Title

Wayward Poets: Whitman, Melville, Douglass, and the Politics of Time

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Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Wayward Poets:
Whitman, Melville, Douglass, and the Politics of Time

by

Cody Marrs

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Samuel Otter, Chair
Professor Stephen Best
Professor Robert Kaufman

Spring 2010

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Abstract

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"Wayward Poets" examines the long careers of Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Frederick Douglass. Although these authors are typically associated with certain mid-century texts (i.e., the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby-Dick*, and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*), their careers in fact span the arc of the nineteenth century. Across this period, they experiment with a variety of literary forms – from journalism to fiction, public speaking, and literary criticism – but are each drawn, at particular moments and for particular reasons, to poetry. This interest in verse, I argue, has to do with its relationship to time, and with these writers' broader entanglements with temporality as a medium of political experience. Indeed, I bring these figures together, ultimately, to reveal a shared formal project, insofar as they each manipulate poetic structures in order to reimagine the shape and propensities of historical time. Assembled through internal splits, ruptures, and inversions, theirs is a fractured verse, and these formal breaks are directly tied to questions about how, and to what ends, a people can share a polity.

Chapters 1 and 2 consider the ways in which temporality acquires political meaning and formal significance in Whitman's poetry. Comparing *Leaves of Grass* across its many editions, I argue that Whitman's book is structured through a slow but definitive move away from the early verse's now-time in favor of a teleological not-yet. I examine the ways in which this transition from a poetics of immediacy to a poetics of anticipation is connected to Whitman's reading of Hegel; to changes within liberal ideology; and to the postbellum struggles of American workers.

I move from Whitman's chants to Melville's poetics in chapters 3 and 4, which look at how *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* provide an immanent account, or inside narrative, of Melville's transition from novelist to poet. Through the Civil War, Melville comes to perceive history as a process of destructive repetition, and this altered historical sensibility plays a pivotal role in his embrace and use of verse. In both *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel*, he crafts a poetry in which damaged rhymes, broken meters, and twisted syntax attempt to carry the weight of the war as a historical phenomenon and connect the conflict to other episodes of discontinuity.

Chapters 5 and 6 recast Frederick Douglass as a political poet. Douglass's orations, wherein most of his poetry arises, create fissures and pockets in time by constructing patterns of temporal relation that divorce listeners and readers from official modes of remembrance. It is in these temporal breaks that Douglass's poetry erupts, often through quoted – and then strategically revised – lines of verse, in order to promote emancipatory forms of feeling and connection. From his repeated use of Byron's *The Giaour* in his Civil War speeches to his enlistment of William Cowper's *The Task* to describe slave song in his autobiographies, Douglass invokes verse to activate a unique mode of

experience vital to fashioning counter-publics against slavery.

For Kristin

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Acknowledgments

It is perhaps appropriate that this dissertation about unacknowledged connections across time was made possible by a variety of different voices. My committee members, Stephen Best and Robert Kaufman, gave me rigorous feedback on my methodology, and showed me new ways to think about the act of reading. My director, Samuel Otter, was instrumental to the development of this project in countless ways. Whether we were discussing *Clarel* or a draft of a chapter, I was constantly inspired by his critical acumen and intellectual generosity. Whatever balance this project may now have, it is due to Sam.

During my time at Berkeley, my thinking and writing were also shaped by Colleen Lye, Scott Saul, and Bryan Wagner, who gave me wonderful examples of what it means to teach and practice literary criticism. Annie McClanahan and Ted Martin offered careful and spirited responses to this dissertation at various stages, as well as a friendship that has sustained me. I have also been very fortunate to have Malik Ali, Aaron Bady, Natalia Cecire, Marisa Knox, Megan Pugh, Swati Rana, Ayon Roy, and Randall Smith as friends and colleagues. These people all made graduate school a far richer experience than it had any right to be.

Important financial and intellectual support for this dissertation was provided by the Townsend Center for the Humanities. As a Townsend Fellow, I had the opportunity to work with historians, art critics, philosophers, and others who pushed me to think about my project beyond the comfort of my disciplinary expertise. Parts of this dissertation were also written while I was teaching, and my students – whether they know it or not – helped me figure out what draws Whitman, Melville, and Douglass together. My parents, Monte and Betty Marrs, and my brother, Kyle Marrs, also gave me love and encouragement. Over the years, they have believed in me even when I did not believe in myself, and for that I am grateful.

Finally, I want to thank the person to whom this dissertation is dedicated: Kristin Lenore Marrs. Without her support, these pages simply would not exist. Her intelligence, her kindness, her humor, and her companionship were indispensable to me both materially (she edited and commented on the drafts, no matter how rough) and immaterially. Whatever I know about time – its fullness, its variance, and its sad brevity – I owe, as I do with so many things, to her.

INTRODUCTION

When Roger Taney, the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, declared in 1857 that "the black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect," one of the most vigorous critiques came from Frederick Douglass. Speaking in New York that May, Douglass denounced the court's expulsion of African Americans from the nation's polity as a "judicial incarnation of wolfishness." He argued that this "most shocking of all-proslavery devices," constructed in defiance of the founding documents, was evidence that a treasonous, "slaveholding wing" had usurped control of the country's judiciary. Yet, he insisted, all was not lost since the "whole history of the anti-slavery is [. . .] studded with proof that all measures devised and executed with a view to allay and diminish the anti-slavery agitation, have only served to increase, intensify, and embolden that agitation." To illustrate this principle he turned to the slave revolts that rocked the American South the previous year – and then to poetry:

> Twenty or thirty of the suspected were put to death. Some were shot, some hanged, some burned, and some died under the lash [. . .] These insurrectionary movements have been put down, but they may break out any time, under the guidance of higher intelligence, and with a more invincible spirit.
>
> > The fire thus kindled, may be revived again;
> > The flames are extinguished, but the embers remain;
> > One terrible blast may produce an ignition,
> > Which shall wrap the whole South in wild conflagration.
> >
> > The pathway of tyrants lies over volcanoes;
> > The very air they breathe is heavy with sorrows;
> > Agonizing heart-throbs convulse them while sleeping,
> > And the wind whispers death as over them sweeping.[1]

These eight poetic lines, construing freedom as a potent force with its own volcanic shape and tendencies, are Douglass's own. They come from "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," a 29-stanza, poetic tour de force that he penned in response to a series of slave rebellions that were hatched, and partly executed, throughout the South in late 1856. Douglass's poem is the extended monologue of a Southern slaveholder who, prompted by the discovery of these revolts, expatiates on the nature of liberty, time, property, and repression. Emerging toward the end of the text after the chastened tyrant has begun to grasp slavery's inevitable downfall, these stanzas suggest that there is a freedom drive that cannot be

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1 Chief Justice Taney, "Opinion of the Court in Dred Scott, Plaintiff in Error v. John F. A. Sandford," *Dred Scott v. Sanford: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Bedford, 1997), 55; Frederick Douglass, "The Dred Scott Decision" (1857), reprinted in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 347-50 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *FD*). For Douglass's poem, see "The Tyrants' Jubilee!; An Address supposed to have been delivered on the occasion celebrating the Suppression of the recent apprehended Insurrections at the South," reprinted at the end of William Gleason's essay, "Volcanoes and Meteors: Douglass, Melville, and the Poetics of Insurrection," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Robert S. Levine and Samuel Otter (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 127-130.

suppressed – not by America's vengeful slaveholders, and not by their allies in the highest court – and thus offer a powerful counter-weight to the majority decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford.* The sudden appearance of these lines, however, is also unexpected, even startling, and compels us to ask: *Why* does "[t]he pathway of tyrants lie over volcanoes"? Is it because history is Providential? Or dialectical? Or simply violent? Moreover, why does Douglass, in the middle of his political response to Taney, enlist *poetry* of all things? For what reasons does verse merit this prominence and attention? And in the wake of the court's "hell-black judgment," what exactly is poetry supposed to do?

