12).

Another poem of "The Year" that appears deceptively simple is the brief "Field Asters." Melville unfolds these eight-lines through a sequence of missed connections; asters are like "stars in commons blue," the poem begins; their name and their color and shape may unite them, but they are also bound together by commonness; "Seen of all, arresting few," the last line of the first stanza concludes: connected, available, and yet unavailable, because un-arresting. The second stanza gets weird, as non-human objects (flowers, stars) absorb attention, rather than returning it:

Seen indeed. But who their cheer Interpret may, or what they mean When so inscrutably their eyes Us star-gazers scrutinize (*Weeds* 14).

This stanza depicts flowers looking at humans looking at stars; within this triangulated sight, seeing is unsettled. To humans, the gaze of flowers is "inscrutable"; to flowers, the gaze of humans, turned heavenward, is just as unknowable; neither of these lookers sees one another; and stars, which cannot see at all, receive sight only to empty it of meaning. Thus,

the resemblances the first stanza proposes—that asters are *like* stars—short-circuits; more likely, it seems, asters are like humans, looking upwards at something that fails to return their gaze.

The oblique transmigrations and indirections of such poems in "The Year" unsettle the surface sentimentality of the section. Similarly, Melville's rose poems should not be taken at face value. Melville's roses are split into two sections: a collection of short poems, "As They Fell," and a long narrative poem, "The Rose Farmer." The poems of "As They Fell" explore two seemingly contrary forms of love: love as chaste and spiritual, or love as embodied and "spousal." Sometimes these two impulses come together in the same poem. (Dickinson called such religious-erotic imagery the "White Heat" (F401)). "The Rose Farmer" takes up a similar dichotomy in its discussion of enjoying earthly flowers versus distilling transcendent attar. This sequence may elevate "Melville's persistent sexualizing to crystalline heights," but at that dizzying pinnacle, roses are also about sexual frigidity, a chaste devotional love verging on the religious. 152

There are several reasons—both biographical and intertextual—for reading the complex romantic impulses of these poems in relation to Hawthorne rather than Lizzie. The most obvious of these, an obviousness tied to language, is Hawthorne's name—the hawthorn shrub (Genus Crataegus) belongs to the Rose family (an expansive family, that includes many of our commonest edible fruits—apples, peaches, as well as other flowering shrubs—meadowsweet, rowan, and all roses). In contrast to this literal affiliation between Hawthorne and the Rose, Lizzie suffered for years from an allergic reaction to roses, a "rose fever"; in later years, she recovered somewhat, and during this time, Melville even began cultivating roses, a hobby Lizzie supported through the gift of Samuel Hole's A Book About Roses (1883) to Melville on his sixty-fifth birthday. 153 However, even if Lizzie outgrew her allergy, it does not seem likely that Melville would compose poems in tribute to her that focused on a plant that for years was a source of acute pain for her. Another reason to think of Melville's roses in terms of Hawthorne is that the rose is the literary flower par excellence. To write of clover may be to make a statement about a care for the common that is somewhat unusual, but to write of the rose is to participate in centuries of literary history, to compose within a particularly circumscribed tradition. 154

Melville read widely in his late years. Critics have been particularly intrigued by his encounters with Schopenhauer, Matthew Arnold, and James Thompson during this period. 155 Yet the books he came into possession of or borrowed during his last decade also include lighter—particularly flowery—fare. In the 1880s, Elizabeth Shaw Melville gave her husband several books of poetry, including Rossiter Johnson's collection of *Poems Narrative* (1881), and Thomas Aldrich's collected *Poems* (1882). ¹⁵⁶ In each of these volumes, plants, particularly roses, appear profusely, as figures of convention. Johnson's anthology gathered mostly Romantic poems, like Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" and Shelley's "Sensitive Plant." This later poem employs imagery of roses and snow, red and white, that also characterizes many of the poems in Melville's "As They Fell" section: "The rose-leaves, like flakes of crimson snow, /Paved the turf and the mosses below./ The lilies were drooping, and white, and wan, / Like the head and the skin of a dying man" (qtd. Johnson 107). In Aldrich's book, such images are everywhere, as the vitality of roses is set against the loss of innocence; dead children hold roses in "One White Rose" and "Destiny," while a "virginal" rose shrinks in the "tangles of a harlot's hair" in this same poem. In another poem, "Nameless Pain," the speaker compares his heart to a rose, whose "fragrant soul" is wafted by a wind he wishes "could tear my heart" (38, 46, 47). Aldrich's book also includes poems with themes that would appear in Weeds and Wildings—two poems about Christmas, and an extended section

of Orientalist poems in which roses are particularly pronounced. In Aldrich's book, these tropes become particularly transparent as conventions. Since Lizzie gave Melville this book, the congruity of conventions between Aldrich's poetry and the poems of *Weeds and Wildings* would seem to add credence to dominant reading that Melville wrote these poems for his wife. Yet, I find it equally likely that Melville, after a career of attending to literary surfaces, rather than simply adopting Aldrich's language for the purposes of serenading his spouse, would have been interested in the super-abundance of convention in Aldrich's collection, and reflected on its effects. I suggest that we read roses this later poetry not as transparent signifiers of love, but, like Bartleby's "I would prefer not to," or the *Confidence Man's* shifting personas, as signifiers short-circuiting in their over-wiring: roses gone electric (as moss did earlier) and sending sparks toward forms of affection concealed within convention.

During these years, Melville also read and returned to several editions of *The Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, in which flowers, particularly roses, were a primary convention. 157 In the introduction of Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubáiyát*, Melville marked a passage in which Fitzgerald describes what he experienced as the genial humanness of "Omar" (who he "cannot help calling" by his "familiar name"). Fitzgerald says that while in the work of other Persian poets, "the Poet is lost in his Song, the Man in Allegory and Abstraction," in Khayyám's work, "we seem to have the Man—the Bonhomme—Omar himself, with all his Humours and Passions, as frankly before us as if we were really at Table with him, after the Wine had gone round" (25). 158 From at least the time of his review "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville had been interested in how the personal becomes tangled in texts—both the reading and writing of them—and how writers appear "really" present, as Fitzgerald puts it, through textual performance. Such appearances are "timeless"; authors long dead or dead only a few decades (as Hawthorne was in the early 1890s), or still living but out of sight, are all equally available for their readers. Yet, as Melville experienced in his early readings of Hawthorne, these appearances are apparitional. Fitzgerald feels "as if" he is at the table with Khayyam. If a younger Melville, as an author who explicitly blurred boundaries between life and art, was frustrated by Hawthorne's ability to withdraw within his work as behind a veil, the author of Weeds and Wildings seems more interested in how texts inevitably produce "open secrets"; even when authors appear most confessional—a tone Melville is generally believed to have struck in Weeds and Wildings—such apparent openness only draws attention to how literature, even when it is directly informed by experience, is not finally commensurate with life.

The acquiescence that critics sense in *Weeds and Wildings* is not an indication of contented rosiness. Rather, Melville's more settled formalism in this manuscript, and his elevation of flowery convention as a central theme, shows him more at ease with textual surfaces as surfaces. After their final meeting in Liverpool, Hawthorne recorded that Melville seemed plagued by disbelief: unable to believe in anything, and yet unable to "be comfortable in his unbelief" (qtd. Melville *Journals* 628). Fitzgerald describes a similar tendency toward disbelief in Khayyám, but with very different effects: "Having failed (however mistakenly) of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but This, he set about making the most of it; preferring rather to soothe the Soul through the Senses into Acquiescence with Things as he saw them, than to perplex it with vain disquietude after what they *might be*" (Fitzgerald 13). Khayyám's focus on the singularity of life, and thus, on the present and the senses, leads Fitzgerald to compare him to Lucretius, the Roman Epicurean, whose poem *De Rerum Natura* takes a microscopic view of universal forces (long before microscopes), analyzing nature at the level of atoms falling and swerving by chance, rather than in response to divine intervention (16). Epicurean philosophy epitomizes the

principle of taking things as they are, rather than fretting about how they might be; it is an even more radical version of what William James called "radical empiricism." In these late poems, Melville practices a literary Epicureanism. Yet, by thickening the surfaces of his text through intertextual abundance, and by inviting in open secrets through the specters of real-life confession, Melville was able to *appear* to practice a quietude directed by memory and acceptance, while at the same time drawing attention to the infiltrations and gaps within his textual surfaces as surface.

Intertextuality directs the last two sections of the manuscript through profuse floral conventionality, flush with references and readerly memories of roses in other poems. Melville's other primary sources for the manuscript, though, are flowers he plucks from Hawthorne. The rose is a fraught image in two stories from Mosses from an Old Manse, "The Birthmark," and "Rappaccini's Daughter"; roses also appear in The Scarlet Letter, The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun. In the first of these works, Georgiana's birthmark is described as a red mark against the white roses of the character's cheek. Hawthorne amplifies this white and red imagery by comparing the contrast on Georgiana's cheek to "a bas-relief of ruby on the whitest marble," or "a crimson stain upon the snow" (Mosses 50). Roses take a prominent position in *The Scarlet Letter*, introduced in the first chapter of the novel, beside the prison door through which Hester walks. This bush, Hawthorne notes, is "wild": its origin either ancient or mythic, stemming from an earlier period in the natural history of New England, or, perchance, from "the footsteps of the sainted" (and antinomian) "Ann Hutchinson" (Scarlet 46). The red of these roses, like the red blazing on Hester's chest, indicates a transgression whose origin remains undisclosed (Hester's consort, the voice that Ann Hutchinson said was God's); Hawthorne also employs a contrasting white and red imagery in the guise of Pearl. Hester's "elf-child" tells an inquiring minister (Mr. Wilson) that, rather than being born, or "made" by God, she "had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door." Hester dresses Pearl in brilliant reds like those of her own letter, leading the same minister to question the aptness of her whitened name: "Pearl?—Ruby, rather!—or Coral!—or Red Rose, at the very least, judging from thy hue!" (97). In The Blithedale Romance, a comparable white-red imagery returns with Zenobia, whom Coverdale finds to be a "perfectly-developed rose" and who drowns herself in a white gown for want of Hollingsworth's love (43). And in The Marble Faun, Hilda, a painter who becomes a nun, repeatedly tosses "a single rose-bud" at her admirer, Kenyon (461, 495, 510, 512). Hilda's purity and artifice pairs with the lusty suggestiveness of the rose in another passage in the novel in which Kenyon contemplates the flowers, both real and artificial, before a statue of the Virgin Mary. Kenyon wonders why "rose-trees, and all kinds of flowering shrubs" aren't planted in pots to replace the medley or blooming or withering live flowers and the artificial plants that never die" (342-43). This preference for bouquets and paper flowers in this scene invokes the decadent ritualism of Catholicism; but the flowers, real and false, twining before a Virgin, also reenact the play between sexual innocence and experience that mark all of Hawthorne's roses, and most roses within Western literature.

In many of these passages on roses, Hawthorne relates the rose not only to sexual desire but also to secrets. When Hilda lobs another rosebud at Kenyon, he feels the tap melt away "his own secret sorrow" (*Marble Faun* 512). Or, in "Rappaccini's daughter, the professor Baglioni stops in to see Giovani and tells him a story from "an old classic author," in which an Indian prince sends a woman to Alexander the Great, a woman whose breath was "richer than a garden of Persian roses." Alexander falls in love, but a "physician" soon discovers "a terrible secret in regard to her": that she "has been nourished with poisons from

her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life...Her love would have been poison—her embrace death" (Mosses 162). In the figure of Rappaccini's daughter, raised on plant poisons from her birth and so treacherous to her lovers, Hawthorne combines the loveliness of roses with direct sexual threat.

Images of white and red, roses and pestilence, take on more homoerotic overtones in *The Blithedale Romance*, as Coverdale retreats to his sick-chamber during a snowstorm, and Hollingsworth comes to build a fire in his chamber and nurse his friend back to health. Other readers have interpreted Hollingsworth as a Melville figure, and read the estrangement between Coverdale and Hollingsworth later in the poem as a depiction of the coldness that seems to have crept into Melville and Hawthorne's relationship in 1851. ¹⁵⁹ At the moment of Coverdale's ailment, however, Coverdale and Hollingsworth are at their closest. Coverdale relates how "Hollingsworth's more than brotherly attendance gave [him] inexpressible comfort" (38). The passage describing their intimacy in the sick room celebrates a closeness that is like the "blaze of a fireside" warming Coverdale "in the down-sinkings and shiverings of [his] spirit." Hollingsworth is described as having "something of the woman moulded into [his] great, stalwart frame" (39). The scene anticipates estrangement—Coverdale says that he finds it "almost a matter of regret, that [he] did not die then," when Hollingsworth "would have gone with [him] to hither verge of life," while now, "he would hardly come to my bedside, nor should I depart the easier for his presence" (39).

Melville believed that Hawthorne had "a secret." By taking up Hawthorne's imagery of white and red, snow and fire, roses and deathliness—as with his adaptation of Hawthorne's mosses—Melville writes within Hawthorne's conceits, changing his relationship to these images from that of a reader to a writer. Unlike Hawthorne's roses, however, Melville's roses make very little show of keeping a secret, or of being aligned to danger or inappropriate desire. The paradox of the sexual openness of Melville's rose poems, however, is that they do keep a secret; they have invited misreading for over a century. It is easy to see convention and tradition in them rather than something far more specific: a decades long conversation with a particular author, friend, and love object.

Among the "As They Fell" poems that invoke religious imagery are "Ambuscade," "The New Rosicrucians," "Rose Window," and "Rosary Beads." The sequence begins with "Ambuscade," a ten-line poem that introduces the imagery of white and red, snow and love. The poem describes a "white nun" dressed in "purity pale passionless." And yet, this cloistered virgin is portrayed as a "May-snow," a frigidity not quite cloaking where spring should be. In the bosom of this nun lies "love's slumbering germ," and the cold "nurtures it, till time disclose / How frost fed Amor's burning rose" (84). In this first poem, the imagery of white and red, frigidity and passion—which Hawthorne so frequently uses as opposites—Melville portrays as feeding one another, snow nurturing a rose to be.

"The New Rosicrucians" and "Rose Window" are even more overt in their religious imagery. "The New Rosicrucians" describes a "Rose-Vine" that "twines the Cross." The Hawthorne-Vine character in *Clarel*, and the religious investigations of that epic poem, illuminates the confluence of roses, vines, and spiritual seeking that, though it employs Christian imagery, is not quite Christian, in this little poem. Here, the poet avows that there "is no mortal sin...but Malice." "Rose-Vine" and "Cross" entwine together into a form of love perhaps as meaningful as those that churches promise. "The New Rosicrucians" proceeds in a collective first person ("To us, disciples of the Order") to a singular, mourning, lyric voice, "I, the Rose's lover." In "Rose Window," Christ as the "Rose of Sharon" is introduced in the first stanza as "figuring" both "Resurrection and the Life," overcoming the

tension between blossom and attar. In the next stanza, the speaker falls asleep even as the "minister grey" drones on, and wakes to a dream of "an Angel with a Rose" shedding "dappled dawn upon the red," suffusing a tomb with reds. In the final stanza, the speaker waits to see "the great Rose-Window" in a cathedral "Transfiguring light" to shine on "the motes in dusty pew" (85-86). Commonness, transcendence, imagination and intertextuality all come together in this poem.

While the religious imagery of these poems suggests chastity and transcendence while actually drawing attention to worldliness, the erotic imagery of some of the other poems in the sequence hides within icy settings. "Amoroso" is the most explicitly romantic poem of the sequence. This poem combines the white and red, hot and cold imagery that Melville borrowed from Hawthorne. Two lovers are riding together in a sleigh "o'er the snows," alongside "ice-bound streams enchanted," and guided by the red star, "Arcuturus," a "huntsman ever ruddy." Though this poem takes up certain tropes of a courtship poem, it unsettles these conventions by pushing against them to suggest all is not as it seems. Though bundled together, the lovers are described as "a plighted pair" in whom "Frost makes with flame a bond." Melville describes their love as both pure as ice or fire and "spousal," an "Arctic Paradise," a love whose realization may be passionate, thought not clearly consummated (83).

The poem draws attention to itself as a poem, amplifying excess through repetition: "Rosamond, my Rosamond, / Of roses is the rose" the poem begins, somewhat absurdly, and this absurdity creates a sense of ironic distance. Courtship is invoked, yet the poem imagines a sense of jubilant passion made impossible, a rose that "in winter glows." Melville's unusual use of moss in the poem should alert us to a relation with Hawthorne. The lovers are "mossed in furs all cosy," an unusual use of the verb, particularly when any number of other ones (wrapped, draped, held, safe) would fit the meter and describe the condition of being bundled together in the back of a sleigh. But the most striking appearance of moss, and thus of Hawthorne, in the poem is the final line, in which the repeated appeal to "Rosamond, my Rosamond," expands into a further correlation between Rosamond and flowers: "Rose Rosamond, Moss-Rose!" Earlier in the poem, the speaker amends a "Rose" as a kind of epithet before his lover's name. But here, the concluding movement to "Moss-Rose" is startling. If "Rose Rosamond" is the lover the speaker would have had—noble, ideal, and perhaps sexually available—"Moss-Rose" is the one he concludes with. A "mossrose" is a separate species of flower, a drought-resistant succulent, suitable for beds with poor soil. They grow well in California, for example, and are more common in the desert than in New England. By wedding moss with a rose, Melville changes the non-specificity of literature's generic Rose to a specific type, one that, by name, also references a particular "Mossy Man" (*Piazza Tales* 241). In an earlier version, this "Moss-Rose" was even more central to Melville's imagination of the poem; the original title for the piece was "Amoroso sings his Moss-Rose" (Weeds 251-252). In the final line of the poem, Melville also lists another possible substitution for the "Rose Rosamond" refrain. This line might have read, "Queen Rosamond, Moss-Rose." This affiliation places the Moss-Rose in relation to both the final poem of this sequence, "The Devotion of the Flowers to their Lady," in which the other flowers address the Rose as their Queen, and the final poem in "This That and the Other," in which a ground-vine pleads with this same Rose Queen for the "Recognition of Clover."