Such questions – linking politics to aesthetics and verse to the public sphere – are central to this dissertation, which considers the poetic careers of Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. These were, as my title declares, wayward poets, or practitioners of an unruly art. Derived from the Old English word meaning "awry" or "turned away," wayward connotes a certain contrariness, a willful insurgence or intractability. In these authors' writing, this unruliness takes shape in a variety of ways, from Whitman's tendency to look with a "sidecurved head" at the world's "pulling and hauling" to Melville's almost maniacal fascination with the extremes of experience and the limits of knowledge, and Douglass's habit of subverting accepted patterns of memory and commemoration. Yet what guides and organizes these writers' waywardness are not simply their respective beliefs, or even their artistic outlooks, but, I will argue, their chronopolitics. The manner in which they each imagine and manipulate time – reconstellating past, present, and future into new patterns – is, in other words, fundamental to their conceptions of how, and to what ends, a people can share a polity.

In the following pages, we will find that if the poet, as Whitman claimed in 1855, "places himself where the future becomes present [. . . and] glows [there for] a moment on the extremest verge," this self-insertion between prophecy and realization is no less crucial for Melville and Douglass than it is for the poet of the body and the soul. The manner in which these bards conceive of this liminal position, situated on the edge of historical transition, nonetheless differs considerably. After the Civil War, Whitman's dilatory chants, from the *Centennial Songs* to "Passage to India," are increasingly future-oriented and addressed to the imminent or still-to-come. In *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel,* Melville fixates on questions of contemporary historical change but approaches the present only by way of the past, wresting patterns of transformation from busted relics, dead bodies, and decommissioned ships. And Douglass, in his speeches and in his improvised poems, structures his political commentary around an "ever-living now," an elastic *Jetztzeit* that simultaneously reshapes memory and gestures towards fulfillment ("The Meaning of Fourth of July for the Negro," *FD,* 193).[2] The labor of their poetry in fact consists in distilling, sublating, and recasting these differing axes of temporal feeling and political investment.

Wayward Poets is thus, on one level, an account of three varying poetics of time, one grounded in the future (Whitman) and the others oriented toward the past (Melville) and the present (Douglass). However, these diverging temporal viewpoints are also fused, I will argue, through a common approach to verse and its structures. This dissertation ultimately makes an argument for a collective formal praxis, insofar as these writers each craft a poetics not of totalities or wholes but, instead, of fissures, gaps, and discontinuities. Theirs is a fractured political verse, a poetic art whose power lies not in its wholeness but in its structural volatility and internal variance. In the coming pages, rhyme, meter, and poetic arrangement will accordingly become matters of intense political interest, while some of the most entangled questions about historical time – its shape, its tendencies, and its origins – will emerge

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2 Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems,* 3 Volumes, ed. Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden, and William White (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1980), I: 5 (hereafter cited parenthetically as *LG*); Whitman, 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass,* in *Poetry and Prose,* ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1992), 13 (cited as *PP* from this point on).

in turn as objects of intense, and intensely local, poetic inquiry.

TIMING THE POLITICAL

This dissertation considers a range of temporal patterns and representations. In the chapters that follow, we will encounter fantasies of teleological progress, memories that incessantly return, cycles of violent destruction, instances of surprising stasis and enervation, and genealogies that are reversed, circuitous, and broken. Whitman, Melville, and Douglass each discover, in their own way, time's unevenness and heterogeneity, and make this multiplicity a dynamic element of their poetic art. My subject is consequently twofold: it involves (1) the varieties of lived, remembered, and expected time which proliferate in this period, and (2) the ways in which these three writers recast these manifold temporalities.

From "Song of Myself" to "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," time emerges not as an empty form or ungraspable abstraction but, rather, as a deeply felt, imagined, and almost corporeal substance. Time, we will find, is a material phenomenon that ties the most quotidian aspects of experience to much broader ideas about social meaning and communal purpose. It is palpable and elastic, as well as – and perhaps most importantly at all – immediately and inescapably political. This is not only because politics, as Peter Osborne claims, inheres in "struggles over the experience of time" and contrasting "senses of [. . .] possibility" but also because social antagonism is inscribed in the very temporal experience of capitalist modernity.[3] Because people in different classes, spaces, and positions live time differently, time's astounding heterogeneity flows, in large part, from the division of labor and from social differences. My examination of time in the poems of Whitman, Melville, and Douglass is also therefore a *re*examination of these authors' politics.

This chronopolitical reframing of these writers expands on a recent temporal turn in literary criticism. Drawing from some of the insights provided by physicists (particularly in relativity and quantum mechanics), mathematicians (especially practitioners of neo-Riemannian and fractal geometry), and social scientists (from E.P. Thompson to Alexis McCrossen), several critics have drawn attention to literature's mixed and layered time frames. Wai Chee Dimock has argued for the importance of planetary "deep time," a global paradigm that acknowledges the assorted ways in which literature extends, thickens, and reweighs temporality. "Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time," Dimock posits: "Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that time, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation." Accounting for these irregular ties and extensions, she maintains, demands conceptualizing "American literature" not as "a discrete entity" but as "a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures." Philip Fisher and Dana Luciano have illustrated the political and literary significance of nonstandard temporalities by focusing more specifically on the body and its complexities. In *The Vehement Passions*, Fisher contends that strong affects such as fear,

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3 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 200. Other important scholarship on time as a mode of politics includes: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, trans. Matti Bunzl (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002); Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (Oxford: Polity, 1995); and the essays by Gayatri Spivak, Jack Goody, and Dominick LaCapra in *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time*, ed. John Bender and David Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991).

anger, grief, and boredom do nothing less than "design time" by providing it with duration and meaning. "The passions," he explains, "convert pure, featureless, everywhere-the-same stretches of time into something like a temporal landscape, building an architecture into time," and literature comprises a testament to this powerful emotional "landscape." A similar model of varied, corporeal temporality is provided by Dana Luciano in *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. Through an analysis of nineteenth-century sermons, mourning manuals, memorial tracts, poems, and novels, Luciano demonstrates that the feeling body, particularly in periods of grieving, offered an "alternative mechanism for the collection of time" that "at once underwrote [. . .] standard chronologies and sponsored other ways of advancing history."[4]

Meanwhile, scholarship by Thomas M. Allen and Lloyd Pratt has tied the politics of literary time to the differentiated development of national identities in the nineteenth-century U.S. In *A Republic in Time: Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*, Allen claims that the manifold temporalities wrought by literary and historical works "produce[d] competing accounts of American national identity." He posits that the antebellum United States was internally differentiated to a degree that is still difficult to grasp, and that one of the principal effects of this disunity was the rise of discordant times, rhythms, and "modes of national emergence." As such, literary writers and historians in this period – from Thomas Jefferson to Emma Willard and Henry David Thoreau – sought to assimilate and "combine these different forms of temporality" and thereby forge "out of America's heterogeneous temporal cultures a vision of America as a nation in time that is, itself, heterogeneous." In a related vein, Lloyd Pratt, in *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, has demonstrated that prior to the Civil War temporal experience in the U.S. was marked not by progressive unification but, instead, by proliferation and difference. Disputing historical accounts that make modernization the unacknowledged telos of antebellum cultural production, Pratt stresses the importance and prevalence of non-synchronous, or non-simultaneous, experiences and representations of historical time. Rather than evincing a progressive unification of temporal consciousness, the literature of the antebellum U.S., he insists, "both document[s] and compound[s] a conflict of times that inhibited the consolidation of [. . .] national and racial identity." This literature is therefore best understood as "disaggregating." Or, as Pratt puts it: "This literature pluralized time. It did not purify it."[5]

One of the most significant contributions of these analyses is their insistence on the importance of literary evidence in thinking about past temporalities. Sociological and historical studies by scholars such as Peter Louis Galison, David S. Landes, Carlene Stephens, Dan Thu Nguyen, Martin Bruegel, Mark M. Smith and Michael O'Malley have enriched our understanding of time's development as a material practice and scientific discourse, but they do not even begin to consider the role of the imagination, let alone that of literature, in generating and managing different experiences and conceptions of time. Lewis Mumford may be right that "the clock, [and] not the steam engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age," but there are a *plurality* of clocks – many of them imagined or otherwise fabricated – which exert real political and aesthetic force, and these literary reassessments

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4 Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 3-4; Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 87, 78; Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2007), 3. For a more formalist approach to the new temporal studies, see Catherine Gallagher, "Formalism and Time," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 229-251.