In this first Rose Queen poem, the Queen is appealed to, in second person, for confirmation of the common, domestic, pleasures that define "The Year." In the clover's face a "lowlier Eden" shows. The ground vine asserts humble connections across plant-life

based on their shared materials: "O Rose, we plants are all akin, / Our roots enlock; each strives to win / The ampler space, the sunnier air" (22). This sameness is not quite realized, however, and the end of the poem has the vine scarcely winning the eye of the Rose. This appeal to appreciate commonness and the material transmigrations of the seasons defines the first two sections of the manuscript; these sections do indeed make claims for the small, unassuming, pleasures of domestic life, and the biological foundations of the household. Yet, in this first poem, the Queen blushes and shies and remains apart from the rest.

If we read "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" as the crux that turns the manuscript toward Hawthorne, intertextuality, and another kind of love, then the Queen of the Flowers begins to seem like another plant-cipher for Hawthorne. While Vine in *Clarel* is brooding and aloof, this Queen is blushing and shy, but lushly so. Melville attributes this second Rose Queen poem to a Provencal monk, Clement Drouon, a former troubadour, once again drawing attention to the specters (even imagined ones) of intertextuality. (Hawthorne makes a similar move at the beginning of "Rappaccini's Daughter," when he introduces the tale as a translation of M. de l'Aubépine, French for Hawthorne). In "The Devotion of the Flowers to their Lady," the other flowers confess their connection and subservience to the Rose in a collective third person: "We are natives of Eden—/Sharing its memory with you, / And your handmaidens yet." As the poem proceeds, however, it turns at "nothing": 161

What nothing has happened? no event to make wan?
Begetting things hateful—
Old age, decay, and the sorrows,
Devourers of man? (41-42)

The forces that this "nothing" begets—"Old age, decay, and the sorrows"—are the very effects Melville is writing against in *Weeds and Wildings* responding to Hawthorne's assertion that "Youth is the proper, permanent, and genuine condition of man." In this stanza, "nothing" is figured as the reproductive impulses—"begetting things"—that drive nature toward both flowering and decay. Melville then turns to an extended allegory of flowers as exiled natives of Eden, and this "nothing" as correlative to the loss of paradise:

Scarce you would poor Adam upbraid that his fall
Like a landslide by waters
Rolled an outspreading impulse
Disordering all;

That the Angel indignant, with eyes that foreran
The betrayed generations,
Cast out the flowers wherewith Eve
Decked her nuptials with man.

Ah, exile is exile tho' spiced be the sod,
In Shushan we languish—
Languish with the secret desire
For the garden of God (42).

First, the flowers align themselves with Adam, sure the Queen will not hold him wholly responsible for "his fall," despite its possessive pronoun; next they describe how they were "Cast out" of Eden along with Eve, who "Decked her nuptials" with their fragrant bodies.

The events leading to the fall themselves are not described, leaving a "nothing" at the center of this allegory. Instead, we see only before and after: the flowery bower of heterosexual love and then, Adam, alone with his "Disordering impulse" after the fall. While the flowers are aligned with Eve, they nevertheless "Languish with the secret desire" that, drawing on Hawthorne's frequent correlation between roses, secrets, and illicit love, invokes longings other than those satisfied in matrimony.

After this brief three-stanza romp through Eden and its loss, the flowers return to their personified selves. Apart from these allegories of human desire, sin, and loss, the flowers conclude by asserting their yearly renewals:

But all of us yet
We the Lilies whose pallor is passion,
We the Pansies that muse nor forget
In harbinger airs how we freshen,
When, clad in the amice of gray silver-hemmed
Meek coming in twilight and dew,
The Day-Spring, with pale, priestly hand and begemmed,
Touches, and coronates you:—

Breathing, O daughter of far descent, Banished, yet blessed in banishment, Whereto is appointed a term; Flower, voucher of Paradise, visible pledge, Rose, attesting it spite of the Worm (42).

Eden pulls other texts into the poem, so that what unites these flowers is not only their materially interlocking roots, but also their figuration in literature. Melville then turns to the language of the flowers—"We the Lilies whose pallor is passion, / We the Pansies that muse nor forget"—to emphasize how over-written these material transmigrations are. Flowers overcome the cycles of reproduction, flowering and decay, by becoming literary conventions. This transcendence corresponds to flowers' absorption into collectives—all lilies, all pansies, all flowers—and their repeated cycles of flowering and decay that collapse time in on itself, so that within "harbinger airs" they "freshen" in the present; within this perpetual cycle, the "Day-Spring" is both clothed in the colors of old age, "gray silver-hemmed" and a force of daily renewal. By the time we return to the singular "Rose" in the final line of the poem, she has already been reintroduced as the generic "Flower, voucher of Paradise, visible pledge." The Rose is Queen like Louis XVI was King; if l'état, c'était lui, then les fleurs, ces sont le Rose. The Rose is the ultimate representative of the language of flowers, representing both their "banishment" from Eden and their "blessed," perennial, renewal in an Edenic present-tense. If the Rose represents both a different kind of all-consuming love that outlasts the temporal impulses of biological reproduction on a human scale, then we can read all of "As They Fell" as a sequence of love poems seeking an alternative to the time-lines of earthly intimacy, and thus an answer to Hawthorne's claim in "Mosses from an Old Manse" that there is something unseemly about an old age that decorates itself with flowers. The final poem of the book, "L'Envoi," responds directly to Hawthorne's claim. Here Melville directly addresses his friend: "Time, Amigo, does but masque us—/Boys in gray wigs, young at core." Age, through a "dull tranquilizer" does not "For flowers unfit us" (51). This is not a volume written by a person whose "sole purpose" throughout his career was beauty; rather, Weeds and Wildings investigates the implications of trying on another artist's version of the

beautiful at a time late in life when the artifice of such costumes becomes most apparent, and yet the vitality of relived within such performances endures.

The final section of the manuscript, "The Rose Farmer," most explicitly deals with this theme by describing a man who has "Come unto [his] roses late." The narrator describes how "A friend, whose shadow has decreased... A corpulent grandee of the East, / Whose kind good will to me began / When I against his Rhamadan / Prepared a *chowder* for his feast" at last, when "dying, remembered me" and bequeathed to him "a farm... consecrate to roses" (47-48). Melville is certainly drawing on traditions of Persian poetry for this poem, but the reference to both his friend's greatness, and to the "chowder" he prepared for him once, also recalls Melville's dedication of *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne. The crux of the poem is what to do with this belated gift of roses: enjoy them at their fullest, or turn them into perfume? Musing on this problem, the speaker comes upon "[a] sort of gentleman-rose-farmer," who describes the fleeting "charm" of roses, and an adoration of roses as appealing in ways different from "Eve's fair daughters":

This evanescence is the charm!
And most it wins the spirits that be
Celestial, Sir. It comes to me
It was this fleeting charm in show
That lured the sons of God below,
Tired out with perpetuity
Of heaven's own seventh heaven aglow;
Not Eve's fair daughters, Sir; nay, nay,
Less fugitive in charm are they:
It was the rose (47-48).

The roses in the poem are personified as ladies, collective, blushing and harkening to their farmer's words; yet personification as a literary device draws attention to the roses as merely *like* ladies. The literary femininity of the roses is evanescent, "fleeting," "fugitive." This poem might be read in terms of Melville's career: should he devote himself to the compressions of "great" literary labors ("Billy Budd") or dally with the pleasures of simple poems? But such a reading overlooks the "charm" of roses defined by the historical depth of their literary nature, an endurance contrasted with a material evanescence, and their suggestion of forms of love alternative to the domestic and reproductive.

The poem ends with the narrator walking away, reflecting on how the farmer seems "in life rewarded" for gathering his rosebuds rather than awaiting "transcendental essence" or "quintessential bliss." The farmer resists "crystalliz[ing] the rose" (48). Yet the rose, by both its cycles of flowering and decay and its literary superabundance, resists crystallization all by itself. The rose seems like the simplest of literary conventions; and yet this very simplicity, as Melville realized, resulted in a complex surface conceit in which roses hide in plain sight. Melville models this open secret by concluding the poem with a stanza disavowing further elaboration:

But here arrest the loom—the line. Though damask be your precious stuff, Spin it not out too superfine: The flower of a subject is enough (48). The accomplishment of *Weeds and Wildings* is to demonstrate how overloaded this simple "flower" may be. The collection seems straightforward—harmless ditties—and yet, it is one of Melville's most sustained investigations of the craft—writing and reading—he devoted his life to. At the end of his life, it is not so much that Melville had grown contented and was ready to retire into domestic bliss. Rather, the manuscript shows him working through a sustained interest—the mingling of life and literature—yet again. By trying on flowers, Melville invoked experience's disappearance into literature, so that "[t]he flower of a subject is enough," and, by this very bareness, more than enough: a world invoked, remembered, invited, and uncontained.

Melville made the vegetative imagery of organic form particular—to his reading and to his life. It wasn't simply plant-life that he was interested in, but rather how certain plantforms unfurled through books and memories, and how, by writing of such plants, he could draw literature and life together. His fascination with moss, lilacs, and roses resembles Whitman's fixation on the grass, Dickinson and Thoreau's botanizing, and Emerson's caduceus loss. For all these writers, the general processes distinguishing plant-life from other forms of biological life mattered, as did the specific ways in which different plant-forms, like different literary forms—"Prose" and "Possibility" according to Dickinson's taxonomy negotiated their world. This imagined proximity of the literary and the lived was at the heart of how nineteenth-century American authors interpreted and internalized Romantic organic form. Rather than approach the "unity in multiplicity" that Coleridge said constituted the organic as insular, these writers investigated ways in which organicism was as much about membranes and what they absorb and emit as about the organs they contain. Though plants take on distinct meanings in the work of American authors from Sampson Reed through Melville at the end of his career, plant-life as a sign for literary form infiltrated by materials and for authorship as inhuman was a recurrent trope. For me, the fact that so many of these writers were moved to consider plants, and literature, in these terms, is a testament to how much they viewed the production and reception of writing as vital—as a means of cultivating attention to the present and the particular, and to registering experience. These authors really did experience composition as a means of making life, and thus, the nonhuman, proper to their selves and to their language. Their work reminds us of how literary attention—distinct from the imagination, overfilling with awareness to the present, the particular, the received, and the recalled rather than with refiguration and projection—is already implicitly environmental. Now, more than ever, we need to recall, and cultivate, a comparable inhuman poetics.

Although, in the end, Emerson has appeared relatively little in this dissertation—the key figures of which have turned out to be Dickinson, Thoreau, and Melville—he has haunted my thinking throughout. Emerson's description, in *Nature*, of the "suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable" was one of the first passages that led me to investigate the figurations of literary form and experience in terms of connections between humans and plants. Similarly, Emerson's description of the suggestiveness of "bare lists of words" to an "imaginative and excited mind" in "The Poet" shaped my thinking about the idea of "bareness," both formal and experiential, implicit in organic metaphors (EL 11, 455). Emerson has helped me to see through articulations and manifestations of literature as "plant-like" in other authors, particularly when plants take on a dark, unsettling, or even macabre quality. Emerson identified this quality as the "occult"; I have examined it across these chapters as the "inhuman." In this coda, however, I wish to consider briefly how Emerson voiced a relationship between the literary and the living in terms outside the vegetal, as a play of transparency and fullness. Looking back over the work of this dissertation, I am still left considering what the implications for the "literary" remain when literature is claimed not as a system of surfaces or even a mitigation between surface and depth, but as diaphanous and open to life.

Emerson often writes of literature as if it were written in invisible ink, in which words recede inside a material that should make them legible, leaving to necessity some form of magic—heat or liquid or some other ink—to reveal what Emerson called in his journal "this undersong, this concurrent text" (IMN IV, 95). Invisible ink strikes that tremulous chord between the material limitation of language—that words must be said, or written, or read, in order to be grasped—and the transcendent possibilities of language—that somehow these very words also exist apart from their transcription, written and invisible, articulate and yet loving to hide. Ferdinand de Saussure referred to this intuition of signification apart from writing as the "internal system" of language, which means, as Jacques Derrida examines in Of Grammatology that writing itself is unnaturally exterior, "that exiled figuration, that outside, that double," "a deviation from nature" (34). But Emerson believed that nature was the "internal system" proper to language, and that writing could capture its most vivid impressions. Emerson's "undersong" sets up a relation between "nature" and "the human soul" that is like the relation between paper and invisible ink; as the language of one becomes more deeply inscribed in the other, writing grows thin; nature becomes paper written on by the soul and illumined by the UV light of universal spirit; the soul is written upon by nature and itself grows transparent, pulled into the ether of impersonal and radiant space. Encounters with nature were for Emerson a highly literary affair; and encounters with resonant literature had the pulse and texture of an encounter with nature. Invisible ink is marketed toward those in need of producing fairy diaries, secret messages, impossible games. Well into his thirties, Emerson remained one of these captivated youth. He dedicated his college journals to witches and nymphs; he found alphabets in collections of feathers or leaves, and intuitions encrypted in the stars.

Yet Emerson was enchanted and troubled by points of connection between what he thought of as the visible and invisible, or spiritual, worlds. The death of his first wife Ellen drew these worlds perilously close; his continued addresses to Ellen in his journal, the poems that he wrote to her, made him doubt the existence of a spiritual life apart from this

one so profoundly that he, famously, opened up Ellen's coffin a year after she was buried in order to remind himself that flesh does indeed decay. 163 In Nature, Emerson refers to the interpenetrations of an invisible world within a visible one several times, beginning with an unattributed citation of Swedenborg, floating in the section on language: "The visible world and the relation of its parts, is the dial plate of the invisible." The introduction of invisibility in Nature is couched in terms of language: the "world is emblematic," Emerson writes; "Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of moral nature is a metaphor of the human mind"; "The axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics" (EL 24). The invisible world is dependent on the visible world for its expression, and this expression runs in two directions—from physics to ethics; from mind to matter; visible and invisible reinforce one another, pulsing and tugging along the circumference of a permeable ring. If man is the shifting membrane that mediates between visible and invisible worlds, his status in terms of either is complex. Emerson uses the term "invisible" twice more in nature, both to describe distinct capabilities or points of knowledge that course through man—"the invisible steps of thought," or the knowledge of architecture which seems to respond to "an invisible archetype" (44). In Emerson's account, the invisible world is both a set of processes reason, inquiry—and forms—the dome of St. Peter's, just as I have show organic metaphors bring together expectations of both experience and literary form. For Emerson, writing forges the seen and the unseen.

In different contexts, Emerson uses the term "transparent" to describe powerful or convincing language, the substance of the atmosphere, and, most famously, his self as it becomes a "transparent eye-ball" at the beginning of Nature. Language, atmosphere, and Emerson's metonymic self, in these instances, become sites of transmission, conduits, through which meaning shuttles—from speaker to listener, stars to star-gazer, spiritual to material realms. While Emerson repeatedly emphasizes the power communicated by these transparent states of transmission, the power that words, space, and humans garner by growing transparent, emptying out, becoming thin, he also celebrates the power that language generates by letting the world in, filling itself with stars, or the wavering moods of men. For Emerson, "transparent" language is also figurative language: "My book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects," he writes in "Self-Reliance" (EL 266). Effective writing, Emerson stresses, both by dictum and example, should grow thick with the material presence of the natural world; we go into the woods not only to peer through air to the stars, or see through things to their spiritual significance, but also to bring back to our study fistfuls of images, words dripping with dew, or clamoring with song. "The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then," Emerson writes in "The Poet, "only when he speaks somewhat wildly" (459). That effective language should be both transparent and figuratively rich is one of Emersonian many contradictions.

Emerson champions the importance of attending acutely to nature, and he does so in language that reverberates with the opaline beauty of dove's necks, and with recursive, unresolved, songs of the self. Before there was Thoreau, or Whitman, writers from whom a tradition of American nature writing and poetry has more explicitly evolved, there was Emerson, spreading his shadow and spinning his webs. ¹⁶⁴ One dominant feature of this tradition—through essayists like Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Aldo Leopold—and poets like Robert Frost, Gary Snyder, or Mary Oliver—is the dominance of what poetics would label a lyric speaker; nature writing in America is almost always as much about charting the evolutions of a self as it is about documenting elements of nonhuman otherness. Even a poet like Robinson Jeffers, unapologetic founder of "inhumanism," imagines himself within the space of his poems (if only to ecstatically consider what it would be like to be devoured

by a hawk.) Especially since nature writing in America grows predominately out of the essayistic, or what Lawrence Buell emphasizes as a "non-fiction" tradition, the essayist's self, as it has beginning with Montaigne's self-conscious fashioning and evolution, has a dominant role. In my work, though, I'm particularly interested in literary encounters of nature in which selves are splintered, disorganized, decomposed. For me, Dickinson, Melville, and even Thoreau are exemplary of these alternative modes of fictive or poetic accounts of nature. And for these writers Emerson was an inescapable subterranean voice. ¹⁶⁵

Attending to the contradiction of transparency and figurative thickness in Emerson's understanding of effective writing moves us from a charting of themes—selves in nature to a question of style: how do words work when they turn toward nature, when they waver between the window and the page? At the end of Ecology Without Nature, Timothy Morton urges his readers to "stay with the darkness," to allow themselves to be weighed down, melancholic, by the ways in which nature resists our obscures them, and they resist and obscure it. 166 Emerson's understanding of writing as both an emptying out and a filling up, growing transparent and more vivid at once, offers an entry point for the literary in this ecocritical murkiness. Focusing on what a self does in and with nature in terms of literary practices—how it reads, writes, translates, interprets—emphasizes the role literature might have in maintaining this space of "darkness." As much as Emerson has been not entirely incorrectly characterized as an incorrigible egoist, the ego that he presents is at times a provocatively washed-out one, a slip of a self, an eyeball that can be seen through, that is "nothing," and yet sees all; Emerson's accounts of words as they buffet against and within natural boundaries enact this transparent power in another, inhuman (and yet consummately human) sphere. Emerson helps us to see the ways in which nature writing always indulges in dreams of invisible ink.