5 Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4; Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 3, 5.

of temporality by Dimock, Luciano, Allen and others have done much to reveal this. This dissertation similarly develops more of a literary and philosophical account than a cultural and material history. It explores "timing" as a complex activity, as Norbert Elias puts it – one that distills and organizes these authors' memories, aesthetic impulses, expectations, and poetic techniques.[6]

Nonetheless, these chapters also complicate some of these critics' insights into time's literary dynamism and structural multiplicity. My approach differs in large part because I conceive of time not simply as a social construction but as a social relation that is acted upon, and even reenvisioned through, these authors' poetics. While it is certainly the case, as many of these scholars have argued, that time is highly malleable and historically variable, the dualistic model that is usually posited between the standardized, homogeneous time of the nation and the factory on the one hand, and the irrepressibly heterogeneous time of literature on the other, only tells part of the story. Time is also a mode of antagonism, a striated materiality through which social antinomies are played out and made real. If race, as Stuart Hall writes, is a "modality in which class is lived," the same might very well be said of time: the latter is an uneven and volatile relation, and it is experienced as a continuous and unsteady modulation. There are, in other words, a series of pressures behind the standardization of time that these recent literary studies often overlook. We moderns may very well be Newtonians in spite of ourselves, as Dimock contends in *Through Other Continents* – subject, that is, to a "silent [temporal] hegemony" that frames time as mathematical, singular, and constant. Yet this hegemony is also the result of struggles and processes that are still unfolding.[7] Lived time originates not in science, or in nature's cycles, or in the nation's calendar but in everyday relations: it is the medium and issue of individual and collective encounters and of how people remember and anticipate these encounters. Time consequently bears the scars of its origins. It, too, is a record of barbarism. Its festivals mark funerals for the unremembered, just as its felt accelerations speed over the unintegrated. This

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6 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, 1934), 14; Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 145. On time's evolution as a scientific discourse and material practice, see Peter Louis Galison, *Einstein's Clocks, Poincare's Maps: Empires of Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983); and Arno Borst, *The Ordering of Time: From the Ancient Computus to the Modern Computer*, trans. Andrew Winnard (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993). Significant studies that focus specifically on timekeeping in the United States include: Carlene Stephens, *On Time: How America Learned to Live by the Clock* (Boston: Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown, 2002); Alexis McCrossen, "'Conventions of Simultaneity': Time Standards, Public Clocks, and Nationalism in American Cities and Towns, 1871-1905," *Journal of Urban History* 33.2 (2007): 217-53; Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990). Dan Thu Nguyen provides a comparative analysis of the British and American contexts in his article, "The Spatialization of Metric Time: The Conquest of Land and Labour in Europe and the United States," *Time and Society* 1 (February 1992): 29-50. An older but still important reference point for much of this work is E.P. Thompson's essay, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967): 56-97.

7 Here I am drawing, in part, on Antonio Negri's reconceptualization of time as an "antagonistic materiality" in *Time For Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2004), 80. Stuart Hall's defines race as a "modality in which class is lived" in "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996); and Dimock reflects on Newton's *Principia* in *Through Other Continents*, 127.

dissertation is about these assorted losses, coercions, and constraints – but it is also about what escapes them.

Rather than examining an opposition between standard and non-standard temporality, or between clock time and "deep time," this dissertation considers an array of criss-crossing times and rhythms. Some of them overlap with the nation and its ideologies in discomfiting ways, while others refuse the unification of historical experience and provide spaces through which the present and the future can be remade. From "Song of Myself" to *Clarel*, a wide spectrum of temporalities will emerge that alternatively redouble, cut down, and eclipse the ideologies of time wrought by the nation's politico-economic consolidation.

This spectrum of timings, ranging from the conciliatory to the removed and the oppositional, acquires aesthetic shape in Whitman's, Melville's, and Douglass's verse. *Wayward Poets* therefore offers a counter-point to many of the prevailing accounts of literature's temporalities, from which poetry is conspicuously absent. Most of these studies tend to intimate that narrative alone can index time's fluctuations and potentials – that the novel, in other words, is somehow *the* temporal document *par excellence.* This privileging of prose, is of course not entirely coincidental: one of the most crucial insights of theories of the novel is that narrative, broadly construed, is an exceptional medium for releasing and marshaling time's assorted "chronotopes," "aporetics," and mythopoetic patterns.[8] Poetry nonetheless offers a distinct kind of access to the temporal that historically- and politically-minded critics would be woefully remiss to ignore. The particularities of verse – its ability to channel the most fleeting as well as the most momentous of events into metered language, which stamps itself upon one's memory; its tendency to vacillate between the public and the private, and between the self and social totality, in small, delicate, and unexpected ways; its formal demands, in rhyme and meter, for symmetry and repetition – make it an important, and in some respects unique, register of time. Poetry connects the local with the translocal, and it condenses and expands time, in especially subtle ways. It reconstellates that which it considers through its intricate and powerful forms. Indeed, it is a medium of transformation – a "widely adaptable literary technology," in the words of Roland Greene – that creates times and spaces at a distinct remove, and thereby transverses the divergent temporalities of the empirical world, in all their dynamism and difference.[9]

Poetry probes and oscillates. It is as much a force of inbetweenness as a vehicle of transcendence, often plunging into the particular but also rising above it. Accordingly, we might say – to borrow from the conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck – that, perhaps more than any other discourse, verse bridges the chasm between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation." According to Koselleck, these terms refer, on the one hand, to the "present past" (which includes events available to memory as well as unconscious modes of thought and action) and on the other, to the "future made present" (which "directs itself to the not-yet" and comprises "hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis"). In *Futures Past*, he argues that historical time itself is made and continuously remade through the interface between these two modes. This tension, he

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8 On the "chronotype," see Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994), 84-258; on the "aporetics" of temporality and its relation to narrative, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), 11-98; and on narrative's mythopoetic patterns, see Northup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987).

9 Roland Greene, *Unrequited Contests: Love and Empire in the Colonial Americas* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.

demonstrates, manifests in “ever-changing patterns” or structural combinations, which shape people's sense of historical movement and temporal belonging. What literature in general, and poetry in particular, offers, I would argue, is a way to at once apprehend and manipulate these determining combinations and their “hierarchies of effectivity.” Poetry generates spaces and structures capable of boring into or outside of that which seems to be fixed or inevitable; it fashions times apart which enable us to reencounter the coercions that make history, and make it felt. Consequently, it is an altogether indispensable archive for scholars of time, one that delves into temporality's fixed patterns but also – as Melville words it in “The Conflict of Convictions” – “spins against” the very historical world with which it is bound up.[10]

One of this dissertation's central arguments is that for these three writers, poetry was not a supplemental, secondary, or compensatory discourse but a vital and transformative medium of experience in its own right. Poetry appealed to Whitman, Melville, and Douglass because of its relationship to time, and because they understood – *avant la lettre*, as it were – that if history, as Frederic Jameson puts it, “is the experience of Necessity” and of that which “hurts,” verse provides a way to at once register and escape its force, to get outside of and re-perceive those diminutions of time and experience which modernity terms “progress.”[11]

UNTIMING THE NATION

This chronopolitical approach to Whitman, Melville, and Douglass also advances a somewhat different sense of literary space. In the following chapters, the fabric of American national history is woven together with a number of locations, times, and events throughout the Atlantic world. The familiar sites of New York City, Rochester, and Boston will be joined by these three authors with Paris, London, Jerusalem, Rome, the West Indies, and even with political and philosophical universalisms that skirt such geographical designations.

In explicating these assorted linkages, *Wayward Poets* seeks to extend recent efforts to turn away from the nation-state as the chief organizing literary-critical category. In tandem with the rise of globalization and the decline of American geopolitical hegemony in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century, a number of related attempts have emerged to account for what Donald Pease aptly calls the “extraterritoriality” of literature. Scholars such as Paul Giles, Elisa Tamarkin, and Leonard Tennenhouse have argued for a “transatlantic” approach and drawn attention to the cogent, enduring affiliations between American literary writing and British cultural production and authority before the Civil War. David Palumbo-Liu, Colleen Lye, and Rob Wilson, among others, have offered subtle new ways to rethink American literature as part of a much larger cultural development within the

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10 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 259-263; Melville, “The Conflict of Convictions,” *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, in *Published Poems*, Vol. 11 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Robert C. Ryan, Harrison Hayford, Alma MacDougall Reising, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 2009), 10. This edition of *Battle-Pieces* will be cited parenthetically as *BP* throughout the rest of the dissertation. The phrase “hierarchies of effectivity” comes from Louis Althusser's account of structural causality within the capitalist mode of production; *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1997), 91-118.