Transparency

Over a decade before Emerson infamously became a transparent eyeball wandering across a commons in *Nature*, he used the adjective "transparent" in his journal to describe the use of language by a powerful speaker. Emerson heard William Ellery Channing deliver "The Evidences of Revealed Religion" at the Federal Street Church in Boston on an October Sunday in 1823. Emerson directly descends from Channing. As a religious and intellectual movement, Transcendentalism began in the pulpits and public papers of Boston in the 1830s, outside of the lecture halls of Harvard, and at the safe remove of the small town of Concord. A generation before, however, another religious controversy split this little sliver of Protestant New England into two campus: Unitarians, (Protestants who believed in one god, and who took an academic and historical approach to studying scripture) and Congregationalists (old school Puritans who believed in the Trinity, the infallibility of scripture, and the salvation of the elect). Unitarianism, which began gathering steam in Boston and its environs in the 1780s, after being formally established in England only a decade before, was fully entrenched at the Harvard Divinity School by the 1820s. William Ellery Channing, who was a key figure in the movement, had already been preaching at the Federal Street Church since 1803. Unitarianism was a late Enlightenment movement, transformed but hardly redirected by the spirit-drenched soil of New England; Unitarians valued reason and historical proof, even for something as supposedly unreasonable as spiritual life, and made John Locke seriously required reading at Harvard. But Unitarianism was also a progressive movement, a democratic movement, and a deeply intellectual one.

It's important to remember both these sides of Unitarianism when it comes to understanding Transcendentalism as a youth movement, a rejection of this earlier intellectual, spiritual, and political radicalism. Transcendentalism is sometimes referred to as American Romanticism, an extension of British and German Romanticism. But that trajectory was belated and distinguished from those earlier European movements by the continuing sway of New England religiosity. Transcendentalism radicalized Unitarianism by expanding Unitarian skepticism about the limits of textual significance to nature. Unitarianism's dismissal of the secret text of Congregationalism's "elect" became Transcendentalism's emphasis on the transparence of "self-reliance," self-salvation through self-knowledge. The fierce monotheism of Unitarianism exploded into Emersonian pantheism. And Unitarian skepticism about the absolute truth of scripture became Transcendental skepticism about the knowledge available through texts in general. Though they read widely, Transcendentalists like Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott advocated a blithe disregard of books, in favor of gleaning knowledge from the uninhibited soul, a soul most readily encountered in a realm they lauded as nature.

When Emerson heard Channing speak in 1823, he was already listening for how nature might radicalize the religious tradition that was his inheritance. Emerson described the theme of Channing's talk by importing a term that was already intellectually important to him: "Revelation standing in comparison with Nature." Channing's language on this topic, Emerson noted, was a "transparent medium, conveying with the utmost distinctness, the pictures in his mind, to the mind of the hearers" (*JMN II*, 160). In an age in which screens present a perpetually shifting array of images, the idea of a medium that is made to almost disappear by the force of the pictures it channels, may not seem particularly startling. But the fact that in Channing's case this transmission takes place entirely in language does make the idea peculiar: the idea that as language grows transparent, the images (if not necessarily the ideas) it conveys come into sharper focus. ¹⁶⁷ For Emerson, images slice through the potential opacity of abstract thought, making the substance as permeable as a film, or a membrane.

Channing's own position seems to be almost the opposite. While images culled from nature have the potential to bewilder us, "God's word" alone cuts through these pictures and delivers the facts. According to Emerson, Channing argued that, "Nature had always been found insufficient to teach men the great doctrines which Revelation inculcated." Only revelation through scripture, Channing believed, can convey ideas directly from God to our minds. Channing argues against looking to nature for intimations of the divine; if the universe were truly capable of reflecting God, it would be so infinite and vast that as humans we would have no true access to its messages. Astronomy, for Channing, was particularly problematic; the study of stars demonstrates the insufficiency of taking the material world as an image of the divine, for though the study of the heavens "reveals to us infinite number of worlds like our own accommodated for the residence of such beings as we of gross matter," "we do not want," or should not want, according to Channing, "such a world as this but a purer, a world of morals & of spirits" (JMN II, 161). Nature's images are a distraction, a ruse; they muddle our sight; they do not convey ideas, but merely offer glints and impressions of overwhelming matter.

What impressed Emerson in Channing's speech had very little to do with Channing's argument; it was Channing's "pictures" that rendered his language "transparent," rather than his insistence on scripture. Emerson was left with intimations of stars. These stars resurfaced in a sermon on astronomy, which articulates the antithesis of Channing's position—that the stars, indeed, are excellent indicators of the divine, and of man's relation

to God¹⁶⁸—and in the first chapter of *Nature*, in which the idea of transparency surfaces in a new context. Stars effectively strand us as humans, Emerson suggests: "if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime" (*EL*, 9). While in Channing's account, astronomy misdirects our attention by reminding us just how much matter the universe contains, for Emerson, staring at the stars reveals to us our difference within the universe, as we kindle to the intimations of the sublime. The light from the stars distinguishes us from the material world, drawing a line between the stargazer "and what he touches," while at the same time, reminder that onlooker of the proximity of the divine. Channing's account rests on a binary—material, bad; spirit, including the word of God, good. Emerson scrambles the sides. In *Nature*, material is an indication of spirit itself. And the transparency of the atmosphere mediates between both stars and things the stargazer could lay his hands on, and the spiritual center that is his self.

For Emerson, the transparency of the world is related to the capacities of the self. The atmosphere was made transparent so that man might be alone with the stars. And more opaque substances can be made transparent by "Wisdom," instruction, or know-how: "The walls of houses are transparent to the architect"; "The world becomes transparent to Wisdom," Emerson writes in his Journal (JMN III, 261, 280). The idea of a world that takes on varying degrees of transparency in relation to the capacities of an individual finds more explicit expression in "Self-Reliance," where Emerson compares a man to a "shell-fish" frequently crawling "out of its beautiful but stony case" to build another home. The more "vigor" possessed by the individual, he writes, the more often this discarding and constructing takes place. And in some cases, "these revolutions" turn "incessant, and all worldly relations hang very loosely about him, becoming, as it were, a transparent fluid membrane through which the living form is seen" (EL, 301). Though the world may become transparent, this does not mean that it becomes insubstantial, or invisible. Emerson was also deeply interested in how the visible world seemed to reference invisible truths, or ideal forms. But here, the "fluid membrane" is a reminder that even transparent substances have substance: the world becomes not a vacuum but a window, a plate of glass.

Given the importance of Emerson's experience viewing natural specimens at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in July of 1833, the transparency of the world to the knowledgeable eye can be thought of as the rows of cabinets in this museum of natural history, parading for a captivated tourist turned budding naturalist, the continuity of "living form." Emerson found the "series of animated forms" at the Jardin des Plantes both "bewildering" and moving (*Lectures I*, 10). In his journal, he recorded how he wandered through galleries filled with birds, stones, and the skeletons of animals and men, through the gardens and the zoo, and how his encounters with "the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes,—& the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient in the very rock aping organized forms" conjured in him "strange sympathies" (*JMN IV*, 198-200).

The natural history cabinets in Paris were designed, according to a classification system established by Jussieu, to reinforce the continuity of natural forms. In his first public lecture, back in Boston in the fall of 1833, Emerson described these cabinets and their effect on him in detail in "The Uses of Natural History." He sketches a reenactment of what it is to wander among these galleries: first, he says, your eye is drawn to the *Psittacus Erythropterus*, a garish parrot, "the beau of all birds." Nearby, various species of humming bird are

clustered together—"the Trochilus Niger not so big as a beetle—to the Trochilus Pella with his irresistible neck of gold and silver and fire; and the Trochilus Delalandi from Brazil whom the French call the magnificent fly (La mouche magnifique) or glory in miniature" (Lectures I, 8-9). Your eye follows from one of these miniscule birds to the next, seeking the sense of "humming bird" between them. Similarly various "birds of Paradise" are gathered: a wedge of swans, a pale collection of white peacocks, and a selection of ibis. In other rooms, you encounter insects pinned in boxes; reptiles preserved with all their spines and scales; fish who seem to swim from one form to the next, rather than through water; and stones, which after all this stillness of life half appear to be alive. "The limits of the possible are enlarged," Emerson concludes, winding down his imaginary tour, "and the real is stranger than the imaginary" (10). This strangeness of the real arises when particular instances of reality—this fish, this limpid flamingo—point through themselves toward a proliferation of forms, toward "the inexhaustible gigantic riches of nature," as Emerson says (10). A school of fish swimming through and around other schools; a flock of flamingos, or spoonbills, or storks. Natural history honors the type, the species, and the whole. Individual forms become transparent, windows toward all the other flamingos in the world. 169

Forms also become transparent as their history, or their use-value, overtakes them, giving them a meaning outside of themselves. Emerson was impressed with how scientists—a "comparative anatomist," or a "conchologist"—could recreate the life of a thing solely based on its form—"whether a skeleton belonged to a carnivorous or herbivorous animal," or whether a shell "were a river or a sea shell, whether it dwelt in still or running waters" (17). In this lecture and elsewhere, Emerson emphasizes how different the world appears to the trained and untrained eye. To recognize beauty in the world requires specialization; else "every thing is a monster till we know what it is for" (17). This monstrosity applies equally to natural and man-made things: "A ship, a telescope, a surgical instrument, a box of strange tools are puzzles and painful to the eye, until we have been shown successively the use of every part." Staring at the series of forms in the Jardin des Plantes, Emerson spoke of the universe as an "amazing puzzle" (Lectures I, 10). When we do not know the reason for things, they remain at a remove, as problems to be solved. As soon as we learn their purpose, however, each one "tells its story at sight, and is beautiful" (17). The instantaneousness of this transmission recalls Channing's "transparent" language—a transfusion of images and ideas directly into the mind. And the compression of the entire story, or history, of a thing into a glance suggests a speedy language, speech that forgoes the slow imprecision of words, accelerating on its way toward the beautiful.

Inspired by his experience in the Jardin des Plantes, Emerson famously resolved to become a naturalist, to learn the history of forms, and see through things toward their significance. Emerson thought of this new calling in terms of his other callings—preacher, scholar, essayist: he thought of naturalist pursuits as another textual enterprise, and naturalists as better readers of nature than the average man out for a walk in the woods. While a traveler sees "a broken mountainside," and turns away, returning to his trip, Cuvier finds a book, and sets himself to reading "the history of the globe" (18). The world becomes transparent when it can be read. And yet this reading does not, or does not yet, provide full satisfaction; it is a form of reading whose story must already by known before it can be comprehended: if you know the story of this mountain, you may read it; if you don't know the story, you merely wander by. The instantaneousness of reading the story of the world requires long hours of previous pouring over texts. Before resolving to become a naturalist, Emerson had already been an avid reader of natural history books. In the year before he departed for Europe, he borrowed books on ornithology, chemistry, natural

philosophy, conchology, and the natural history of bees and ants; he read transactions from the British Royal Society on science; he read Knapp's *Journal of a Naturalist*, and Drummond's *Letter to a Young Naturalist*; as early as 1830, he had begun reading Bigelow's *Florula Bostoniensis*, a guide to flora growing in the Boston area, and transcribing in his journal the Latin names of plants and flowers he encountered on his walks. ¹⁷⁰ It was this preliminary study, in fact, that allowed him to identify commonalities between the things he saw growing in England and Scotland during his travels there, and common American plants (many of the latter, having been carried over the Atlantic by settlers, both intentionally, and not). ¹⁷¹

To experience nature as a transparent language, conveying its histories in a language of fact and form, an idealized hieroglyphics, 172 required a training Emerson affiliated with spiritual growth: a man "cannot be a naturalist," he writes in Nature, "until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit" (EL, 47). Without this satisfaction, the world would appear "not transparent but opake"; the eye that should itself become transparent would project onto nature the "ruin or the blank" of its own misunderstanding of form. The study of nature is as yet, unfinished; I do not think we are yet masters of all the reasons that make this knowledge valuable to us," Emerson wrote. And yet this study is spurred on by the "presentiment" that we have "of relations to external nature, which outruns the limits of actual science" (Lectures I, 7). At the beginning of Nature, Emerson concludes his discussion of the stars by elevating the way they finally stand aloof from our understanding: "The stars awaken a certain reverence," Emerson writes, "because though always present, they are inaccessible." Thus, stars are like "all natural objects," "when the mind is open to their influence." Much of nature appears to us through what Emerson calls frequently, borrowing from Goethe, an "open secret," a secret that, like the stars, is both present and inaccessible, apparent and opaque.¹⁷³ The intuition of nature's opacity, her willingness to hide,¹⁷⁴ Emerson ascribes to a "most poetical sense in the mind" (EL, 9). If looking at the world while flushed with spirit allows the eye to become transparent, and the transparency of air to flood the spirit further with intimations of significance and grandeur in the surrounding world, then looking at the world from the perspective of poetry, or as a poet, permits natural objects to maintain some shimmer of their secrets, to be both immediate and removed.

Looking at the stars, one feels both these things—the possibility of direct transmission of meaning through nature, and the sense of nature as irreparably aloof. Emerson's understanding of the relationship of nature to language wavers between these two poles; as language, nature can be read, its particularities smoothed away into a general grammar of things; but when we turn to regard natural objects in "a poetical sense," all the real thicknesses, feathers, shades of color, and peculiarities of particular natural forms come back into focus, enriching writing with their evocative aloofness, rough edges, but insistence on being themselves. The move from a transparent world to a material world, therefore, is like the move from reading to writing. If reading, translating, interpreting nature illuminates spirit and renders nature transparent, transcribing nature, putting puddles in an essay, a humblebee in a poem, demands concreteness, and makes language thick.

The smell of pines

In his chapter on Goethe in *Representative Men*, Emerson observes the prevalence of writing everywhere in the natural world: "All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river, its channel in the soil; the animal, its bones in the stratum; the fern and

leaf, their modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone...The air is full of sounds; the sky, of tokens; the ground is all memoranda and signatures; and every object covered over with hints, which speak to the intelligent" (746). Nature is engaged in the ongoing process of "self-registration," of writing itself, through shadows, scratches, channels, bones, fossils, the movements of water and wind. While the world becomes transparent from the perspective of the eye engaged in reading, at the same time, this "intelligent" eye is confronted with the non-transparent substance of nature's writing: the sky, ground, the botanical species which comprise nature's alphabet. Both "the record" and the "recorded" are similarly "alive," according to Emerson; in fact, just as invisible ink becomes the paper on which it is written, the record becomes absorbed in or by the recorded—stones record the life of stones, water, the life of water. The "mountains, sunshine, thunder, night, birds, & flowers" that make up what Emerson earlier called in his journal "the sublime alphabet," tell the stories of themselves while at the same time, hinting at something more (IMN 258). Both their concreteness and their power of suggestion associate them with language. To speak of nature as a language renders the concreteness of nature diaphanous by emphasizing nature's ability to signify thoughts beyond itself, and at the same time, draws attention to the singular instances of concrete expression—the geologic record, for example 175—that make up nature's dictionary. 176 Emerson devoted an entire section in Nature to "Language," but he developed many of the ideas in this section in the journal entries and lectures of years before.

Emerson's earliest lecture series focused on natural science, the biographies of great men, 177 and English Literature, from Chaucer, through Shakespeare to Bacon. These themes, and the points of intersection between them, continued to fascinate him throughout his career. If the four earliest lectures on natural science—"The Uses of Natural History," "On the Relation of Man to the Globe," "Water" and "The Naturalist"—are essential blueprints in the development of Emerson's thinking on its way toward *Nature*, the lectures on English literature were equally important. (And the lectures on great men, combined with these other themes, contributed to Emerson's other early masterpieces—"The American Scholar," and "The Divinity School Address.") Although these lectures focus on British literature, Emerson uses his readings as a springboard to work through his ideas on the significance of literature, and language, more generally.

Language begins, Emerson argues in his introductory lecture to the series, when man considers the natural objects that surround him—"beasts, fire, water, stones"—as more than mere commodities. He senses their ability to signify something beyond appearance or usevalue. "All language," Emerson writes, is therefore "a naming of invisible and spiritual things from visible things." Spirit shines through matter, turning the visible into the suggestive. Emerson gives a rather spurious series of examples of what this spiritual suggestiveness actually looks like: "Right originally means straight; wrong means twisted. Spirit primarily means wind. Transgression, the crossing a line. Supercilious, the raising of the eyebrow. Light and heat in all languages are used as metaphors for wisdom and love. We say the heart to express emotion; the head to denote thought." These examples—not exactly convincing of the material origins of all words—do not seem sufficient to Emerson's sense of connection between language and the material world. But the origin stories of language are always unsatisfying. According to Emerson, words seem to stir a forgotten memory of a time when they were things, yet "[m]ost of this process is now hidden from us" (Lectures I 220).