11 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 102.

Pacific Rim.[12] Anna Brickhouse, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Caroline Levander, Robert S. Levine, and Sean X. Goudie have illustrated the benefits of hemispheric, transamerican, and inter-linguistic models of inquiry. Their work has powerfully refocused critical attention on the important and often startling connections fostered through "literary border crossing," "creolization," "discourses of spatial encounter," and "intercontinental exchange."[13] And even broader methods of inquiry have been developed by Lawrence Buell, Wai Chee Dimock, Jonathan Arac, Pascale Casanova, and Bruce Robbins, who have stressed the need for a "planetary" or "global" approach that surpasses regions, oceans, and spatial geography itself.[14]

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12 Donald Pease, "The Extraterritoriality of the Literature of Our Planet," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 50 (2004): 177-221. On the transatlantic makeup of American literary culture, see Paul Giles, *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2002) and *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992); Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996); and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007). Critiques of nation-based criticism from the perspective of the Pacific Rim are developed in David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999); Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004); and Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From* South Pacific *to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

13 See Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004); Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002); Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); Rodrigo Lazo, *Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina press, 2005); Cyrus Patell, "Comparative American Studies: Hybridity and Beyond," *American Literary History* 11.1 (1999): 166-86; and the essays in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2008). Also see the 2003 special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* on "Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary," ed. Paula Moya and Ramón Saldivar; the 2004 issue of *Radical History Review* on "Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings," ed. Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman; and the 2005 issue of *Comparative American Studies* on "Critical Perspectives and Emerging Models of Inter-American Studies," ed. Claire F. Fox. Gretchen Murphy provides a useful overview of the hemispheric approach in her review essay, "Nation, Ocean, Hemisphere, and Planet: New Geographies of American Literary Studies," *American Literature* 81.1 (March 2009): 181-91. The quotes I use come from Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations*, 8-9; Goudie, *Creole America*; and Levine and Levander, "Introduction" to *Hemispheric American Studies*, 3.

14 Lawrence Buell, "Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of U.S. Environmental Imagination on a Planetary Scale," in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, ed. Lawrence Buell and Wai Chee Dimock (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), 227-48; Wai Chee Dimock, "Planet and America, Set and Subset," in *Shades of the Planet*, 1-16, and *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009); Jonathan Arac,

Despite their patent diversity, these new approaches are united in their desire to cast off the "nation" as the determining rubric of literary meaning. Whether their subject is a transamerican archive that stretches from South America to New Orleans and beyond (Gruesz and Brickhouse), a discourse of and about the Caribbean that shapes early American political thought and literary writing (Goudie), or an English "diaspora" that makes American writing possible (Tennenhouse), these comparative projects collectively reveal "American literature" to be a profoundly unstable and surprisingly unbounded formation. The guiding impulse of this transnational turn is nicely described by Robert S. Levine and Caroline Levander in their introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies* as an "attempt to move beyond the U.S. nation" without rejecting "the concept of the nation." The aim of post-nationalist critics, they write, is not to abolish the nation as a critical term but "rather to adopt new perspectives that allow us to view the nation beyond the terms of its own exceptionalist self-imaginings. It is to take full account of the contingency of nation formation, the unpredictability of national histories, and the protean character of the nation itself" (7).

This dissertation likewise develops new grammars for literature's extra-national relations and exchanges, but it also proceeds from a certain unease with a tendency in this transnational turn to code the nation as an exclusively geographical formation. What if – these chapters ask – the nation's "own exceptionalist self-imaginings" are as much temporal as spatial?[15] What if the ideologies of time that underpin national formation and territorial expansion get disregarded, or perhaps even reproduced, when we critics cross and redraw national literary borders? Moreover – to move beyond questions of temporality to related questions of method – might the mutable, "protean character of the nation itself" be accessed and comprehended most rigorously not through comparitivization and "distant reading" (as Franco Moretti terms it) but, instead, through a deeper attention to the complexities of literary form?[16] Indeed, what if the nation's antinomies – its imaginary foundations, self-made histories, and structural contradictions – are already fully registered beneath our noses, as it were, and in the smallest of places:

"Global and Babel: Two Perspectives on Language in American Literature," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 50.1-3 (2004): 94-119; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. Debevoise (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004); and Bruce Robbins, "The Worlding of the American Novel," in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

15 Harry Harootunian poses a similar question in his article, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *boundary 2* 32.2 (Summer 2005): 25-32. The spatial turn in the humanities, he argues, has in many respects short-circuited the social and historical analysis of time and "encouraged strategies that have ultimately privileged space at the expense of effacing precisely those different temporalities produced by capitalism's capacity for serializing and segmenting a cumulative temporal process defined by its irreversibility" (25-6). In her "Afterword" to Levander and Levine's *Hemispheric American Studies*, Susan Gilman voices a similar anxiety, noting that the comparative framework "has a [long] history as a mode of analysis that favors the nation as both the object and the frame of study itself – an exclusive focus apparent in the longstanding tradition of 'two-country' pairings." Indeed, she argues, to the degree that a term like "hemispheric" can reorganize our categories, it can do so only if it is conceived as a "spatiotemporal unit" that does not "assume a geographical unity of study that privileges space at the expense of time" (329-30). Xiomara Santamarina also provides a provocative commentary on the theoretical risks of comparative spatial frameworks vis-à-vis the politics of time in"Are we there Yet?: Archives, History, and Specificity in African-American Literary Studies," *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 304-16 (see especially 308-11).

16 Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (January-February 2000): 54-68.

in the syntax of texts, and in the arrangement of poems; in diction, textual revisions, and in the patterns of rhyme and meter?

These queries about time and form help generate – and, in turn, are addressed by – the critical method developed in these chapters. This method is, first and foremost, *immanent*. I proceed from – and more importantly, within – these three writers' politico-literary careers and poems, and thereby eschew a more symptomatic approach that would either read these texts as outgrowths of their subtexts or figure the latter as the principal analytical object. My conjecture is that it is only from this inside position that one can understand the inner, wayward diachrony of these writers' thought – that is, the manner in which their political investments and aesthetic practices twist, and shift, and reconstitute themselves over time. Focusing on the nuances of texts and the on complexities of forms, this method hinges on close reading, but this should not be viewed as a retreat from the political and the historical concerns that have dominated critical interest in recent decades. On the contrary, this dissertation considers an array of political events and processes – including the anti-slavery debates about the Constitution in the 1850s; the revolutions of 1848, and subsequent political counter-revolutions of the early-1850s; the rise of transatlantic communism; the fate of Black Reconstruction; the development of the American labor movement in the 1870s and 80s; and the myriad effects of the Civil War – but refracts these considerations through a close attention to literary form. It is in form's aesthetic space, I contend, that prevailing structures of temporal feeling are most radically divulged, recombined, and reconsidered. Although these assorted historical subtexts get taken up in the content of Whitman's, Melville's, and Douglass's texts, it is in the latter's formal unfoldings – in their structural organizations and realignments – that these extra-textual and "extraterritorial" phenomena are most rigorously scrutinized and assessed.

The problem of thinking beyond the nation's self-generated categories is thus, to my mind, an immanent problem of literary form.[17] The latter, these chapters demonstrate, is the very obverse of an empty medium or mere structural envelope. In Whitman's, Melville's, and Douglass's writing, we discover that, contrary to what Frederic Jameson's argues in *The Political Unconscious*, form is not an "ideology" but a transformative agent in its own right, a catalyst of imaginary change that impinges upon historical consciousness and even reconstitutes ideology. In poems like *Clarel* and "By Blue

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17 In this regard, my understanding of form is quite close to Theodor Adorno's reading of form as a negating "countermovement" in *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York: Continuum, 2004). Form, he writes, is a "posited unity" that "constantly suspends itself as such" – that is, "it interrupts itself through its other just as the essence of its coherence is that it does not cohere [. . .] Form is the law of the transfiguration of the existing, counter to which it presents freedom. Form secularizes the theological model of the world as an image made in God's likeness, though not as an act of creation but as the objectification of the human comportment that imitates creation; not creation *ex nihilio* but creation out of the created" (189). This conception of form as something that is at once irrepressibly dynamic (constantly transfiguring the "merely existing") and utterly negative (a "counter" against the empirical world) can help us disentangle some of the ways in which these authors think and feel beyond the nation precisely through the formal labors of their composition. Yet because form carves a space unto itself, it, too, must be approached immanently – or, as Cesare Casarino puts it, through a "philopoesis" that "does not repeat the text by revealing the secret truth that the text itself somehow refuses to speak, [. . .or] question the text in hope of extracting a confession," but, instead, "unfolds alongside the text rather than in its wake," accompanying "the text in its path and shar[ing] its fate" (*Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002], xxviii). In *Wayward Poets*, this shared fate is the author's career, inevitably cut short by time, and the long development of aesthetic forms which, as Adorno words it, "converge with critique."

Ontario's Shore," and in Douglass's remarkable revisions of Byron and Shelley, we find that form is not a reactive enclosure in which, as Jameson words it, "social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms" are either repressed, displaced, or resolved, but a dynamic and often unsettled aesthetic medium that reroutes perceptions and transfigures the empirical world (76). This insistence on form's rebarbativeness and semi-autonomy might appropriately be termed "post-symptomatic," since it entails something like a transfer of critical agency from from the analyst to the artist, a redistribution of reflective powers which acknowledges that the writer as much as the critic can both access and question the social contradictions that shape history.[18]

This post-symptomatic approach opens up spaces that are simultaneously local and translocal. In these chapters we will look at formal acts ranging from punctuation to rhyme schemes, metric alterations, and the repositioning – and rewriting – of poems, but in so doing we will also look at many divergent times and locales. From the American Revolution and the American Civil War, we will proceed to Greece in the 1820s, and the Paris Commune of 1871; to peasant rebellions in medieval France, and political coups in ancient Rome; to labor strikes in postwar West Virginia, Chicago, and New York City; and to the accumulated millennia of events in the Holy Land. Across these oceans and epochs, and from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to Douglass's political speeches and poems, we discover that the nation's most basic temporal ideologies – its varied, "exceptionalist self-imaginings" – are constitutively and unavoidably bound up with questions of aesthetic representation and poetic configuration. In fact, paying close attention to form's chronopolitical charges will allow us to reenvision literature's relation to the nation by enabling us recognize and rethink those ideologies of time that buttress the state and enable its expansion.

This latter point is crucial. A progressive conception of historical movement – according to which time is constant, unilinear, and infinitely fillable – has been, and in many respects continues to be, an indispensable condition of national formation and development. It is this immutable, forward-oriented temporality that renders the modern-nation state psychically inhabitable by fostering a shared sense of history and synchronized experience. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes this temporal dispensation as fundamental to the rise of modern nationality. "What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time," Anderson writes, "is an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."[19] Anderson's contention, which he famously illustrates through the examples of the newspaper and the novel, is that the nation's psychic coherence – its very imaginability, so to speak – depends, quite fundamentally, on its displacement of premodern temporalities with a modern experience of time as something that is fixed, singular, and quantifiable. The nation, consequently, is as much a temporal formation as a geographical and institutional edifice, and its development hinges on its capacity to envelop and codify the people's historical consciousness.

Anderson's account of national formation nicely delineates the state's dominant temporal order, but it neglects to acknowledge the extent to which time continues to proliferate, even multiply, in the

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18 On "post-symptomatic" criticism, see the special issue of *Representations* (Fall 2009) on "How We Read Now," ed. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. My methodology is particularly close to what Best and Marcus describe as "surface reading," which, rather than attempting to divulge a text's repressed truth, locates freedom in a sustained "immersion" and thereby emphasizes that which is "evident, perceptible, [and] apprehensible" in the artwork itself (16, 9).

19 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2002), 24-5. Ed White provides a nuanced reading of Anderson's account of national formation and its limited applicability to American history in "Early American Nations as Imagined Communities," *American Quarterly* 56.1 (2004): 49-81.

era of the modern nation. Capitalism and the nation-state certainly homogenize and centralize temporal experience, but they do so by integrating rather than simply erasing the times of pre- and non-capitalist life. A similar point is made by Nicos Poulantzas in *State, Power, Socialism*, in which he argues that although the modern nation produces "a segmented, serial, equally divided, cumulative and irreversible time that is oriented towards [. . .] expanded reproduction and capital accumulation," this prevailing temporality does not fully absorb or circumscribe people's experiences. This nation-time's very segmentation and seriality, he points out, in fact raises "the fresh problem of unification and universalization: how to master time by means of a single, homogeneous measure, which only reduces the multiple temporalities (workers' time and bourgeois time, the time of the economic, the social, and the political) by encoding the distances between them." And this is precisely where the state comes into play: it harmonizes these assorted and expanding times; it "marks out the particular temporalities as differential temporalities – that is to say, as rhythmical and material variations of a serial, segmented, irreversible and cumulative time," and it does so, by and large, by constructing collective memories and stories that render the nation both felt and imaginable. Constituting the people by representing their "historical orientation," the state organizes "the forward course of the nation and thus tends to monopolize the national tradition by making it the moment of a becoming designated by itself, and by storing up the memory of the people-nation [. . .] The State establishes the modern nation by eliminating other national pasts and turning them into variations of its own history." This self-generation is not only a matter of "inventing a tradition," as Eric Hobsbawm famously puts it, but also, and primarily, of *coordinating* the different times and velocities that mark the daily lives of the nation's subjects.[20]

This massive, integrating process is all too frequently forgotten when literary critics praise time's multiplicity. Time is indeed plural, variegated, irregular, and replete with potentiality. But these qualities of time are also the very preconditions of capitalist accumulation and national development. As Harry Harootunian writes, one of the most troubling "paradoxes of both temporal and spatial matrices under capitalism seems to be the persistent segmentation and proliferation of multiple spaces and temporalities that, through the mediation of state and nation, manage to homogenize and even universalize their apparent dissociations" (45). When critics turn to literature as an archive of alternative, non-standard temporalities, these hidden integrations must be kept in mind. The dependence of the state and of capital on divergent times does not negate the potential significance of such temporalities, but it does force us to recognize, against the grain of much prevailing criticism, that these heterogeneous time frames are also enmeshed in invisible relations of force and violence.

This recognition must be the starting point rather than the conclusion of literary analyses of time and its varieties. Indeed, literature, I would conjecture, is all the more important not despite *but because of* this collusion between time, capitalism, and the nation. Since it is nimbler than other kinds of discourse, literature is able to cut across and between these heterogeneous temporalities in powerful and often unexpected ways, chiefly through the agency of form. Rooted in a certain aesthetic

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20 The state accomplishes this feat, Poulantzas argues, by establishing a "peculiar relationship between history and territory, between the spatial and the temporal matrix. In fact, the modern nation makes possible the intersection of these matrices and thus serves as their point of conjunction; the capitalist State marks out the frontiers when it constitutes what is within (the people-nation) by homogenizing the before and the after of the content of this enclosure. National unity [. . .] thereby becomes historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history – in short, a territorial national tradition concretized in the nation-State; the markings of a territory become indicators of history that are written into the State." *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 2000), 110, 113, 114; Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 1-14.

separateness, a generative space apart, literature modifies our experiences, memories, and sensations, and thereby enables us to recircuit time's combinations. If, in order to move past the state we must also go through it, literary form thus provides us with a rather unique position from which this rethinking can be accomplished, because it carves out a space for undetermined and untimely reflections.

This latter aspect of form – its temporal dislocation, its inborn out-of-jointness – is especially important. The untimely is that which allows one to be behind, ahead, or outside of history's compulsions. It is the standpoint of the out-of-sync and the unaligned, a wayward position that both allows for and derives from the autonomous act of creation. It is, as Cesare Casarino aptly puts it, "the temporal register of that which is nonsynchronous with its own history, of that which at once is in history and yet can never completely belong to it: the untimely is the unhistorical time of potentiality" (xl).[21] And this, we will find, is one of the primary reasons why form demands renewed attention: it enables one to at once time the nation (by registering its temporal ideologies and coordinated velocities) and *un*time it. This untiming will cohere differently in the coming chapters: it will manifest in the insistent returns of *Drum-Taps*, in the refractive historical patterns of *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel*, and in the reinvented lines of Douglass's quoted poems. These remarkable temporalities sometimes reinforce the nation's imagined synchrony. But they also provide – frequently through the wayward, "unhistorical time" of their form – ways of remembering and anticipating that suspend, and even momentarily destroy, the timescape of America's uneven modernity.