Things bear the traces of originary language. "It is not words only that are emblematic," Emerson writes, but also words (*Lectures I* 220). Emerson senses an emblematic origin of language from this quality of things to suggest ideas beyond

themselves. Emerson's rhetoric is again more compelling than his examples, which project human qualities back onto animals, minerals, and other physical phenomenon, rather than letting these things speak for themselves: "A fierce man is a lion;" he writes, "a brave man is a rock; a learned man is a torch; Light and Darkness are not in words but in fact our best expression for knowledge and ignorance" (Lectures I 221). In Nature, when Emerson gives a more programmatic account of nature's relationship to language, he relies on a Swedenborgian vocabulary of symbols and signs: "1. Words are signs of natural facts. 2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts. 3. Nature is the symbol of the spirit" (EL 20). In this three-part theory, words (signs) point directly to nature, while nature (symbol), both in its particular and general forms, points through itself to spirit. While words maintain concreteness, symbols become transparent. Emerson's understanding of spirit, however, is difficult to pin down; spirit vacillates, it shifts through moods, it is not the same today as it was yesterday. Though he lifts the idea that natural particulars correlate directly to "spiritual facts" from Swedenborg, Emerson leaves exactly what matter signifies open to interpretation. In his essay on Swedenborg in Representative Man, he lists examples of the kinds of symbolic correlatives Swedenborg suggests between natural objects and ideas: "a horse signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich, that; an artichoke, this other" (EL, 676). Emerson criticizes these neat correlations on the basis of Nature's, and, implicitly, human's, protean nature. For Emerson, natural particulars correlate not to theological principles but rather to "spiritual facts" as slippery and unfinished as nature itself. In "The Humanity of Science," Emerson pointedly states that the correlative suggestiveness that exists between nature and spirit grows from both nature and spirit's inability to mean the same thing at each new occasion: "The permanence and at the same time endless variety of spiritual nature finds its fit symbol in the durable world," Emerson writes, "which never reserves the same face for two moments" (Lectures I 26).

Emerson revised Swedenborg's notion of nature as a symbol for particular theological ideas into a more general concept of nature as the symbol of a never settled, never finished, evolving spiritual nature; he similarly extended Goethe's idea of words as things, ¹⁷⁸ developing his own theory of the material nature of rhetoric and poetic expression. Emerson's ideas about the evocative power of good writing, and about poetry as the use of language that gets closest to language's lost, material, origins, both have their beginning in the idea that words directly correlate to things. If the record of nature and what nature records are "alive," Emerson also insisted that good writing, either "in prose or verse...should be born alive" (JMN 432). This living-quality in what Emerson calls "discourse" or prose has to do with writing's openness to influence by the natural world. "My book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects," he writes in Self-Reliance. "The swallow over my window should interweave that thread or straw he carries in his bill into my web also" (EL, 266). The world gets into writing through the attention of the writer. If he loves the city, "his writings love the city, & if a man loves sweet fern & roams much in the pastures, his writings will smell of it," Emerson wrote in his journal (JMN I 197). Brilliant discourse, according to Emerson, needs to be figurative, to demonstrate that its deliverer spent time looking long and hard at the world, and that, during that looking, the world did not grow transparent but rather came into sharp focus, an abundance of particular details and images to be rallied into metaphor or image. In his introductory lecture on British Literature, for example, Emerson writes, "[a]ll the memorable words of the world are these figurative expressions" and, "[g]ood writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. The imagery in discourse which delights all men is that

which is drawn from observation of natural processes" (*Lectures I*, 222). Emerson valued the mind's ability to engage with and incorporate material particulars into written expression. A few of Emerson's examples of this principle include Homer describing Apollo as "the Night," heroes falling in *The Iliad* like "the great ash," Milton's Proserpine, herself a flower, gathering flowers, and imagistic moments from Shakespeare's plays and poems (222-223). Later, in his chapter on Shakespeare in *Representative Men*, Emerson expands his notion of excellent discourse into a definition of imagination, which, he says "is the use which the Reason makes of the material world, for purposes of expression" (*EL* 291). The material world is so useful for expression because one of its primary qualities is already expressiveness.

Emerson's use of the idea of "expression" is related to his use of transparency when describing Channing's speech. The ideal of transparent speech leaps through words and directly connects pictures and ideas in the mind; the medium that allows for that expression grows thin. Similarly, when natural particulars are expressive, they seem to convey something other than themselves. This expressivity of things applied equally to living forms in nature and quotidian objects: "the lapel of a coat, the crimp or plait of a cap, a creampot," as well as "a tree" or "a stone" or "[e]very knot of every cockle" (JMN III 79, JMN I 14). In Emerson's approximation, both a cream pot and a tree seem to be about to speak, even though, ultimately (this isn't Disney), flatware doesn't break into song, and trees capture only the sound of the wind. The appearance of expressive potential is more important than whether or not such things ever speak. "Nature seems," therefore, "not to be silent but to be eager & striving to break out into music," Emerson writes in his journal: "it is impossible that the wind which breathes so expressive a sound amid the leaves—should mean nothing" (JMN I 138). In "The Naturalist," another of his early natural history lectures, Emerson writes that a cabinet of natural curiosities is useful in so much as it consolidates nature's "hints" for us in one place, allowing us to peruse these "intimations of the inward Law of Nature" at our leisure. And staring into these boxes filled with forms, our thoughts begin to become tangled in shells and birds, shot and stuffed long ago: "It would seem as if there were better means of expressing these thoughts than words," Emerson writes (Lectures I, 82). Indeed, the objects express themselves outside of language. We stroll through the galleries waiting for them to sing.

The expressivity of natural objects is one of poetry's oldest dreams, beginning with Orpheus, whose ability to stir matter into music, Emerson references often. Under the tutelage of Orpheus's song, rocks and trees grow expressive. Although things may appear on the verge of speaking, they need to be activated before they will respond. For Orpheus, that activation lies in music, which sends its echoing strains into surrounding life forms, which acquire their own agency from its reverberations. For Emerson, the activation of matter's expressivity comes through the attention paid to nature by the naturalist, or poet, and through natural "composition," the arrangement of forms. Emerson used an example of seashells frequently, beginning with the recounting a childhood memory in his journal: "I remember when I was a boy going upon the beach & being charmed with the colors & forms of the shells. I picked up many & put them in my pocket. When I got home I could find nothing that I gathered—nothing but some (old) dry ugly mussel & snail shells. Thence I learned that Composition was more important than the beauty of individual forms to effect. On the shore they lay wet & social by the sea & under the sky" (JMN 291). 179 A shell plucked from the shore and taken home to be singularly admired will no longer gleam as it did among other shells along the sea. Better than a single flower or a shade of orange is a field, or a sunset. "A hillside expresses what has never been written down" (Lectures I, 74).

Although natural composition seems to surpass unnatural composition—the actual act of writing, or arranging forms—Emerson does have literature in mind when he observes the composition of a hillside, or a shore. Shakespeare exemplifies literature aligned with nature. In his early lecture on the Bard, Emerson defines the "law" of "Composition" simply as "putting together"; composition both "lies at the foundation of literature" and "is the most powerful secret of Nature's workmanship" (*Lectures I*, 317). Literature, at its best, seems unarranged.¹⁸⁰

Is nature an image of literature, or literature an image of nature? Emerson's vocabulary spans these poles, making nature into a poetic structure, and poems into things about to come alive. Recalling Orpheus again, Emerson writes in "History," that poems have the "power...to unfix, and, as it were, cap wings to solid nature" (EL, 251). "A strange poem is Zoroastrism," bestowing spirit on nature, or bringing Plato's forms into sight (JMN) IV, 11-14). Emerson thought of poetry, like language, as referencing a long and partially obscured history, charting back to a time when "language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry" (Lectures I, 221). Language begins in poetry, and poetry begins in pictures; like Channing's transparent language, poetry is embodied directly in images, summed up in a hill, or a humblebee. Poetry occupies an intermediary space, a kind of missing link, between nature, embodied in images, and language, which at its best, brings together images and ideas. In "The Poet, Emerson writes, "Every word was once a poem. Every new relation is a new word" (EL, 455). Poems precede and produce words; words produce new relations to nature. In the same essay, Emerson defines poetry as "fossil language" (457): the calcified sediment of a more general language or the oldest example of living language, just as those imprints of nautilus-like crustaceans are some of the earliest examples of life. Emerson thought "poetry," far from a mere set of conventions or a system of meter and line, expressed something essential about language's obscured relation to the natural world. Poetry, according to Emerson, is a general function of language, rather than a technical term for a particular arrangement of literary constraints. Poetry could get inside of other language—essays, lectures, sermons: all things that Emerson wrote in addition to poems. Even in conversation, Emerson believed, a man "will find he has always a material image more or less luminous arising in his mind contemporaneous with every thought, [which] furnishes the garment of the thought" (Lectures I, 221). Emerson's capacious understanding of "poetry," and the influence of his definition—on all the other authors I have focused on in this dissertation—unsettles the idea that poetry in nineteenth-century America was defined mainly through the inheritance and performance of literary conventions. 181 For Emerson and his heirs, "poetry" designates an ideal use of language in which the boundaries between nature and verbal expression are obscured. Language begins not in nature but in "poetry," which is removed from nature and yet behaves so naturally that it seems to have a "spirit" like that "of a plant or an animal" and "an architecture of its own." Poetry forms new natures, natures inside of nature (EL, 450); and the "poet," as Emerson begins by saying in *Nature*, "conforms things to his thoughts," rather than "thoughts to things" (34).

Though this dream of living language may be as old as Orpheus, the nineteenth century saw a particularly wide flourishing of statements about language's living capabilities. Poetry should be a leaf, an apple, a sprout. This emphasis on the naturalness of poetic expression extended to poetry's most contrived features: Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman all wrote of rhyme modeled on natural occurrences. "A rhyme in one of our sonnets," Emerson writes in "The Poet," "should not be less pleasing than the iterated nodes of a seashell, or the resembling difference of a group of flowers" (*EL*, 459). Whitman echoes this

in his preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, asserting that "rhyme" in a poem should "bud...as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfumes impalpable to form" (v). These instances of literature modeled on living form follow the same kind of circular structure as Emerson's grammar of nature. Nature is a good literary model because it is literary itself: in its resounding rhymes, elegant lines, and capacity to evocatively, if not definitively, suggest. These features allow nature to be figured as a literary production that humans also undertake, for Thoreau to wonder, in his essay on "The Natural History of Massachusetts," what journal "the persimmon and the buckeye...and the sharp skinned hawk" keep, for literary production to become naturalized (Walden 547). Or for Thomas Wentworth Higginson, one of Dickinson's long time correspondents, to suggest that "[o]n this flowery bank, on this ripple-marked shore, are the true literary models" ("Out-Door Study" 255). The problem with nature as a literary model, however, is that sentences or lines, as solid and expansive and invigorating as they might be, as seemingly capable of expression, never quite smell of pine trees. To model writing on nature is to be continually reminded of the insufficiency of words.

The pain of an alien world

Pointing to the naturalness of poetry is a claim for poetry's ability to leave literature behind. But looking to nature as a literary model also becomes a reminder of art's inability to signify fully, to actually indicate with fullness the world upon whose images it turns. Emerson rarely suffers from such failures. Rather, he generally sees the unfinished recording of nature as a challenge, a call to "the highest minds of the world," to go on exploring "the double meaning, or, shall I say, the quadruple, or the centuple, or much more the manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact" (*EL*, 447). There is a passage from his journals, however, in which Emerson accounts for his failure to translate what he encounters in nature "in living language to my page." Here, before he goes to pull her from the ground, Emerson directly addresses Ellen:

15 July 1831.

After a fortnight's wandering to the Green Mountains & Lake Champlain yet finding you dear Ellen nowhere & yet everywhere I come again to my own place, & would willingly transfer some of the pictures that the eyes saw, in living language to my page; yea translate the fair & magnificent symbols into their own sentiments. But this were to antedate knowledge. It grows into us, say rather, we *grow wise* & not take wisdom; and only in God's own order & by my concurrent effort can I get the abstract sense of which mountains, sunshine, thunder, night, birds, & flowers are the sublime alphabet (*JMN II* 257-258).

Emerson's failure to encounter Ellen (and yet encountering her, through this failure, everywhere) in the mountains and the lake is also his failure to convert "pictures," those impressions that in transparent language should shuttle between minds, into language thick with the world. As he looks for his dear interlocuteur, he finds himself all the more alone; and in this solitude, "mountains, sunshine, thunder, night, birds, & flowers" are also aloof, unscripted. Emerson writes of knowledge as a growth that is not organic—effortless and formless, but rather that must be cultivated, an "order" responded to by "effort." Rather

than saying that wisdom, "grows into us," Emerson suggests, "say rather, we *grow wise*"; we cannot "take wisdom" like an apple from the tree, but must graft and tend and prune it every winter ourselves. This effort brings nature's "sublime alphabet" into being, transforming natural particulars into letters: letters like this one Emerson writes to someone outside himself, in his journal.

Emerson believed it was poetry's work to activate mountains and lakes into letters and letters. But he did not believe that poetry alone could teach us to read the world. In an oration on "Literary Ethics" from 1838, Emerson bemoaned the fact that his foundation in "Latin and English poetry," which raised him on "an oratorio of praises of nature—flowers, birds, mountains, sun, and moon" had yet taught him nothing "of their essence, or of their history" (EL, 101). These poets were not naturalists enough; "they contented themselves with the passing chirp of a bird," Emerson quips; they "listlessly looked at sunsets" (101). Real poetry, according to Emerson, takes place not at a desk (where he spent the majority of his time) but in the forest or by the shore, where everything is yet "new and undescribed." As illustration of this newness, Emerson provides one of his quintessentially figurative passages: "The screaming of the wild geese flying by night; the thin note of the companionable titmouse, in the winter day; the fall of swarms of flies, in autumn, from combats high in the air, pattering down on the leaves like rain; the angry hiss of the woodbirds; the pine throwing out its pollen for the benefit of the next century; the turpentine exuding from the tree" (101-102). All these appear new, unwritten, to the solitary walker in the woods.

Poetry reminds us of everything that has already been written, already said; nature reminds us of everything that remains unwriteable. Even the most transparent language, dripping with pictures, is not as effective as a sunrise: "Whilst I read the poets, I think that nothing new can be said about morning and evening. But when I see the daybreak, I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearian, or Miltonic, or Chaucerian pictures. No," Emerson writes, "but I feel perhaps the pain of an alien world; a world not yet subdued by thought; or I am cheered by the moist, warm, glittering, budding, melodious hour, that takes down the narrow walls of my soul, and extends its life and pulsations to the very horizon. *That* is morning, to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body, and to become as large as nature" (102). Though much of this resounds with Emersonian optimism, I want to stay, for a moment, with Emerson's surprising idea, before cheerfulness buts in, of "an alien world; a world not yet subdued by thought." This is the newness we seek in nature, the sense of a world that resists us. "The human is the alien," Wallace Stevens would write a century later, "The only creature that has no cousin in the moon." Emerson, for all of his love of the human, registers this alienation, too.

In the lecture "Literary Ethics," Emerson describes a haunted landscape, that spans both the "darkness of the American forest," "the repulsive plants that are native in the swamp" and the "pleasing terror of the distant town." This "haggard and desert beauty," Emerson says, "has never been recorded by art, yet is not indifferent to any passenger" because "[a]ll men are poets at heart. They serve nature for bread, but her loveliness overcomes them sometimes (EL, 102). The inhumanness of this landscape, which all men incorporate in the name of poetry, Emerson suggests, recalls Dickinson's "Haunted House" of Nature," Thoreau's encounter with the top of Katahdin in *The Maine Woods*, and haunted forests in Melville's *Mardi* and *Pierre*. Such landscapes come into focus, with all of their creepy grandeur, when these authors turn the eyes of poetry away from the page both outward, toward the spookiness that surrounds them, as well as inwardly, toward an inhumanness motivating the very impulse to put such strange proximity into language.

Perhaps the greatest counter to impressions of Emersonian egoism is to remember the moment in which he himself becomes "transparent." Back at the beginning of *Nature*, we encounter him becoming something other than a solid self: "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God" (EL, 10). The "backyard sublime" of the commons is enough here to washout Emerson's sense of self. 183 By "backyard sublime" I mean an experience epitomized by the psychic disorientations that seem to arise in response to quintessentially "small" or insignificant natural particulars: the buzzing fly that Dickinson's speaker hears while dying, or the stones, trees, cat that Melville's Isabel confuses herself with in Pierre. This formulation draws on William Cronon's suggestion in "The Trouble with Wilderness," that we needn't go looking for "nature" or "the wild" in places far from home. Emerson's commons is a wonderful example of how close such disorientations lie. We might feel ourselves torn to pieces by the sublime even in the context of other humans, without cliffs or lightening or oceans, on a walk across town. The combination of familiarity and sudden influx otherness—an amped up version of the uncanny—constitutes the inhuman.

As the individuality of the self is blotted out in such moments, the world comes flooding into view: "I am nothing; I see all." Emerson's self thins so that nature might come near. The transparent eyeball is linked with Emerson's failure to translate nature into language or to find a dead beloved, the "pain" of witnessing "an alien world"; these are all moments in which transparency, as a medium of meaning, short-circuits for a moment; the language of nature grows full of static; the self, even as it tunes in, begins to disappear. There is a classic "terror and awe" to these moments, but they are small instances of the sublime: an evening on the commons, the disorientations produced by the sudden death of a loved one, the failure to find the right words, a sense that the morning is more new and startling than one could ever make use of. I love the Emerson who stumbles, who smudges his ink. I suppose, on certain days, I love the Emerson of perfectibility, too. 184 But I like most the idea that perfectibility might be a kind of emptying out, a transparency rather than a fullness, an encounter with the alien that is the human's other half, the moments in which Emerson imagines the "occult relationship between man and vegetable," in which the mountains and atmosphere and grass do not necessarily clearly signal back, in which nature is not constituted of symbols, but rather intimations of something on the verge of being said, and left unsaid. The illusion of ink sinking into its surfaces, and the illusion that some other substance, perhaps our attention, will uncover that naked writing.

On Attention

In conclusion, although I have tried in this dissertation to examine form and experience as the two sides of organic suggestion, ultimately, I find that what unites all literary practice (writing and reading), and what is so often invoked by arguments about the value of nature writing though rarely analyzed, are practices of "attention." Attention renders texts transparent while making experience full. But what is attention itself and does it really accomplish what we claim for it?