WHITMAN, MELVILLE, AND DOUGLASS ACROSS TIME

This mixing of the timely with the untimely is the subject of this dissertation's initial two chapters, which examine how temporality acquires political meaning and formal significance in *Leaves of Grass*. My subject here is Whitman's massive project of poetic revision, his nearly four decades of composition, amendment, deletion, rewriting, and rearrangement. Comparing Whitman's poems and clusters across time (from 1855 to 1892), I argue that *Leaves* is structured through a decisive chronopolitical shift, a transformation of its historical vision and formal arrangement that originates in his experience of the Civil War. Prior to what Whitman called "America's real parturition years (more than 1776-'83)," *Leaves of Grass* is the chant of a regenerative present.[22] From the embrace of national synchrony in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" to the fantasies of rebirth bodied forth in *Children of Adam*,

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21 The term "untimely" originates with Nietzsche, for whom it designates a philosophical position outside of history and its eternal returns, a way of slipping beyond the strictures of historical consciousness in order to act "counter to our time and thereby [. . .] on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come." "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 57-124 (the quote is from 60). The idea of the untimely receives its most rigorous philosophical explication from Ernst Bloch (in "Non-synchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics" [1932], *New German Critique* 11 [Spring 1977]: 22-38), who defines it as a form of *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitgen*, or "contemporary non-contemporaneousness," which entails an uneven and productive tension between the present of historical movement and the felt relations of alternative solidarities and affiliations. On the untimely as a mode of politics, see also Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), 113-134.

22 Whitman, "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of American, 1996), 666.

Whitman's antebellum "yawp" fuses everything that is separate and disparate through a poetics of resurgent simultaneity and radical – indeed, almost bodily – immediacy (*LG,* I: 82). Something happens to this early chronopolitics, however, and the story of its afterlife is largely untold. Whitman's wartime experiences and his study of idealist dialectics lead him to reconstruct *Leaves of Grass* almost in its entirety. His postwar poems evince a decidedly different chronopolitics, one grounded less in synchrony-across-time and more in teleological fruition. Chapter one focuses on the nature and context of this shift; it examines the connections between Whitman's sense of history and emergent notions of "progress" in the postbellum North. I consider how Whitman's transition from a poet of the conjuncture to an oracle of the imminent rearticulates, and subtly revises, a broader change in liberalism in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, wherein political interest moves away from artisans and individuals and towards collectivities and processes. His poetics, we will see, corporealizes this burgeoning liberalism's evolutionary sense of time.

Yet – and this is where the difference of a post-symptomatic method comes into play – my argument about Whitman only *begins* with this ideological reading. Chapter two looks at the gaps in Whitman's chronopolitics and the fractures within his own reconstructive project during the birth of the modern labor movement. I turn to the fluctuating structures of *Leaves of Grass* and find that, on a formal level, this futural turn in Whitman's thought has two principal effects: first, it tends to shift the syntax away from catalogs of the present and towards apostrophes of the imminent; and, second, it leads to a method of poetic arrangement that integrates the sequencing of poems into a Hegelian sense of historical time. These structural changes, however, also thwart the ideological impulses behind Whitman's reorganization by forging temporal connections and visions of social solidarity that elude, undermine, or otherwise surpass the very modes of historical consciousness generated by postwar liberalism. Time thereby emerges in Whitman's reconstructed volumes, particularly in clusters like *Drum-Taps* and *Songs of Insurrection*, as something that swerves, and contracts, and intensifies in ways that are far too volatile – and far too wayward – to be incorporated into any philosophy of history, even Whitman's own.

From *Leaves*' chants of the emergent, I move to a poetics of repetition in chapters three and four. Melville's two principal books of verse, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* and *Clarel*, are the subject of *Wayward Poets*' mid-section, which considers how the Civil War and its aftermath influence Melville's politics, historical understanding, and sense of artistic vocation. In chapter three, I contend that through the war Melville comes to perceive history as an agent of destructive repetition, and that this revised understanding of time plays a pivotal role in his turn to poetry. To reconstruct the war in all of its fracturedness, *Battle-Pieces* develops a distinct poetics of history, one that attempts to represent time's aprogressive resurgence by conjoining the Civil War to an extended series of upheavals, from the bloody coups of ancient Rome to the peasant rebellions of medieval France. America's descent into "Nature's dark side" – as he puts it in the poem "Misgivings (1860)" – is thus framed by Melville as a problem, first and foremost, of historical perception and experience (*BP,* 13). In this book of verse replete with damaged rhymes, broken meters, and twisted syntax – lines and patterns that resemble their very subjects – the war's temporal significance also becomes a matter of intense formal interest. Over the course of *Battle-Pieces*, the mechanics of rhyme and meter come to carry the weight of the war as a chronopolitical event. What Melville creates in *Battle-Pieces*, through this fusion of politics and aesthetics, is in fact nothing less than a novel lyric form, one that does not give voice to a single, unfettered subjectivity but articulates subjective experience from a plurality of contrasting viewpoints; and the strange capaciousness of this altered lyric has everything to do with its rearrangements of historical time.

My revisionary account of Melville's embrace of verse – according to which his poetic turn constitutes not a reaction against publicity but a politico-artistic response to the temporal upheaval of

the war – is extended in chapter four, which looks at his subsequent "kraken" of a book, *Clarel*.[23] Melville based this 18,000-line, poetic epic in part on his own 1856-7 trip to the Holy Land, during which he sought but failed to secure some divine revelation. *Clarel*'s plot revolves around the circular pilgrimage of a motley group of wanderers who travel from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and then back, but its subject – what it is actually "about" – is far broader. This colossal poem, which has too often been ignored or slighted by critics, poses innumerable questions about modernity's attributes, origins, and futures, reflecting at different turns on the nature of political reform and revolution, historical change, faith and belief, communism, capitalism, secularism, and knowledge itself. *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel*, I posit, comprise a distinct poetic diptych: the latter rearticulates all of the earlier volume's anxieties about art, time, violence, and epistemological uncertainty in a different – and more theological – key, while *Battle-Pieces* reveals *Clarel*'s historical and philosophical conditions of possibility, the set of events and circumstances that provide its political reflections and formal structures with meaning. This second part of Melville's diptych, we will find, extends his poetics of history through its formal convolutions: *Clarel* ties the legacies of the Civil War and Reconstruction to time's deepest and most aprogressive patterns through its own poetic structures. The unnerving rhymes, punctuations, and meters of Melville's poem are in fact what enable him to offer in this staggering book – the issue of a decade of literary labor – numerous, untimely reflections on everything from the death of God to the birth of the proletariat, and from the autonomous time-space of the poem's wayward form.

From Melville's epic poem, we move to a political verse that emerges in a very different, and decidedly more sporadic, manner. The dissertation's two concluding chapters discuss Douglass's revisionary poems and the broader political aesthetics with which they are bound up. Chapter five foregrounds this reframing of Douglass as a political poet by examining the structural makeup of his speeches, wherein most of his verse arises. Douglass's lectures and orations, I argue, constitute a distinct politico-literary form: his acts of public thought develop not as discrete responses to assorted events but as related iterations, or grouped articulations, in a manner redolent of *Leaves of Grass*. Douglass's speeches cluster around distinct sets of related events: his meditations on issues ranging from American slavery and the Fourth of July to the Civil War and the European revolutions of 1848 create their own patterns of temporal connection and, collectively, develop an aesthetic of nonlinear historical movement that divorces listeners and readers from official modes of remembrance.