Attention is a noun, and yet, as a noun, it frenetically attracts verbs. Attention is caught, claimed, governed, paid, taken, drawn, given. Most of these verbs convey a minimal willpower, if they allow for willing at all. At times, we may choose to give attention away—

reading and writing create occasions in which, I believe, attention can be most freely given—but more often than not, attention is demanded, wrested. Similarly, attention is so often invoked in discussions of the value of nature writing because of an expectation that attention to nature is given freely.

The works I have examined here frequently explore how our attention is not our own, even perhaps most particularly when we consider our relationship to nature. One of the paradoxes of attention—Buddhists know this well—is that the more it is given, the emptier it becomes; the more one attends to the limbs of a tree, or the lines of a poem, the easier it becomes to understand such phenomenon as "incorporate" (as Whitman has it) not only with one another, but with one's sense of self as well. Even if attention is freely given, the effects of that gift remind one of what a small thing agency, in the cause of attention, can be to begin with. ¹⁸⁵

And yet, I think this slightness of attention might be the best thing literature has to offer, to writers or to readers, including students of all kinds. Charles Altieri characterizes literature's potential in similar terms, as creating instances for "appreciation," both of textual particulars and of the way our receptivity to them initiates processes of "self-awareness." In Altieri's account, appreciation, while it is not sufficient to "the political romance of developing and addressing constructs we can treat as collective modes of agency," nevertheless allows for transformation (self by self) ("Appreciating Appreciation" 1-3). My own question remains, however, how such acts of literary appreciation (or as I prefer to call them, more neutrally, attention) correlate to how others—especially those most seemingly distant to the human, like the feral fennel growing along parking lots—capture our attention, and might ultimately change our actions, if we were to respond to the full force of their undemanding demands.

Notes

Introduction

- ¹ These biographical features of Reed's life are pulled from James Reed's brief biographical preface to the final edition of *Observations on the Growth of the Mind*.
- ² Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 201-212.
- ³ For a different take on the ethics of humans responding to plants, see Michael Marder's *Plant-Thinking* (2013) and Matthew Hall's *Plants as Persons* (2011). These two philosophers have been important contributors to what has begun to be called "critical plant studies."
- ⁴ Higginson donated his "Field Notes," accounts of walks and lists of flowers he assembled in the 1840s, to the Harvard Herbarium in the 1894; Professor L.L. Dame, writing to Higginson in acknowledgement of his bequest, observed "I have got pleasant glimpses through your spectacles of plant-life in Cambridge and vicinity in your college days –It seems scarcely possible that some plants you have noted could ever have grown where you found them Dear me! The march of improvement is not an unmixed pleasure to us all." For more on the work of botanists based at the same Herbarium on Thoreau's plant-collection and climate change, see Charles G. Willis et al.
- ⁵ Coleridge's most famous articulation of organic form comes from his lectures on Shakespeare (*Criticism of Shakespeare* 52-53); see Coleridge's "On Poesy or Art" and *Hints toward a more comprehensive theory of life*, a book owned by Thoreau, for articulations of organicism that more explicitly bridge literature and natural science.
- ⁶ Derrida writes of flowers in "White Mythology," *Dissémination*, and *Glas* which Sartillot uses to frame her argument (2). Deleuze and Guattari take on the ethereal aspect of trees in the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* (3-24).
- ⁷ For this reason, I remain suspicious of recent attempts within environmental literary criticism to claim what seems to me unmediated encounters or participation in what Timothy Morton termed "ecology without nature." Nature seems a useful concept to me precisely because it carries so much cultural and historical baggage. Similarly, I find the recent work on "new materialism" or object oriented ontology (OOO) fascinating as an articulation of a particular kind of fantasy, not unlike science fiction or classic utopia of a world in which humans no longer have to be human. I find this fantasy a symptom of our intellectual and political climate, in which agency seemingly must be groped for within a sense of ever darkening doubt that any of us are individually capable of doing anything politically effective within in the face of globalized capitalism and environmental degradation; yet precisely because of what appears to a be a wide-spread skepticism about human agency, I think it is important to "stay with" the human, just as Morton advises his readers to "stay with the darkness" in *Ecology Without Nature* (187).
- ⁸ See Creech for an extended interpretation of this portrait as based on the actual painting of Allan Melville by John Rubens Smith (143-146). Creech's "camp reading" explores the suggested incest in *Pierre* as a foil for homosexual love.
- ⁹ The interest that biologists Maturana and Varela's study, *Autopoiesis and cognition: the realization of the living* (1980), caused in radical poetry communities in the 1980s, which would have considered their poetics universes away from any notion of "organic form" is testament to the impoverished understandings of Romantic organicism that have persisted since mid-twentieth-century New Critics attempted to adjust Coleridge's definition of organic form to fit their own understandings of what poetry should be and do.
- ¹⁰ See Denise Gigante's *Life: Organic Form & Romanticism* for a further investigation of the meaning of "power" in relation to vitalist theories during this era, and especially how the British tradition coopted ideas of power from German Romantics. Gigante discusses Coleridge's theory of living form as "unity in *multeity*" at length (23).
- ¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, chapter 6 of A Thousand Plateaus, "A Body without Organs."

¹² Like much in his theories of the organic, Coleridge's emphasis on the irregular connects to a German Romantic tradition, this time to Goethe's botanical writings. In his account of the Urplanz, or the plant-unit from which all other plant forms might unfold, Goethe similarly speaks of the importance of cases of irregularity. Deviations in botanical self-development make visible the true development of a plant, including its idealized generative unit, by contrast.

- ¹³ See Barbara Johnson's *Persons and Things* (2008) for more on the dynamic interplay between animated and non-animated forms.
- ¹⁴ Brooks poetry as a "natural' activity," (x), gives examples of "natural" things in poetry (rivers, cities) (6), and argues that poems are characterized by an organic wholeness (165-66).
- ¹⁵ For more on the New Critics and organic form see Donald Welsing's *The Chances of Rhyme* (1980), especially 14, 15.
- ¹⁶ Frances Fergusen gave a talk this past April (2014) at the UC-Irvine "Historical Poetics Symposium" titled "Our I.A. Richards Moment."
- ¹⁷ In particular, see *Coleridge and the Imagination* (1934).
- ¹⁸ For a succinct overview of this critical Marxist history, beginning with Lukács's investment in realism, through Adorno's writings following Benjmain's death, see *Aesthetics and Politics*.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Robert Kaufman's take on the Adorno and Benjamin debate in "Lyric Commodity Critique, Benjamin Adorno Marx, Baudelaire Baudelaire Baudelaire" (208-210).
- ²⁰ British philosopher Graham Harmon is the founder of "object oriented ontology." For his popularizers within American criticism, see Timothy Morton's *Realist Magic*, Levi Bryant's *Democracy of Objects*, and Ian Bogost's *What it is like to be a thing*. Although "new materialism" is not always claimed as being the same thing as object oriented ontology, the two movements are relatively contemporaneous with one another, and have many overlapping features. See, for example, Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*.
- ²¹ See Adorno's section in *Aesthetic Theory* on "natural beauty" (61-74), Raymond Williams's entry on nature in *Keywords*, and John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology*, which argues for ways in which the founder of this tradition was in fact deeply cognizant of nature in relation to human activities. For the ecocritical dismantling of nature, see Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature*.
- ²² Various attempts have been made to revise the term "ecocriticism." Dana Phillip and Timothy Morton both prefer "ecocritique"; even more recently, "environmental humanities" or "environmental studies" have become even more general, and have wandered toward "critical science studies," "posthumanism," and even the "new materialism" and "object oriented ontology." I see all these recent directions in criticism as part of the same history, and often fueled by similar impulses, not least of which has been a distancing from the literary. I continue use the term "ecocriticism" partly because its awkward thud appeals to me, and also, because I am interested in signaling the whole of this critical history.
- ²³ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature"; Latour, We Have Never Been Modern; Morton, Ecology without Nature.
- ²⁴ Of note here is also Bill Brown's study of things in proto-Modernist American prose works by Norris, Jewett, and James, A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature (2009).
- ²⁵ See Shira Wolosky's ""The Claims of Rhetoric: Toward a Historical Poetics, 1820-1900" (2003), Yopie Prins's "Dysprosody, Historical Poetics, and *The Science of English Verse*" (2008), and Kerry Larson's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth Century American Poetry* (2011) for the most directed overviews of historical poetics in the context of American literature.
- ²⁶ Virginia Jackson's study of Dickinson, *Dickinson's Misery: a Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005) remains the most important recent attempt to complicate the supposed self-enclosure of the lyric by drawing attention to its material founding—as emblematic in Dickinson's wild manuscripts as her posthumously printed poems were once emblematic for mid-century critics of a "lyric" hermeticism. But Jackson provides a much more comprehensive view of what she calls the twentieth century "lyricization" of other poetic genres, and the slipperiness of this term across the history of poetics, in her entry on the lyric in the new edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), 826-

834. See also Jackson and Yopie Prins's collaborative introductory essays in their co-edited *Lyric Theory Reader* (2014).

²⁷ Following the success of the 2013 Conference on Ecopoetics, I am working with Angela Hume on co-editing an anthology of critical essays on ecopoetics. In our introduction to the volume, we trace how the critical study of ecopoetics over the past twenty years mirrors the development of ecocriticism toward ecocritique, posthumanism and animal-studies. Following Bill McKibben's The End of Nature (1989) and Carolyn Merchant's The Death of Nature (1990), American environmentalism and scholarly investigations of the environment together entered a new era. The growth of ecocriticism within literature fields corresponded to the predominance of new historical modes of scholarship during the 1990s; many of these studies, like new historicism more generally, dealt sparingly with poetry, or ignored poetics entirely. Lawrence Buell's important study of American literature, The Environmental Imagination (1995), for example, argued for the relevance of non-fictional, prose, forms (like Thoreau's Walden, or his journals) as foundational to American "nature writing"; in comparison to Thoreau's encyclopedic responsiveness to lived experiences in nature, the formal distancing required by verse-making, and the presumed ego-centricity of a lyric tradition, seemed hopelessly un-ecological, even dangerous. The critique of the lyric that animated debates in radical poetry and some scholarly communities in the 1990s and early twenty-first century—debates that influenced Jackson's reconsideration of the lyric-contributed to a suspicion of poetry as an appropriate place for recording ecological experience. Despite the fact that ecocritical studies of prose works, or even of non-literary works, continued to shape the field throughout the decade, a number of studies of the relationship between poetry and ecology also appeared.

The most important of these were Jonathan Bate's Romantic Ecology (1991) and The Song of the Earth (2000). These two works neatly bookend the decade, revealing how much ecocriticism, including ecocritical studies of poetry, had yet to explore. While Bate's first book argued for an "environmental tradition" within Romantic poetry, a tradition to which Wordsworth was central, Song of the Earth argued for the material and global implications for poetry as a form uniquely involved with and responsive to environment, including environmental change. Bate's work opened the way for studies like Timothy Morton's Ecology without Nature (2009) or Tobias Menley's "The Present Occlusion" (2012), investigations of Romantic poetry in which a figure like Shelley or Cowper offered new insights beyond a poetic formalism of the nineteenth-century or lyric-predominance: these critics demonstrate how earlier poets thought, and can help us think, about human alienation in nature, or even cataclysmic climate change.

The study of British Romanticism has been, and remains, important to the study of American ecopoetics. The first wave of ecopoetics—or ecopoetry or nature poetry as it is sometimes called—within the American tradition, however, remained firmly focused on American Modernism. For critics like Guy Rotella (Reading and Writing Nature, 1991) and Gyorgi Voros (Notations of the Wild, 1997), ecocriticism offered a compelling new theoretical take on already canonical poets like Frost, Moore, Bishop, or Stevens. Other critics, like John Elder (Imagining the Earth, 1996) and Leonard Scigaj (Sustainable Poetry, 1999), turned to a later generation of modernists—Ammons, Merwin, or Levertov—while also adding poets whose work is more explicitly dependent upon ecology and modern environmentalism. In Bernard Quetchenbach's study at the end of the decade, Back from the Far Field: American Nature Poets in the Late Twentieth Century (2000), ecopoetry turned its gaze more explicitly toward the contemporary; for Quetchenbach, Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder were indispensable "nature poets." Published in 2002, J. Scott Bryson's edited Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction summed up this first period in the study of ecopoetics, while also gesturing toward contemporary poetry's potential for unsettling the field; Bryson's contributors still leaned heavily on readings of Modernists (Yeats, Jeffers, Williams) as well as a small sampling of condoned "nature poets" (Ammons, Merwin, Snyder, Berry); yet the final section of the anthology, "Expanding the Boundaries" initiated investigations of ecopoetry within studies of critical race, queerness, postcolonialism, impersonality and post-humanism.

In the early 2000s, Jonathan Skinner began publishing the journal ecopoetics, giving this field a new name, and with it, initiating a whole new set of poetic histories and possibilities. Skinner's choice of "ecopoetics" over "ecopoetry" or "nature poetry" emphasized the practice of poetry as a theorization that was also an activation intimately involved with other activities: from taking a walk to protesting a transcontinental pipeline. While considerations of ecopoetry and nature poetry in the 1990s focused mainly on poets writing outside of an experimental or avant-garde tradition, Skinner's approach to ecopoetics was inclusive; he published work by poets, scholars, activists, and writing in a variety of modes, though particularly the experimental. In her essay, "What is Experimental Poetry & Why Do We Need It?" (2007), the poet-scholar Joan Retallack made the connection between contemporary experimental poetry and environmental responsiveness explicit. Skinner and Retallack opened the field to poets and scholars (and often both) who were interested in the connection between poetic form at its most dynamic and worldly engagement—intellectually, ethically, and politically.

Within this expanded field, several scholarly studies of ecopoetics emerged which took a much broader view of the history of the environmental engagement of American poetry. Jed Rasula's This Compost (2002) and Angus Fletcher's A New Theory of American Poetry (2004) sum up two versions of this approach; for both scholars, Whitman was crucial as an ecological thinker and poet; Rasula takes off from Whitman and runs toward poetry of "the open field" (Duncan, Oppen), while Fletcher turns to Ashbery, maintaining a Romantic through-line. John Felstiner, in Can Poetry Save the Earth (2009), reaches even further back, though not further forward; his "field guide" begins with Psalms and Romantic poetry, Whitman and Dickinson, and then through Frost, Williams, Moore, Jeffers, St. Vincent Millay, Oppen, Swenson, Levertov, Kinnell, and Gary Snyder. While Rasula and Fletcher's books demonstrate two sides of what has sometimes felt like an irreconcilable divide between mainstream and experimental poetic traditions (or between the East and West Coast), Felstiner's study demonstrates an admirable blending: Millay's sonnets meet Oppen's winnowed lines.

While these scholars expanded the scope of what could be studied as ecopoetics, contemporary poets have actually expanded it more. Current ecopoetics is in the unusual position of being a field of inquiry far more actively engaged with by poets (and perhaps even by activists and visual artists) than by scholars.²⁷ Active engagement with ecopoetics within the poetry community has resulted in the publication of three important anthologies in the past five years: Camille Dungy's anthology of African American nature poetry, *Black Nature* (2009), Brenda Iijima's collection of essays (mostly by poets) in the *Ecolanguage Reader* (2010), and Joshua Corey G.C. Waldrep's postmodern pastoral anthology, *The Arcadia Project* (2013). These anthologies have crucially demonstrated the extent of environmental engagement in poets previously left out of nature-writing canons, both past and present.

- ²⁸ See Chapter 4 for more on Isabel's queerness.
- ²⁹ Branka Arsíc's edited volume, *American Impersonal* (2014), collects essays by critics thinking "with" Cameron's idea of impersonality.
- ³⁰ Arsíc observes a similar phenomenon in her reading of Bartleby as "a cloud"; 7 ½ Times Bartleby (155-164).

Chapter 1

- ³¹ These examples are drawn from the Bindings D collection at the American Antiquarian Society.
- ³² Stephen John Mack examines Whitman's unique contribution to democratic theory in "A Theory of Organic Democracy" (2006).
- ³³ Virginia Jackson has argued that the process of "lyricization" beginning at the end of the nineteenth-century, and gathering steam through the Modernist period, effectively replaced a diversity of poetic forms with "lyric." Jackson begins this argument in *Dickinson's Misery*, and returns to it in *The Lyric Theory Reader*. In contrast, part of my argument throughout this dissertation is that

poetry in the nineteenth-century was not only defined by the genre and print conventions that critics working on historical poetics have largely focused on; more expansive, and amorphous, ideas of what Shelley called "poetry in the general sense," ideas of poetry that prioritized experience and forms of attention, were also endemic to the literature of the period.