It is in these reconstructed pockets, or breaks, of historical time that Douglass's poetry erupts, often through quoted – and then strategically revised – lines of verse. These altered poetic invocations are the subject of chapter six. Focusing on his invocations of British verse and on his original poems, I find that poetry frequently interrupts his speeches and autobiographies not to provide some supplemental rhetorical register but, rather, to promote an aesthetic experience in which history itself is momentarily arrested. From his repeated use of Byron's *The Giaour* (1838) in his Civil War speeches to his enlistment of William Cowper's *The Task* (1784) to describe slave song in his autobiographies, Douglass invokes verse to activate a unique mode of experience vital to fashioning counter-publics against slavery. Striving to destroy the world's antinomies, verse, for Douglass, is the vehicle through which memory is most radically re-formed and through which transnational spaces of political experience are most fully opened up.

Throughout these chapters, *Wayward Poets* offers an account of how Americans' temporal experiences were reorganized in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. It is an account not of inevitable

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23 "Leviathan," Melville wrote to Hawthorne in 1851, "is not the biggest fish – I have heard of Krakens." My argument is that for Melville in the wake of the Civil War, *Clarel* becomes this other, elusive "fish." Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 1851, in *Correspondence*, Vol. 14 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), 213.

modernization, wherein antebellum variety ostensibly gives birth to postbellum order, but, instead, of a developing set of tensions between experience and expectation which structure modernization's ideologies. *Wayward Poets* however is also, indeed primarily, about what these three writers *do* – sometimes unknowingly, and sometimes quite willfully – with these powerful, evolving combinations of temporal feeling. Through their poetics, Whitman, Melville, and Douglass each construct a variety of ways to think and feel one's way into as well as outside of these chronopolitical tensions. In the futural excesses of Whitman's *Centennial Songs*, in the uncompleted cycles of *Clarel*, and in the untimely emancipations of memory opened up by Douglass's poems we discover temporal sequences that alternatively inhabit and elude the ideologies of time that buttress political and economic development. Whether they are attempting to unite the globe in an adhesive, erotic union or weave the United States into vast cycles of historical repetition, these writers foster aesthetic experiences that take up the potent ideologies of modernization, and then – in different texts and in different ways – arrest, break apart, and reimagine them.

Because of this dual focus on these poets' labors and the nation's mergers of temporal experience, the Civil War is an overarching focus of these chapters. This "Verteber of Poetry and Art [. . .] for all future America," as Whitman called it, has somewhat faded as a subject of literary-critical inquiry in recent years, due in large part to scholars' attempts to decenter the war as the defining event of the period. Coinciding with the transnational turn within American Studies, critics have argued that granting the Civil War a primary focus not only risks reproducing the nation's self-made, progressive mythos but also reinforces the exceptionalist idea of a single historical and geographical "center" for the nineteenth century.[24] While this refusal to view the war as either the crowning event or the birth-moment of American political modernity admirably corrects for earlier, nationalist readings of the conflict, it is necessary to balance our political and methodological self-distancing from the war with a nuanced acknowledgment of the war's real historical effects. As Paul Giles notes, scholars continue to return to the Civil War not simply because of its centrality to nationalist mythology but because, "despite all of the internecine regional and racial conflicts it highlighted, the outcome of the war also facilitated the emergence of the United States as the world's leading economic power in the second half

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24 Whitman, *Memoranda During the War & Death of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962), 4. This turn away from the war is also due to the fact that, as Deak Nabers notes, Americanists have tended to accept Daniel Aaron's assertion that the war was overwhelmingly "unwritten." Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973); Nabers, *Victory of Law: The Fourteenth Amendment, the Civil War, and American Literature, 1852-1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006), 15. Edmund Wilson, for instance, declares in his seminal study *Patriotic Gore* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994) that the "period of the Civil War was not at all a favorable one for poetry. An immense amount of verse was written in connection with the war itself, but today it makes barren reading" (466). The war's only real contribution to American literary history, Wilson argues, is its incepting of realism in the following years, which moved writers away from the "clogged and viscous prose" of the antebellum period and towards a more streamlined narration in which the "plethora of words is reduced; the pace becomes firmer and quicker; [and] the language becomes more [. . .] 'efficient' [. . .and] 'functional'" (636, 638). This reading of the war and its literature has remained largely intact. In *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), David E. Shi reinforces Wilson's claim by framing the war as the birth-moment of America's intellectual modernity (in which a "mania for facts" and historical linearity takes hold). And in *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), Louis Menand provides a more philosophically inflected variant of the same position, contending that the war's greatest legacy is the pragmatist thought that its violence made possible.

of the nineteenth century"; indeed, it was only through the war that "the country began to take the continental shape that we know today [. . . as] America was metamorphosed from a series of local economies into an imposing continental edifice." Scholars such as Amy Kaplan, José Saldivar, and Shelley Streeby have disclosed how this metamorphosis from nation to empire involved the violent opening up of space; but this massive territorial expansion also depended on modes of temporal experience and historical imagining that were made possible by the war and its unprecedented destruction.[25]

In *Wayward Poets*, I approach the war primarily as an event of forced cognitive remapping. This bloody "Verteber" dissolved the bonds between remembrance and expectancy, ripped apart people's sense of historical connection, and disabled many of the cosmographies that had hitherto dominated throughout the states. The war thus interests me not as the cardinal moment in a progressive chronology but as an event that radically reorganized Americans' temporal consciousness. The struggle, in all of its strange and violent variety, had a profound influence on Whitman, Melville, and Douglass: everything from its decades-long lead up and its startling inception with John Brown's raid to its staggering coordination, implementations of modern technology, and revolutionary effects in law, politics, and theology shaped their writing for the rest of their lives. In this dissertation, these three authors will accordingly be described – to borrow a phrase from the anthropologist Talal Asad – as "conscripts" of the war.[26] The conflict lingers in their texts long after the physical battles had ceased – returning continuously in texts such as "Proud Music of the Storm," *Clarel*, and Douglass's Decoration Day lectures – because this founding event was as much *constitutive* as destructive: it established an irrevocable set of cognitive and institutional conditions, and forged novel combinations of experience and expectation, which set the terms for these writers' subsequent artistic labors and political meditations. For these authors, the overwhelming destabilization of the war and the reintegration of national experience that followed it made timing and untiming conjoined aesthetic actions. Their repeated efforts to fuse temporality to the political and to locate formal spaces of artistic autonomy are, inexorably, bound up with the war and its meanings. We might therefore say, following Marx, that these conscripted bards labor in historical conjunctures not of their choosing but also make the most of their situatedness. They each find ways, through their wayward art, to test the limits and even surpass the set of historical conditions ostensibly fixed forever by the nation's bloodiest conflict – and this, ultimately, is the story told in these pages: a story about three writers who, in writing the war, also write far beyond it.

As this story unfolds, *Wayward Poets* gives an alternative account of these authors' intellectual, literary, and political affiliations. One of my principal arguments is that these writers' standard literary relationships need to be rethought. We will find that the links between Melville's and Douglass's poetry are in certain respects just as significant as Melville's affiliations with the Young America group; that

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25 Paul Giles, "The Deterritorialization of American Literature," in *Shades of the Planet*, ed. Buell and Dimock, 44. The scholarship I have in mind on the spatial and cultural formation of an American empire in the nineteenth century includes Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002); José David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 36-56; and Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002).

26 Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization," in *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond*, Vol. 1: Civilization in Crisis, ed. Christine Gailey (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1992), 333-51. My framing of the Civil War here is also informed by David Scott's reading of Asad and C.L.R. James in *The Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).

Whitman's Reconstruction-era poems and revisions are legible only when read through and against *Clarel*; and that there was an alternative tradition of vernacular poetics that developed alongside Whitman's, an African American verse which similarly insisted that "the poetic quality is not marshaled in [. . .] uniformity," but tested this idea in a subaltern key.[27] In the connections across these literary texts we will thus find a poetic triptych, not only because the politico-aesthetic commitments and endeavors of these three authors are most illuminated when they are read together, but also because their poems reveal one another's otherwise opaque elisions and assumptions. What makes this three-part relation, and what makes it *work*, is their common approach to form. This dissertation brings Whitman, Melville, and Douglass together, ultimately, in order to reveal a shared formal project, insofar as each of these writers manipulates poetic structures to reimagine the shape and propensities of historical time. For these wayward poets, verse is a powerful – and a powerfully malleable – mode of experience, a dynamic force whose inner breaks disrupt the fictions of continuity wrought by modernization.