- ³⁴ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have suggested "surface" reading as an alternative to the deep attentions of ideology critique, while Branka Arsíc has modeled what I would call an "immersive" reading practice, a form of close reading that attends not only to a primary text but to the texts that directly influenced or contributed to one author's work. These examples have to do with critical orientation and practice. Theo Davis and Dorri Beam, with their studies of literary "ornament" and "highly-wrought style" respectively, offer other examples of attending—or paying a deeper attention—to literary surface.
- ³⁵ Sharon Cameron's study of "impersonality," Anne-Lise François's theory of "recessive action," Sianne Ngai's study of "ugly feelings," Jennifer Fleissner's yet to be published accounts of "maladies of the will," or Emily Ogden's investigations of "enchantment" and "possession" in mesmerism all put pressure on the idea of self-possessed subjectivity. There are notable differences among these critics, particularly when it comes to the relationship between historical specificity and literary analysis: Cameron, François and Ngai's projects focus on authors and ideas who vary quite widely within historical fields, while Fleissner and Ogden maintain a more consistent historical focus.
- ³⁶ This critical preference warrants further investigation, particularly in relation to the fact that all of these critics are women, but I will not be able to take up such questions here. This problem is explored somewhat differently by a critic like Caleb Smith, who has examined a "poetics" of justice in the language of nineteenth-century preachers as an alternative to critical modes of ideology critique or the hermeneutics of suspicion. Smith's readings continue to foreground literary criticism as a kind of action, even if under a different name.
- ³⁷ The "Pleasure Reading" section of the new journal *J19* is a testament to this. For another take on how this seeming tension between formalists and historicists is both hardly new and also hardly tense, see Samuel Otter in "An Aesthetics in All Things"
- ³⁸ This section is number 6 in the "deathbed edition" of *Leaves of Grass*; the first edition, from which this selection all other subsequent citations of "Song of Myself," did not include breaks between or numbers for sections. See *The Walt Whitman Archive* online: http://www.whitmanarchive.org.
- ³⁹ Virginia Jenkins offers the most comprehensive history of the development of the American lawn, focusing in particular on how the lawn became gendered—beginning as a feminine space in the nineteenth-century and become masculinized with the intensification of lawn mowing technology. Doug Stewart details how this development of lawn mowing technologies corresponded with other technological advances around the Civil War. And Michael Pollan agues that "The American lawn is an egalitarian conceit," and yet that, because of its twentieth-century recreation as the epitome of private property, mechanized "gardening," and general waste of resources, the lawn should be abolished.
- ⁴⁰ Oppen, who responds directly to Whitman's celebration of the common in "Of Being Numerous," wrestles with the challenges of belonging to collectives far more than his predecessor does in this early poem. Oren Izenberg's critical study *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life* (2011) traces this imagination of poetry as social, and socializing, force from the Romantics into Modern and post-Modern Anglo-American poetry.
- ⁴¹ For an excellent study of the trope of the "disappearing Indian" see Renée L. Bergland's *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (2000).
- 42 http://www.native-languages.org/state-names.htm
- ⁴³ "The Voice of the Grass" appeared in the *Pensacola Gazette*, the *Dover Gazette & Stafford Advertiser*, and *The Ohio Observer* in 1848, Rochester's *The North Star* in 1849, and belatedly, over a decade later, in the *Vermont Chronicle* in 1860.
- ⁴⁴ Benjamin draws widely from descriptions of flânerie outside of Baudelaire's work, including passages from the work of or describing the practices of Balzac, Dickens, Poe, and even Beethoven.

But Baudelaire remained iconic for Benjamin. In his unfinished essays drawing on the archive of *The Arcades Project*, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1935, 1939), Baudelaire becomes the representative lynch pin in the section dealing with "the Streets of Paris," the flâneur's primary domain. In 1939, Benjamin also completed his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," reprinted in *Illuminations*. Benjamin and Adorno corresponded extensively on, and disagreed over, Benjamin's thoughts on Baudelaire; for this see *The Complete Correspondence*.

- ⁴⁵ For this publication history, and searchable e-texts of all US editions of *Leaves of Grass*, see The Walt Whitman Archive online: http://www.whitmanarchive.org.
- ⁴⁶ "This Compost" has also become an important poem for ecocritical readings of American poetry; Jed Rasula's study of the ecological poetics of (mostly) twentieth century poetry takes its title from, and begins by analyzing, Whitman's poem.
- ⁴⁷ Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* contained 12 discreet pieces in verse, none of which had titles. Later, Whitman would title these pieces: "Song of Myself," "A Song for Occupations," "To Think of Time," "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric," "Faces," "Song of the Answerer," "Europe the 72d and 73d Years of These States," "A Boston Ballad," "There Was a Child Went Forth," "Who Learns My Lesson Complete," and "Great are the Myths," and send them sprawling across different sections of his subsequent revisions.
- ⁴⁸ Poetry's relationship to breath was important to both Olson and Creeley. Olson outlines this investment in "Projective Verse." While Olson favored large-lunged lines, Creeley wrote poems that seemed to be always catching their breath, or running out of it, through steep enjambment. But Olson was hardly original for prioritizing the breath. The late-nineteenth-century fascination with metrics often turned on the relationship between poetic form and human physiological features; see, for example, Oliver Wendell Holmes's essay "The Physiology of Versification."

Chapter 2

- ⁴⁹ One of the best accounts of the Romantic imagination remains M.H Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953); Abrams traces a shift from an Aristotelian aesthetics of mimetic representation, which prioritized evaluation of aesthetic objects, to a fixation on aesthetic agency during Romanticism.
- ⁵⁰ Elaine Miller's *The Vegetative Soul* (2002) charts the figurative importance of plant life within nineteenth-century German philosophy, through later twentieth-century French theory. Michael Marder continues this philosophical recovery of "the plant" as an important philosophical figure in *Plant Thinking* (2013).
- ⁵¹ Sharon Cameron's readings of Dickinson and Thoreau remain emblematic in this regard. In both Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre (1979) and Choosing Not Choosing (1993), she examines Dickinson's poems as surging at their edges; her reading of Thoreau's journal in Writing Nature (1985) approaches this mammoth document as Thoreau's primary literary work, an almost unreadable, wild, sprawl. More recently, Virginia Jackson and Alexandra Socarides have continued an exploration of Dickinson's excesses in terms of her materials, returning to her manuscripts.
- ⁵² In *Clandestine Marriage* (2012), Theresa Kelley traces the ways that non-European plants were valuable commodities for imperial powers, as medicine, food, and objects of aesthetic wonder, and their cataloguing within European systems of nomenclature became yet another way of asserting forms of institutional control over both spaces and colonial subjects.
- ⁵³ The hyper-localism of Dickinson and Thoreau's herbaria is interestingly complicated by specimens each received by mail. Not included in Dickinson's herbarium, but apparently sent to her by a traveling friend, and now housed in Harvard's collection of Dickinson-related artifacts, are specimens from the Holy Land. Thoreau gathered the vast majority of his specimens in and around Concord; but he also hunted for plants in Vermont and Maine, and was sent specimens by a "Mrs. Brown" of Brattleboro. Thoreau notes these specimens in his herbarium; he also indicates a few specimens

gathered by Emerson. Finally, Dickinson's letters frequently arrived equipped with floral offerings; it is quite likely that some of her herbarium specimens were also delivered by mail.

- ⁵⁴ During the Renaissance, specimens were widely gathered into books, pages bound within single volumes. In 1751, Linnaeus advised in *Philosophica Botanica* against the storage of specimens in a single volume. Today, modern herbaria adhere to this library model.
- ⁵⁵ Judith Farr analyses Dickinson's dual calling as a poet and gardener in *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (2004).
- ⁵⁶ Thoreau began his journal in 1837. His first essay for *The Dial*, "A Natural History of Massachusetts" was published in 1842. For more on the intersections between Thoreau's journal and his botanizing, see Ray Angelo's "Botanical Index to the Journal of Henry David Thoreau" and "Thoreau as Botanist."
- ⁵⁷ In "Surface Reading" (2009), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus argue for a descriptive approach to texts, throwing over decades of the excavations of symptomatic readings; "surface reading" strays toward the social sciences, attempting unadorned accounting.
- ⁵⁸ These examples are from the *OED*.
- ⁵⁹ For readings of *Pierre*'s hyperbolic landscapes, see Sam Otter's "The Eden of Saddle Meadows: Landscape and Ideology in *Pierre*" (1994). Jonathan Hall ascribes such exaggerations specifically to a rewriting of Wordsworth in "The Non-correspondent Breeze" (1993).
- ⁶⁰ In his essay "Linnean Poetics: Emerson, Cooper, Thoreau, and the Names of Plants" (2010), William Stowe examines the poetic effects of natural history lists. My essay, "Dickinson's Lyric Materialism" (2012), explores a similar poetics in Dickinson's work.
- ⁶¹ One exception is John Shoptaw's "Listening to Dickinson," which minutely and convincingly accounts for just how central the meter, and thus the sound, of her poems was to Dickinson.
- 62 Sharon Cameron's Lyric Time (1979) argues for such radicalism in Dickinson's lyric even before the appearance of these editions. Cameron's discussion of Dickinson's "rage" connects her reading to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's classic feminist account of Dickinson in The Madwoman in the Attic (1979). Later, Susan Howe's My Emily Dickinson (1985) and Sharon Cameron's Choosing Not Choosing (1993) explore a "radical" Dickinson in terms that have as much to do with form as with gender. (Unaware of Dickinson as a poetic forebear, Prufrock recounts his own historic and particular "visions and revisions" in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Alfred J. Profrock.")
- ⁶³ See Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery* (2005). Alexandra Socarides extends Jackson's materialist approach in *Dickinson Unbound* (2012), reading Dickinson through her particular paper products: stationary, household scraps, and envelopes.
- ⁶⁴ Joan Shelley Rubin's *Songs of Ourselves* traces the importance of poetry recitation in schools as a foundational feature of nineteenth-century American culture (107-136).
- ⁶⁵ This is Judith Farr's phrase in her "Preface" to the facsimile edition of the herbarium (15).
- 66 This book was popular enough to have turned up in Emerson's and Thoreau's libraries as well. For accounts of the reading of these authors, see Jack Capps on Dickinson, Kenneth Cameron and Walter Harding on Emerson, and Robert Sattelmeyer on Thoreau. For more on the textbooks Dickinson may have used at school, see Lowenberg.
- ⁶⁷ Thoreau's work as a naturalist began in collaboration with his sister Sophia and brother John; together, the siblings kept a journal of bird sightings and bloom times. In a longer version of this argument, I plan to explore this document in relation to popular friendship albums of the period; these were often decorated with floral plates, but were largely blank books in which friends were tasked with writing poems devoted most frequently to memory—either claims on the owner of the book to remember them, or promises to remember him or her. I will argue that the confluence in these documents between collectively writing for the purposes of both poetry and memory and the acute attention to natural particulars that makes the Thoreaus' journal a very specific kind of memory and friendship album were intimately tied the general understanding of poetry that I am tracing here.

 ⁶⁸ Capps, 148.

⁶⁹ Higginson reports on their first meeting in his *Atlantic* essay, "Emily Dickinson's Letters" (1891), in which a number of the poet's letters to Higginson were first published: "She came toward me with two day-lilies, which she put in a childlike way into my hand, saying softly, under her breath, "These are my introduction," and adding, also, under her breath, in childlike fashion, "Forgive me if I am frightened; I never see strangers, and hardly know what I say" (not paginated). Juliana Chow and I have explored Dickinson's penchant for eliding not only herself and flowers, but also her friends and flowers, in our epistolary essay "Flower/Friend."

⁷⁰ In an essay I presented at the 2014 MLA, "Mechanical Form and Embodied Metrics in Dickinson and Poe," I argued that Dickinson emphasizes the relation between common meter and "song" as an extra-textual reality by accenting the syllable as a primary compositional unit and an agent of animating breath. Showing that that Dickinson's work bridges organic and mechanical form, I read these practices in the context of Edgar Allan Poe's skepticism of organicism and Poe's own interest in sound as a mechanical composition strategy with affective effects.

⁷¹ For these roses, see F53, F54, F72, F131.

⁷² Poems in which roses are included in correspondence, or signal transport or a gift: F11, F53, F60, F131, F806, F811, F1480, F1619.

⁷³ I am grateful to Janet Min Lee for alerting me to this connection.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) epitomizes this appraisal, and remains an important early work of ecocriticism before a more recent turn toward "ecocritique." Laura Dassow Walls's *Seeing New Worlds* (1995) reads Thoreau in the context of nineteenth-century science (1995).

⁷⁵ One insightful exception to this trend is Elizabeth Witherell's study "Thoreau as Poet," which also pays particular attention to the poetry housed in *A Week*.

⁷⁶ On March 23, 1856, Thoreau writes, "I take infinite pains to know all the phenomena of the spring, for instance, thinking that I have here the entire poem, and then, to my chagrin, I learn that it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and have read, that my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and the grandest passages, and mutilated it in many places" (*The Writings* 220-224).

⁷⁷ Like many of Thoreau's manuscripts, these charts are distributed across libraries. I am grateful to the Princeton Thoreau Edition, and to its editor, Elizabeth Witherell, for allowing me to consult the photocopies she has of Thoreau's lists and charts, and for her expert insight into these documents. Kristen Case undertakes an analysis of Thoreau's "Kalender" project in the second issue of J-19.

⁷⁸ Cameron, Writing Nature, 3.

⁷⁹ Oren Izenberg relies on Shelley in *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life* to develop the idea of how poetry might contribute to shared social experiences (17-22).

⁸⁰ This is Ray Angelo's paraphrase of Thoreau's complaint in "Thoreau as Botanist." During the years when Thoreau was assembling his herbarium, Angelo writes, "In his *Journal* he noted comparisons of the artificial Linnaean ordering of plants with natural systems, but always with the comment that neither addressed the poetical aspects of plants. When he sought the literature rather than the science of plants he was told to his dismay by naturalist and Harvard librarian, Thaddeus W. Harris, that he had already read all there was" (unpaginated).

81 In *The Poets of Reality* (1965), for example, J. Hillis Miller defines a "new space" of reality as "the realm of the twentieth-century poem." "It is a space in which things, the mind, and words coincide in closest intimacy," Miller writes. "In this space flower the chicory and Queen Anne's lace of William Carlos Williams' poems. In this space his wheelbarrow and his broken bits of green bottle glass appear. In a similar poetic space appear 'the plans above the stove, the pots on the table, the tulips among them' of Stevens' "poem of life'" (8). Speaking of Stevens in particular, in *Painterly Abstraction* (1989), Charles Altieri writes that "it becomes possible to imagine poetry as a literal site," a place of both the real and the intelligence defining itself in constant communion with the real (322). Bill Brown takes Modern poetry as the archive for developing his "thing theory" in *A Sense of Things* (2004). And Daniel Tiffany calls this "literal site" of imaginative interaction with matter "lyric substance," defining this moment and place as "the point where these corresponding representations of corporeality and the lyric medium intersect" (21). This collapsing space of objects, intellect, and

language, or expanding space of the real into poetic space, extends through many contemporary ecopoets' interest in the "new materialism" explored by critics like Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) and in an "object oriented ontology" formulated by Graham Harmon, but expounded enthusiastically by critics such as Timothy Morton over the past few years (2011-2012). At the *Conference on Ecopoetics* (2013), poets Allison Cobb, Alica Cohen, CA Conrad, Jen Coleman, Jen Hofer and Kaia Sand formed a roundtable session on "The Thingness of Things" in ecopoetics. A seminar on object oriented ontology convened at the same conference.

82 Paul Gilmore examines the "aesthetic materialism" of the nineteenth century along in terms the expanding use of electricity, and proliferation of metaphor grounded in electricity, toward the end of the century in *Aesthetic Materialism* (2009). "Aesthetic materialism," he writes, "ascribes determining agency to material reality, even as it compels us to reconceive that very materiality" (10).

Chapter 3

- ⁸³ Throughout this dissertation, I focus on the particularly important place plants held within nineteenth-century theories of the organic; however, this doesn't mean that the human wasn't being actively thought (and deconstructed) in relation to animal biology or new discoveries in geology during the period as well. "Animal studies," which builds on foundational critical work by Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Harraway, and Agamben, tends to approach questions of human-animal relation philosophically, rather than through literature or literary history.
- ⁸⁴ See Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets*, Rei Terada's *Feeling in Theory*, and Branka Arsic's *Passive Constitutions*, respectively.
- 85 Sharon Cameron, Impersonality, on Emerson 53-107 and Melville 180-203.
- ⁸⁶ Cameron writes on Melville and Hawthorne in *Corporeal Selves*, Thoreau in *Writing Nature*, and on animal sentience in a recent essay on Robert Bresson's film *Au hazard Balthazar*.
- 87 My description of vegetable thinking as taking place "elsewhere" owes a debt to Julie Joosten's essay for a seminar on "Vegetal Eco-critics" in which we both participated at the 2013 Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. Joosten describes her essay as "an experiment in taking plants as a source of thought rather than thought's object," and takes the work of cytogeneticist Barbara McClintock on corn as a possible opening onto such experimentation. Joosten writes: "What is this indissociable combination of mind and maize? I believe it is a kind of vegetal thinking and knowing that occurs as a *being-for* the plant and whose manifestation is a 'feeling for the organism.' It allows for the possibility that part of our experience takes place elsewhere—in the way the wind shift's a plant's leaves or as a maize plant's roots grow horizontally rather than gravitationally in response to an obstruction in the soil" (6).
- ⁸⁸ See Cameron, *Emerson's Reading*; Harding, *Emerson's Library*; Capp, *Dickinson's Reading*; and *Thoreau's Reading*. For a reading of Dickinson's textbooks and the role they played on her later poetic production, see Lowenberg's *Emily Dickinson's Textbooks* (1986).
- Although the category of the human has been surrounded and tackled from a variety of angles (from within critiques of capitalism to within ecocritique, and the intersection of these), much of this discussion is informed by influential accounts of the "posthuman" by theorists like Foucault (who ends *The Order of Things* (1994) by heralding the end of man) Bruno Latour, and N. Katherine Hayles.
- ⁹⁰ It is interesting that these authors have been appropriated as both champions for modern environmentalism (as in Lawrence Buell's study of Thoreau in *The Environmental Imagination* (1996)) and as too egoistic to be of much use to contemporary ecocritics and ecopoets, many of whom seek for less overtly first-person singular versions of the human encountering "nature"; (he poet Tina Darragh critiques Thoreau's egocentrism in these terms in *The Ecolanguage Reader* (2010) (1-8). My work seeks more of a middle ground, and takes guidance from Branka Arsic's readings of Emerson (in *On Leaving* (2010) and Thoreau (in unpublished work delivered at the Dartmouth Future of

American Studies, 2013. Arsic's readings are truly revisionary in that they create portraits of wellknown authors that seem radically new, primarily through expansive readings of their work that also actively practice literary criticism outside a dichotomy of formalism/historicism.

91 See Willis, Ruhfel, et al.

⁹² Goethe represents "The Writer" in Emerson's Representative Men (1850). Emerson did own volumes (15, 24, 36) of Goethe's Sammtliche Werke (1840), and all 55 volumes of an earlier edition of Goethe's Werke (1828-1833). However, given that, despite Margaret Fuller's best efforts in forcing instruction upon him, Emerson remained a poor student of German, it is likely that much of his knowledge of Goethe and his work arrived second hand, either through Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe (1839), or Austin's Characteristics of Goethe (1833), a three-volume translation to which he returned frequently. Walter Harding lists these volumes in Emerson's Library (1867).

⁹³ Darwin's study, undertaken with his son toward the end of his life, remains a suggestive document, eliciting responses as different as Elaine Scarry's dreamy investigation of the literary imagination in Dreaming by the Book (69-70) and Garzon and Keijzer's philosophical foray into the possibilities of plant neurobiology and minimal cognition (161).

⁹⁴ Miller surveys the centrality of the metaphor of the "vegetative soul" from German Idealism into French Poststructuralist theory. In particular, Miller emphasizes plant-metaphor as an expression of "a thinking rooted incontrovertibly in the body, but a bodily thinking that is itself indefinitely individuated and subject to metamorphosis" (18). For this definition, Miller returns to classical meanings of animal and vegetable (anima: wind, breath, soul in Greek and Latin; vegere: to live, to quicken in Latin). In De Anima, Aristotle examines the soul as an animating force dependent upon particular bodies, including those of plants.

95 It is impossible to tell from Thoreau's notes which of Gray's manuals he is using.

⁹⁶ This same journal entry also includes a remarkable passage about crickets, their commonness, how little they are actually seen, and as such, the commonness and yet elusiveness of their song. In the cricket's song, Thoreau finds a fleeing approachability that has much in common with accounts of lyric poetry as both available and aloof. Unlike many of these accounts, both in the nineteenth century and more recently, however, Thoreau's crickets sing not singularly, but en masse: "Who ever distinguished their various notes? which fill the crevices in each others song—It would be a curious ear indeed that distinguished the species of the crickets which it heard—& traced even the earth song home each part to its particular performer I am afraid to be so knowing," Thoreau writes (381). I find Thoreau's fear of knowledge here—a particular fear of a particular knowledge—both stirring and suggestive. If, indeed, this passage can be read as a sidelong glance at aesthetics, firmly rooted in direct natural observation, what kind of knowledge frightens Thoreau here-knowledge of the kind of artfulness the crickets practice? Or knowledge via direct encounter, actually stumbling on an individual insect, thrumming his wings?

97 My thinking on semblance has been informed by Robert Kaufman's readings of Adorno, Benjamin and Celan. Kaufman helpfully distinguishes between aesthetic experience and the aestheticization of experience; within genuine aesthetic experience, illusion is experienced as illusion, while delusions that art might stand in for life are kept at bay. This clear vision of spectral appearances can, nevertheless, be transformative, allowing one to see the world anew from the perspective of the aesthetic, and then return to a world to enact non-illusionary changes. Kaufman explores the relationship between this Frankfurt school thinking and the poet Robert Duncan in "Poetry's Ethics?" (2006) and between the Frankfurt school, Marx, and Baudelaire in "Lyric Commodity Critique" (2008). In "Experience," Emerson experiences illusion as delusion; the world becomes pure semblance, its depth knocked out from under his feet.

⁹⁸ This definition comes from the Oxford English Dictionary; all examples listed of the term are from before 1890.

⁹⁹ From the un-paginated "Botanical Dictionary" in Eaton's book (beginning after p. 63).

¹⁰⁰ In the essay "Matter of Suffering" (2009), Mark Noble provides a reading of Emerson in light of Michael Faraday's theories of electromagnetism, in which "atoms" become both singular entities and points in an electromagnetic field, singular and constellated.

¹⁰¹ Alan Weisman's 2007 book of this title projects a world recovering from human blight.

My examination of memory here is indebted to Anne-Lise François's study of "recessive action" in *Open Secrets* (2008). François's study investigates what she calls "uncounted experience," or experience that resists narrative success or fruition. In much the same way that I have been writing of vegetation as an alternative to reproduction here, François focuses on characters and speakers in Madame de Lafayette, Jane Austen, Wordsworth, Dickinson, and Hardy that turn down, or turn away from, certain trajectories of fulfillment, particularly those resulting in an increase in visibility or recognition.

Robert Kaufman and Oren Izenberg have both argued recently for the transformative effects of poetic engagement. See note 20 for more on Kaufman's work. Kaufman argues for the aesthetic, and particularly, for lyric poetry, as having a necessary social function in carving out a space from which to view the social without being under the spell of aestheticizing socio-political delusion. In *On Being Numerous* (2011), Izenberg similarly explores the socially-transformative effects of poetic engagement; Izenberg, however, argues that poetry actually creates publics, and that solitary reading opens directly onto understanding of collective belonging.

¹⁰⁴ In this regard, Reed anticipates contemporary object-oriented ontologists like Graham Harmon (who coined the term OOO) and Timothy Morton (who has worked hard to popularize it). OOO argues that objects recede, that all objects (including humans and ideas) are relational with other objects, and that objects can only be experienced through the effects perceived by other objects. Among other things, OOO attempts to rescue aesthetics (particularly in Morton's formulations) from a history of various "materialisms" that in some ways seemed to discount aesthetic experience as a primary, rather than ornamental, mode of experience. (Kaufman's readings of the Frankfurt school already offer another alternative to the idea that materialism necessarily discounts the aesthetic).

Chapter 4

105 Harrison Hayford surveys the "Monody"/Vine scholarship and controversy in Melville's Prisoners. Hayford dates the "Monody"-Hawthorne connection to Lewis Mumford in his 1929 biography and the Vine-Hawthorne connection to Walter E. Bezanson's 1943 dissertation, the findings of which were reprinted in his headnote to the Hendrick's House edition of Clarel; although he acknowledges the controversy about "Monody," Bezanson uses the vine and "grape" imagery of the poem to add support to his own argument that Vine resembles Hawthorne. While Bezanson's argument has been largely accepted as probable, criticism surrounding "Monody" has been far more heated. Hayford splits reception of the poem into two periods: first, "three lively decades, 1921 to 1951," in which critics debated 'Monody's' relevance from both an "imaginative" and a "fact-minded" perspective; during the second period, more "muted," from 1951 to 1990, the poem remained contentious. Hayford places Raymond Weaver and Lewis Mumford in the 1920s "imaginative" camp, and Willard Thorp, F.O. Matthiessen, Jay Leyda, and Leon Howard, whose works spanned from 1938-1951 respectively, in the "fact-based" contingent. In the midst of this, Henry A. Murray, a psychologist with keen literary sensibilities, added support to the Hawthorne in "Monody" and as "Vine" readings. At midcentury, Olson, Chase, and Arvin all accepted the Hawthorne/Vine/"Monody" hypothesis (109, 111-112, 125).

¹⁰⁶ See Leyda's log and Parker's biographies for a biographical overview of the Melville-Hawthorne relationship. Edwin Haviland Miller's 1975 biography was the first to spend significant time on the homoeroticism of this relationship (234-250). Miller suggests that Melville may have made a sexual

"advance" that Hawthorne repelled and that Melville's review, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," was "a love letter" whose "reverberations were to be heard and felt throughout Melville's life" (12, 36). In their edited volume, Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship (2008), Jana L. Argersinger, and Leland S. Person compile recent attempts to think through both what the Melville-Hawthorne relationship may have involved within the context of antebellum America as well as the ways in which critics have responded differently to the relationship depending on their own historical moments. Argersinger and Person also provide an excellent overview of preceding periods of Melville-Hawthorne reception (3-19). Erik Hage's The Melville-Hawthorne Connection (2014) provides the most recent and thorough investigation of the relationship.

¹⁰⁷ During his years in the Berkshires in the early 1850s, Melville ran a working farm. He reports to Hawthorne of how, while working on his "Whale," he was prevented from visiting because of the need of "building and patching and tinkering away in all directions," harvesting "corn and potatoes" and blistering his palms from "hoes and hammers" that even keep him from writing his novel (*Correspondence* 190-191). Decades later, while living in New York City, Melville cultivated roses (Bridgeman 239).

¹⁰⁸ See Melville's copy of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, digitally scanned at Melville's Marginalia Online.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond Weaver's 1921 biography, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic, initiated the idea of the later half of Melville's career as a "long quietus" (349-382). Samuel Otter and Gregory Sanborn's edited Melville and Aesthetics gathers essays that write against this "narrative of career decline" (9).

110 Melville made use in *Mardi* of a pervasive nineteenth-century association between femininity and floral nature, particularly through a sentimental language of flowers and the institutionalization of botany as a feminized subject of study. Sam George's *Botany, sexuality and women's writing 1760-1830* (2007) gives an account of the relationship between women's education and women's writing within a British context; chapter 4, "Botanizing Women," of Theresa Kelley's *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (2012) also focuses on women's participation in botany as a gendered pursuit.

111 Hayford observes that though the vine/grape imagery in "Monody" and *Clarel* seems to connect, Melville used similar imagery in other works, including those written before meeting Hawthorne. Hayford's reading of passages in *Mardi, Moby Dick*, and *Pierre*, like my readings of plants in *Mardi*, point to this imagery as specifically *feminized*; Hayford gives an extended reading of what he calls a "vine/grape/breast/milk cluster" of images across these works, which, he suggests, "like the simple vine/grape one, migratory in Melville's writings" (123-124).

¹¹² Leon Howard's biography *Herman Melville* (1951), for example, took a major turn away from imagining the intimacy of the Melville-Hawthorne relationship toward portraits of Melville as obsessed with reputation and literary greatness (qtd. Hayford 128).

¹¹³ William Cronon argues for such an understanding of wilderness in "The Trouble with Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature."

114 The idea of "genius" may seem like an outmoded concept. The idea of an individual's unique singularity or access to divine inspiration infuses the possibilities of creation with strains of the mystical and inaccessible, not to mention the undemocratic. By no means has the term or idea disappeared from our culture, however, though we're more apt to ascribe genius to scientists, businessmen, or entrepreneurs than to artists: Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs. In the nineteenth century, the meaning of genius as an individual of great artistic and creative talent migrated from German literature into English. Prior to the Romantic turn toward the artist, however, the meaning of the word had more to do with forces beyond the powers of an individual. The oldest meaning of genius, whose first recorded appearances in English date from the Middle Ages and derive from Latin, refers to a "tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world" (OED, 1,5.). A similar spirit or god was said to attend to places, and eventually to periods of time, and even to material things, such as soil, or material causes, such as disease. In Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's Georgies, for example, the "Genius of the Soil" is said to deny "sev'ral Kinds of Seeds and Plants." Similarly, a

more "fruitful genius of the ground" in Pope's translation of *The Odyssey*, allows for "all products and all plants" to "abound." Consequently, in Joseph Spence's *Anecdotes, observations, and characters, of books and men* (1858), Pope is recorded to have advised a century earlier (1728-1730): "In laying out a garden, the first thing to be considered is the genius of the place" (*OED*, 3e). As an "attendant spirit" outside of an individual but with the ability to exercise control over her, and proper both to human and nonhuman materials, this earlier definition of genius sounds a lot like the feeling of an inhuman, material, otherness at work in the vegetable metaphors for artworks and thinkers that I've been examining here.

this characterization of Melville as blustery egoist and Hawthorne as retreating aesthete is fairly standard. In *Empire for Liberty* (1991), for example, Wai Chee Dimock takes Melville to task for being self-centered. Contrary to this reading, however, I am suggesting that Melville's letters be read, like all his other depictions of authorial personality, as fictions. Melville's hyperbolic tendencies, after all, are easy to spot in his depictions of almost everything else, particularly through the first half of his career (including *Pierre* and his letters to Hawthorne). This intentional excess similarly informs his playful self-portraits. Melville, in other words, like Hawthorne, is also capable of "hiding" in fiction, though he masks himself more gaudily.

¹¹⁶ Melville knew about Goethe's interest in plants. In Goethe's *Travels in Italy*, Melville marked, "Tell Herder that I am very near finding the primal vegetable type." Above this, Melville wrote, "Ah, another of your fine notions, as Schiller says" (Goethe 448). See *Melville's Marginalia Online*.

¹¹⁷ Alex Calder's analysis of Melville's "bad writing" is one of the most perceptive essays on Melville's stylistics. Calder gets at the complexity of Melville's frequent forays into the over-wrought; this bad writing, Calder writes, "is not good writing disguised as bad writing. Nor is it heedful of audience. It is too clotted to be a mark of freedom and too unwilled to be a mark of strategy...But badness tended to work positively for Melville, delivering psychic insulation and vitalizing the text" (31).

¹¹⁸ In *Style, Gender and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (2010), Dorri Beam distinguishes between "fine" or "highly wrought" writing—qualities that often describe women's writing of the period—and the quality of being "over-wrought," an emotional excess that was sometimes associated with such writing.

¹¹⁹ Samuel Otter addresses *Pierre* as this turning point in *Melville's Anatomies* (1999), which follows the first half of Melville's career. Particularly in the final section of his study (255-261), Otter addresses the change made by *Pierre*, in which Melville arrives at an "Althusserian insight about the confinements of subjectivity" and abandons his earlier "experiment with exuberant, inside critique" (258).

¹²⁰ Creech builds on John D. Seelye's argument in "Ungraspable Phantom" that Hawthorne influences the character of Vine in *Clarel*, Frank Goodman in the *Confidence Man*, and Isabel in *Pierre*. Creech expands his attention from the Pierre-Isabel, Herman-Nathaniel relationship to a larger consideration of what he calls "textual cruising": how homosexual authors indicate sexual orientations to homosexual readers, who Creech believes are uniquely qualified to catch the wink and follow.

¹²¹ Otter reads inversions of landscapes and human interiors in his two chapters (4&5) on *Pierre* in *Melville's Anatomies*; for treatment of Lucy in particular, see 203-204. Lucy, another of the novel's female leads—a white light to Isabel's dark—like Isabel and Yillah, also suffers from a tendency to blend into the landscape. Her eyes become lakes, her face, the rolling hills of Western Massachusetts.

¹²² For more on Melville's contorted relationship with fiction, see Nina Baym's important article, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction" (1979).

- ¹²³ Hayford suggests that Isabel's house is Hawthorne's (124).
- ¹²⁴ Letter to Sophia Hawthorne, January 8, 1852; Correspondence 218-220. .
- ¹²⁵ Virginia Jackson, "The Poet as Poetess," 54-55.

¹²⁶ This is Charles's Olson's term for the whale: "Ahab uncovers his whole hate," Olson writes in *Call Me Ishmael*. "He turns the harpoon, forged and baptized for the inhuman Whale alone, upon his own human companions, the crew, and brandishes his hate over them (60). Olson also writes that Ahab

accuses the gods of "inhumanities." I haven't been able to find this usage of "inhumanities" in *Moby Dick*, or in any of Melville's works other than *Pierre*. Ahab rails against a "vast impersonality." I read the "inhumanities" of *Pierre* as a more earthly species of this impersonality; Ahab protests a divine force without personhood, but Isabel grows dizzy feeling herself transfused into ecological others. See Sharon Cameron's *Impersonality* (2007) for more on the former, and my dissertation introduction for more on the distinction I draw between the impersonal and the inhuman.

¹²⁷ Again, I have Cronon's argument about a wilderness close to home in mind here.

¹²⁸ Hayford's *Melville's Prisoners* focuses on Melville's repetition of particular "motifs and images" often within one work, and sometimes across works, identifying the recurrence of a "Prisoner" type—in the guise of an unidentifiable emprisonned king in chapter 41 of *Moby Dick*, and in the characters of Pierre, Bartleby, and Billy Budd (5-7, 11-25). Brian Yothers's *Melville's Mirror* (2011) undertakes a similar analysis of mirrors as a "recurring motif" across Melville's work (2).

¹²⁹ This scene in *Moby Dick* corresponds to an earlier one in Chapter 45, "Reminiscences," of *Mardi*, in which Taji invents memories for Yillah of when they frolicked gathering nuts and flaying among flowers, including a scene that will return in *Moby Dick*: "All the past a dim blank? Think of the time when we ran up and down in our arbor, where the green vines grew over the great ribs of the stranded whale" (142). He anticipates his search for her by saying that it has already happened: "over the wide watery world have I sought thee: from isle to isle, from sea to sea" (143). Even here, we can see how this paradigmatic structure of form and decay is bound up in Melville's imagination with the uncomfortable, even coercive, relationship between memory and imagination.

¹³⁰ According to the "Online Catalog of Books and Documents Owned, Borrowed and Consulted by Herman Melville" at *Melville's Marginalia Online*, Melville bought this volume in Paris, recording the purchase in his journal on December 15, 1849; the volume was then seized by British custom officials and subsequently replaced by a gift from Melville's London publisher, Richard Bentley, four days later.

¹³¹ Recent eco-critical work has examined the ways in which climate disturbance disrupts experiences of time as sequential or assured. See, for example, Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009) and Tobias Menley's "The Present Obfuscation" (2012).

¹³² Naturalism grew out of the realist tradition, but was influenced by biology (particularly Darwinism) and beliefs in biological determinism. In America, Frank Norris, Theodor Dreiser, and Stephen Crane are often identified as "naturalists." Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, published in German in 1892, argues that dramatic changes in urbanization and social structure have resulted in "degenerate" art and individuals, is a prose account of some of the ideas that animate naturalist fiction

¹³³ Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins's Lyric Theory Reader (2014) argues for this critical history.

Chapter 5

134 For readings of *Weeds and Wildings* through this vein, see John Bryant's two essays on Melville's rose poems; the more scholarly, "Ordering the Rose: Melville's Poet's Revisions" (1999), and his "biographical experiment," "As They Fell: Melville's Roses," which tries on fiction to imagine Melville's late-life affection for Lizzie. See also John Milder's "Old Man Melville: The Rose and the Cross," which argues that *Weeds and Wildings* "is Melville's enclave of pastoral peace cordoned off from the importunities of the world and the naturalistic grimness of Creation yet inviting a languor that may be an apostasy of sorts" (16). Milder provides a more extensive reading of *Weeds and Wildings* in this vein in *Exiled Royalties*.

¹³⁵ My reading builds on Lyon Evans's observations that there is something much "darker" afoot in these poems, including a critique of Melville's wife. Evans acknowledges that in these poems "we will find a Melville familiar to us from earlier works. Far from being transparent and artless, as is generally

supposed, these texts are complex and sophisticated, as well as ambiguous and mordant" (81). The effort that characterizes these poems recalls other sequences by authors who were hardly ideal husbands, and who may have only realized some of their dependence upon their wives at the very end of their lives or after the death of their spouse; Melville's "Year," belongs in a genre with the notoriously unfaithful William Carlos Williams's "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" and Thomas Hardy's sequence of poems composed after the death of his estranged wife.

136 Elizabeth Renker and Douglass Robillard, co-editors of a special issue of Leviathan (2007) on Melville's poetry, have been instrumental in galvanizing new attention to Melville as a poet. Before this recent critical turn to Melville's poetry, Aaron Kramer's Melville's Poetry: toward the enlarged heart; a thematic study of three ignored major poems (1972), remained one of the only book-length considerations of Melville as poet. This has been joined by Hershel Parker's study, Herman Melville: the Making of a Poet (2008), which charts Melville's move from the "poetic" prose of his early career through his turn to verse; William Spengeman's study Three American Poets (2010) considers Melville alongside Dickinson and Whitman as three distinct voices of the American nineteenth century. Most recently, Samford Marovitz has edited a volume of essays, Melville as Poet (2013), which includes essays by Wyn Kelley, Clark Davis, and Robert Sandberg on the still widely understudied late work. Robillard's edition of The Poems of Herman Melville (2000), which includes all of Battle-Pieces, John Marr, and Timoleon, as well as selections from Clarel, has no doubt assisted in making Melville's poetry more available for critics.

137 This contrast is perhaps best played out through a comparison of Cody Marrs and Hershel Parker (to whom Marrs explicitly responds). Parker argues that reviews of Melville's prose style as "poetic"—used in both admiring and derogatory ways—would have encouraged him to think seriously about writing poetry (11-22), and that Melville's earlier exposure to memorizing poetry and continued practice of reciting poetry throughout his life (23-30) would have made the shift from prose to poetry a natural one. In contrast, Marrs takes "poetry in particular," and "especially, lyric" as a form acutely capable of generating "aesthetic experiences that elude, repel, or undo the pressures of the material world." Melville's turn toward poetry, therefore, indicates a substantial shift for the poet, a new "mode and medium of worldly engagement," the opposite of a retreat into aesthetics, "a politico-aesthetic realignment" mid-career and as a direct response to Civil War (94). Marrs thus reads Melville's turn to poetry as a political re-entrenchment, in keeping with Frankfurt School theories of the lyric as the most historically and materially engaged of aesthetic forms

¹³⁸ In the Marovitz volume, Robert Sandburg argues for attention to Melville's combined prose and poetry experiments as a form in themselves.

139 The most obvious reason for the scant critical attention *Weeds and Wildings* has received is because a reliable scholarly edition of the volume is yet to be published. *Weeds and Wildings* was first printed by Raymond Weaver in the London Standard Edition of Melville's Works (Constable and Company, 1924); this is the version reprinted by Russell & Russell in NY in 1963. In 1947, Weeds and Wildings was printed, and re-edited, by Howard P. Vincent for the Hendrick's House Edition (Chicago: Packard and Company, Vol. XIV). Vincent gave accurate readings where Weaver had misinterpreted or translated. The best presentation of *Weeds and Wildings* remains an unpublished dissertation, including both a reading and a genetic text of the manuscript, by Robert Charles Ryan, filed in 1967; I rely upon this dissertation for all quotations as well as descriptions of the manuscript; Ryan also offers a comprehensive overview of criticism on *Weeds and Wildings* through 1967. The long-awaited *Northwest-Newberry* edition of Melville's late poems has not yet appeared at the time of this writing.

140 Virginia Jackson's new book, Before Modernism: Nineteenth-Century American Poetry in Public (forthcoming) has yet to appear in print but will, I suspect, offer an overview of the current work on historical poetics. For more on nineteenth-century poetry, see Barbara Packer and Shira Wolosky's contributions to The Cambridge History of American Literature volume focused on Nineteenth-Century Poetry (2004). Wolosky's "The Claims of Rhetoric: Toward a Historical Poetics, 1820-1900" (2003), Yopie Prins's "Dysprosody, Historical Poetics, and The Science of English Verse" (2008), Meredith McGill's introduction to her edited The Traffic in Poems (2008) and Max Cavitch's introduction to the a forum on nineteenth-century transnational poetry in the first issue of 119 (2013), also provide

overviews of the work of historical poetics. In short, historical poetics seeks to reinvestigate poetry within its historical context, rather than through the lens of Modernist reading practices.

to me in relation to the ways in which text and memory specificity in Melville is particularly interesting to me in relation to the ways in which text and memory are (sometimes) pitted against one another in contemporary poetry debates. The emphasis Language poets placed on texts as agents combatting forms of social hegemony with a radical, textual, openness, for example, is often explained as reacting against a "lyric," or mid-twentieth-century confessional or narrative poetic tradition. Although Lyn Hejinian remains one of the most moving theorizers of textual "openness"—see her essays collected in *The Language of Inquiry* (2000)—she also interestingly brings memory into the mix. One of her books, *Writing is an Aid to Memory* (1978), makes the relation between writing as a practice of textual openness and memory as a contributing force to this practice titular. In her classic *My Life* (1980), memory both organizes and throws open the books cyclical returns. The ways in which memory operates as a disintegrating force within set structures (the set-number of lines and sections in *My Life*, for example) is a suggestive "aid" to reading the disorientations of memory in Melville's otherwise recognizably ordered, even conventional, late poems.

¹⁴² See Jackson and Prins "General Introduction" and introduction to the section on "Genre Theory" in their *Lyric Theory Reader* (2014) for more on this process of "lyricization."

¹⁴³ Ryan also observes that the willow in Melville's tale corresponds to the willow described in "The Old Manse" and a "moss-grown willow tree" compared with "lilac-shrubs" in "Buds and Bird-Voices" (*Weeds* 78-79).

¹⁴⁴ The poet and philosopher (Yoji and Babalanja) are one of the only exceptions to this; as is, of course, Pierre, the poet turned disastrous novelist. Otherwise, however, one of Melville's great contributions is his approach to aesthetics through depictions of non-aesthetic labor: whaling, war, scrivening.

¹⁴⁵ Parker, Herman Melville: A Biography, Volume 2, 412.

¹⁴⁶ Eleanor Metcalf, in her book on her grandfather, *Cycle and Epicycle*, describes this slip of paper (qtd. *Weeds* 81).

¹⁴⁷ Bryant introduces "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac" in his edited volume *Herman Melville: Tales, Poems and other Writings*, by suggesting that, "Rip's widespread lilac foretells Melville's own [critical] resurrection" (554).

¹⁴⁸ Leyda's final section of the *Melville Log*, Volume 2, covers Melville's invitation to, and declination of, an invitation the New York Author's club, as well as his correspondence with James Billison and other admirers (781-837).

¹⁴⁹ In terms of varied form, Melville includes: short quatrains or double quatrains dedicated to particularly common flowers, longer "bird" poems, a poem about a butterfly, a chipmunk poem, poems that deal more broadly with seasonal changes, and poems about the commonness of weeds. The two Christmas poems that end the sequence vary the most from the other poems, both in form and content, extending into longer (mostly 4 or 5 beat) lines and narrative. An innocent tone characterizes most of the poems in the series: Children "woo" weeds in "When Forth the Shepherd"; the narrator of "Madcaps" follows "Two children in glee" two poems later; "bobolinks sing…[i]n juvenile cheer" in the next poem, "The Old Fashion"; three poems later, the "Dairyman's child" appears (*Weeds* 10-12). In "The Chipmunk, "Baby" is "Crowing mirth" before taking off, unexpectedly, like a chipmunk, "From our hearth!" and children and young women await Christmas in the final two poems.

¹⁵⁰ As Bryant's reading of "The Chipmunk" have suggested, the nursery-rhyme final stanza—"So did Baby, /Crowing mirth...Flit (and whither?) / From our hearth!"—jars painfully against the realities of Melville's lost sons—Malcolm's suicide and Stanwix's early succumbing to illness. While this section, generally, seems to be the least biographically infused, still, the presence of children throughout may be a way of thinking through particular losses ("Melville's Rose Poems," 60).

¹⁵¹ In his correspondence with James Billson, Melville expressed admiration for Blake (*Correspondence* 498, 514). It is unlikely that he would have known Dickinson's work.

152 Bryant "Ordering" (18).

- ¹⁵³ Bridgman notes this gift in "Melville's Roses" (239). Milder, in "Old Man Melville: The Rose and the Cross," reports that "[b]y the time of the late poetry, Melville had revised his notion of the rose," from an earlier association in *Clarel* with ideality, "partly because in his retirement he had become a rose gardener himself, literally and metaphorically" (16).
- ¹⁵⁴ Bridgeman argues that, though Melville created many other symbols for himself—the "tortoise, wall, island"—the rose is different because it is inherited (235). On the challenge of making the rose "new," see also Bryant (18). And for an overview of other possible intertextual nodes in *Weeds and Wildings* (there are many), see Ryan's introduction to his unpublished edition.
- ¹⁵⁵ Dillingham discusses Melville's late –life reading in *Melville and His Circle* (2008); Cameron investigates Melville's reading of Schopenhauer in relation to "Billy Budd" in *Impersonality* (184, 196-204).
- ¹⁵⁶ Melville's Marginalia Online notes that both these books were inscribed to Herman from Lizzie, Johnson in 1882, and Aldrich in 1883.
- ¹⁵⁷ Melville owned three copies of this book; the 1878 Boston "red-line" edition can be seen on *Melville's Marginalia online*. Dorothy Finkelstein's *Melville's Orienda* (1961) examines Melville's interest in Easter writings—particularly those of Khayyám and Saadi—in the context of a larger mid-nineteenth century American fascination with these authors; in Finkelstein's readings, Melville's appreciation of the darkness and homoeroticism of some of this Persian poetry is often contrasted with Emerson, who found a resolute lightness in poets Khayyám, Saadi, and Hafiz.
- ¹⁵⁸ Dillingham argues that the Marquis de Grandvin of the "Burgundy Sketches" is "geniality personified" (15).
- ¹⁵⁹ In *This Infinite Fraternity of Feeling* (1996), Monika Mueller argues that *Pierre* and *The Blithedale Romance* should be read as companion texts in which both Melville and Hawthorne explore forms of both gender and genre bending.
- ¹⁶⁰ Melville writes as much in his first letter to Hawthorne and suggested the same in a meeting with Hawthorne's son in 1890. See Leyda, *Melville Log* (Volume 2, 782), which cites an essay by Julian Hawthorne, "Hawthorne at Lenox," published in 1901.
- 161 "Monody" also revolves on some uneventful event, an understated waning of intimacy.

Coda

¹⁶² For more on the spiritual as invisible, see Emerson's Sermon XXIII, which responds to Romans I: 20: "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead."

¹⁶³ Robert Richardson gives a good narrative account of this moment, and its context, in *The Mind on Fire*.

164 Providing a full account of American poetry as a continuum was an important project to an earlier generation of critics, as witnessed by Roy Harvey Pearce's The Continuity of American Poetry (1961), Hyatt Waggoner's American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (1968), and even F.O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance (1941), which for all of its insight into nineteenth-century authors most obsessively to T.S. Eliot. For accounts of the continuity of American nature writing, both of which overlook poetry, see Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind (1967) and Lawrence Buell's Environmental Imagination (1995). For more recent attempts to align poetry and nature writing in American literature, see Angus Fletcher's A New Theory for American Poetry (2006) and John Felstiner's Can Poetry Save the Earth? (2009).

165 Harold Bloom covers some of this reception history in "Emerson and Influence."

¹⁶⁶ Timothy Morton advocates "eco-critique" and "dark ecology": "Dark ecology undermines the naturalness of the stories we tell about how we are involved in nature. It preserves the dark,

depressive quality of life in the shadow of ecological catastrophe. Instead of whistling in the dark, insisting that we're part of Gaia, why not stay with the darkness?" (187).

This is partly Elaine Scarry's argument in *Dreaming by the Book* when she suggests that perhaps one of the reasons poetry has been so often filled with fragile things—flower petals and flitting birds—is that the flimsy nature of these things makes them all the more evocative in language directed toward conjuring images in the mind; the more language gives an impression of transparency, of being easily seen through, the more vivid the images imaginatively produced.

¹⁶⁸ See this sermon:

¹⁶⁹ Emerson gives another example of this in another one of his early lectures, the "Humanity of Science," in which he describes the experience of classifying a violet with the knowledge of other violets in mind: "This act of classifying is attended with pleasure, as it is a sort of unlocking the spiritual sight. I am shown a violet, the hearts ease, for example. If I have never seen a plant of the sort, I fasten my attention on the stem, leaves, and petals, of this; and I do not easily believe in the existence of any other sort of violet, than that I see. But another is shown me—the white; then the round-leaved; then the yellow. I see each with a livelier pleasure, and begin to see that there exists a violet family, after which type all these particular varieties are made. I experience the like delight in being shown each of the tribes in the natural system of Botany, as the lilaceous, the papilonaceous, the mosses, or the grasses" (19).

¹⁷⁰ Kenneth Walter Cameron, Ralph Waldo Emerson's Reading (17-20). In his journal, Emerson writes a list of plants during a visit to the White Mountains in late June, early July, 1832, using Florula Bostoniensis: A Collection of Plants of Boston and its Vicinity (Boston, 1824), which he withdrew from the Harvard Lib Aug 1, 1828, and again June 15-July 15, 1830 from the Boston Athenaeum (JMN, 229-230).

¹⁷¹ "In this day's raid," Emerson writes in his journal, I marked that the botany of England & America are alike. The clematis, the mints, the golden rods, the gerardias, the wild geranium, the wild parsley, & twenty more better known to my eye than to my ear [—] I saw & recognized them all" (*JMNIV*: 413). Ann Leighton's three volume series on gardens in America, from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth traces the history of some of these plants.

The comparison between the language of nature and the yet un-ciphered language of the Egyptians was a common trope in the period. See Emerson's early lecture, "The Naturalist" (*Lectures I*, 78). Thoreau and Melville make similar comparisons between nature and the unreadability, yet obvious representative quality, of hieroglyphs.

In his lecture, "The Humanity of Science," Emerson writes, "The order of the world has been wisely called 'an open secret.' And it is true that Nature's mode of concealing a law is in its very simplicity; she hides facts by putting them next us...In these pages, every strong agent has written his name: the whirlpool, the lake, the volcano, the wind" (Lectures I, 25-26). The editors of Emerson's early lectures cross cite Emerson's journal, where he remarks on Goethe's idea of the open secret (IMNIV, 139).

(JMNIV, 139). ¹⁷⁴ See Pierre Hadot on the mistranslation of Heraclitus's famous idiom. This slipperiness of natural objects takes a dark turn in "Experience," where Emerson writes: "I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition. Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates" (473).

¹⁷⁵ Emerson was particularly impressed with the way stones write themselves. In "The Humanity of Science," he discusses geology as scripture: "In Geology again, we have a book of Genesis, wherein we read when and how the worlds were made, and are introduced to periods as portentous as the distances of the sky" (*Lectures I 26*).

Emerson describes the experience of encountering plants laid out like alphabetized words on a page in the Jardin des Plantes in "The Uses of Natural History": "Moving along these pleasant walks, you come to the botanical cabinet, an inclosed garden plot, where grows a grammar of botany...If

you have read Decandolle with engravings, or with a *bortus siccus* [an herbarium], conceive how much more exciting and intelligible is this natural alphabet, this green and yellow and crimson dictionary, on which the sun shines, and the wind blows" (*Lectures I 3*). Emerson's interest in the suggestibility of "bare books" and of nature, which I discuss in chapter 2, begins here.

Emerson's first run-through of great men showed his continuing preoccupation with the meaning of Christianity at this early point in his career; in 1835, Emerson lectured on Michael Angelo, Martin Luther, John Milton, George Fox, and Edmund Burke.

Emerson mentions this idea of Goethe's frequently; one of those examples is in "History," where he refers to the desire of "Goethe's Helena...that every word should be a thing" (EL, 252).

¹⁷⁹ This passage appears in varying forms in Emerson's early lectures "The Naturalist" and on Shakespeare (*Lectures I*, 73-74, 317)

Emerson sketches out his ideas on composition in his journal, where he references both Shakespeare's method and Goethe's idea of the "open secret" (*JMN III*, 270-71, 284-85, 299, 316, 428).

¹⁸¹ On the conventionality of nineteenth-century poetry, see Kerry Larson's "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth Century American Poetry*.

Wallace Stevens, "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit" in *Transport to Summer* (1947).

¹⁸³ By "backyard sublime" I mean an experience of the sublime epitomized by the psychic disorientations that seem to arise in response to quintessentially "small" or insignificant natural particulars. The buzzing fly that Dickinson hears while dying is a perfect example of this; or the stones, trees, cat that Melville's Isabel confuses herself with in *Pierre*. My idea of the backyard sublime draws on William Cronon's suggestion in "The Trouble with Wilderness" that we needn't go looking for "nature" or "the wild" in places far from home; Emerson's commons is a wonderful example of this. We might feel ourselves torn to pieces by the sublime even in the context of other humans, without cliffs or lightening or oceans. A walk across town.

¹⁸⁴ This is Stanley Cavell's Emerson, and my love in this regard might be equally channeled through Cavell's own energetic investigations.

Here, I am undoubtedly influenced by Anne-Lise François's theory of "recessive action" in *Open Secrets*, and in the latent Buddhism that pervades so much of Sharon Cameron's writings on "impersonality."

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