The formal and chronopolitical relations that open up through this triptych are significant in a literary-critical sense, but they are also important – I want to venture, in closing – politically. By the end of these writers' lives in the 1890s, and certainly by the time we reread them now, the volatile visions hatched in their poems – the lively time-sequences that incessantly double back, or bound forward, or arrive from some sublime future – came to seem outdated or fantastical. This, in part, is simply the general fate of poetry. Verse gestures towards the impossible. It attempts to rescue that which is fleeting, or forgotten, or caught insolubly between the real and the ideal. It is, in this sense, a language that inaugurates its own supersession. Derrida hinted at this destined failure, or obsolescence, when he defined poetry as a form of "testimony" or "witnessing": verse is a recording, an artistic register, for that which would otherwise fade away; and it is always at a remove, never fully consumed by its subject.[28] Nonetheless, the supplanting or erasure of poetry for Whitman, Melville, and Douglass was also a very specific and concerted event. These poets witnessed – and created a poetic art about and alongside – the burgeoning of national and capitalist development, as Americans' temporal experiences were increasingly coordinated in a way that evacuated the past of substance and the future of revolutionary possibility. From the vantage point of this later temporality, the time frames that materialize in many of these texts seem to be either antiquated or moribund. In retrieving these three authors' temporal poetics we are thus, on one level, retrieving an assortment of dead times. But these same temporalities are also irrepressibly dynamic. Animated by memories, desires, and expectations that cannot be entirely integrated or controlled, they jut up against the very ideologies of time generated by modernization, and, in their formal and aesthetic convolutions, create experiences and reflections which today, in the tragic wake of "development," are all the more necessary to reclaim.

Keeping in mind this pairing of the living with the dead, let us turn to these wayward poets, beginning with that most loquacious singer of history's "subtle electric fire": Walt Whitman.

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27 Whitman, "Preface" (1855), *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Justin Kaplan, 11.

28 Jacques Derrida, "'A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text': Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," trans. Rachel Bowlby, in *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 180-207.

CHAPTER ONE

"Sweeping the Present": Liberalism and the Chronopolitics of *Leaves of Grass*

> Endless unfolding of words of ages!
> And mine a word of the modern . . . a word en masse.
>
> A word of the faith that never balks,
> One time as good as another time . . . . here or
> henceforward it is all the same to me.

This dissertation begins with a curious instance of capitalization. In the passage above, from what came to be called "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman, singing a "new chant of dilation" in 1855, proclaims his openness to time's variety. By 1881, however, Whitman – a chronic editor – had rewritten this passage, refiguring time as singular and resigning himself to its laws:

> Endless unfolding of words of ages!
> And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.
>
> A word of the faith that never balks,
> Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time
> absolutely.
> (*LG*, I: 30)

From many times, each as good as the other, each as important, to a singular "Time": the change, seemingly trivial, in fact alters the meaning of the passage. The later, streamlined version is not only more confident (Whitman's stance in 1855 is more tentative; those ubiquitous ellipses are capable of tempering even the most extravagant of claims) – it is also more consistent. One cannot be, at one and the same time, a partisan of "the modern, the word En-Masse" and an indifferent recorder of time's multiplicity. The very idea of the modern is predicated on the notion of an epochal break, and Whitman, positioning himself as a unique chronometer ("I am the clock myself"), sings the praises of this rupture (*LG*, I: 52). The latter promises, for Whitman, the death of "the gorgeous-composite feudal world" and all its social codes. It promises – and these revised lines contain a hint of this promise – "Unionism," democracy, and the "gravitation-hold of liberalism" ("Democratic Vistas," *PP*, 975). "I accept Time absolutely": I accept the modern; I accept history's linear movement; I accept the merge and all that comes with it.

This shift from times to "Time," from histories to History, is hardly anomalous. It is, I will argue, part of a much broader transformation within Whitman's thought and poetic practice which goes to the very heart of his politics. Throughout his career Whitman was fascinated with temporality and, especially, with the philosophy of history. Following the "shock electric" of the Civil War he studied Hegelian dialectics, philosophical idealism, Darwinian evolution, and the writings of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Whitman abjured a poetics of crisis in favor of a poetics of the future and its "unloos'd dreams"; he incorporated the insights of evolutionary theory regarding change and mutability ("Urging slowly, surely forward, forming endless") into that most mutable (and mutated) of books, *Leaves of Grass*; and, perhaps most importantly, Whitman crafted – and tried to represent through his poetry – a theory of "Universal Time" as unilinear, bound up with the state, and driven inexorably by the raw force of democracy's progress (*LG*, II: 453; III: 750).

These changes in Whitman's political and poetic thought, however, have by and large been construed by literary critics as elements or epiphenomena of his artistic decline. If there is a narrative that unites the criticism, of whatever stripe, on Walt Whitman it is a narrative of declension regarding the trajectory and power of his work. As the following chapters will show, this is part of a pattern in Americanist literary criticism, which has to a large extent been unable to account for those authors identified with the American Renaissance as writers who continued to create, rethink, and revise not only through but also long after the Civil War. Scholars have offered numerous variations on the same story – a story that climaxes, for Whitman, in the 1850s and closes in the 1870s and 80s, when despite his growing fame the "Old Gray Poet" ostensibly reaches the point of creative exhaustion. In the era of New Criticism, the tragic emplotment of Whitman's career was almost exclusively aesthetic in focus: Whitman after the war was a weakened poet, compelled to expand a poetic project that had already reached its zenith.[29] Now, in the era of postnationalist American Studies, the content of the narrative changes but the tragic form remains: the trajectory of Whitman's career is still marked by decline but this decline is understood politically. In this narrative, Whitman's political thought degenerates rather than develops: it abandons its early radicalism after the 1840s (Jerome Loving), or after 1856 (Peter J. Bellis), or after the Civil War (M. Jimmie Killingsworth); it becomes increasingly split between nostalgia and a doomed impulse for prophecy (Ed Folsom); it becomes increasingly conventional, and begins to approach Thomas Carlyle's anti-democratic conservatism (David Reynolds); or, with the massive changes wrought by postbellum capitalist accumulation and industrialization, it stagnates, retreats, and becomes evermore predicated on absence and loss (M. Wynn Thomas, Betsy Erkkila). Kenneth Cmiel's summary of Whitman's political maturation is fairly typical in this regard. "Whitman's political ideas," he writes, "can be traced from a rather standard artisanal position in the 1840s, to the rather stunning mix of liberalism and democracy evident in *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855, and to an increasingly stale and out-of-touch version of that same position in the early 1870s."[30]

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29 See, for example, Newton Arvin, *Whitman* (New York: Macmillan, 1938); Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961); Arthur Golden, "Passage to Less Than India: Structure and Meaning in Whitman's 'Passage to India,'" *PMLA* 88 (October 1973): 1095-1103; and Richard Chase, *Walt Whitman Reconsidered* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1955).

30 Jerome Loving, "The Political Roots of *Leaves of Grass*," in *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, ed. David Reynolds (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 97-120; Peter J. Bellis, *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2003), 102-120; M. Jimmie Killingsworth, *Whitman's Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989), 155-174; Ed Folsom, "Lucifer and Ethiopia: Whitman, Race, and Poetics before the Civil War and After," in *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, ed. Reynolds, 45-95; David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Random House, 1995), 448-590; M. Wynn Thomas, *The Lunar Light of Whitman's Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 252-282; Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 240-292; and Kenneth Cmiel, "Whitman the Democrat," in *A Historical Guide*, 205-234. There are certainly exceptions – and powerful ones at that – to this declension reading. See, for instance, Luke Mancuso, *The Strange Sad War Revolving: Walt Whitman, Reconstruction, and the Emergence of Black Citizenship*, 1865-1876 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), and James Perrin Warren, "Reading Whitman's Postwar Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Ezra Greenspan (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 45-65. Whitman, Warren argues, moves from a revolutionary "poetics of discontinuity" before the war to an "evolutionary style" by the 1870s. While I concur with Warren that evolutionary principles tend to structure Whitman's postbellum *Leaves*, this shift is not simply – or at least not only

I suggest we rethink the narratological frame given to Whitman's career by rejecting the idea both of Whitman's progressive withering and of his progressive growth. The story of *Leaves of Grass* is not a linear one. Whitman's poetic art does not materialize out of the aftermath of the American 1848 only to suddenly flourish and then, even more suddenly, abate. Nor does it develop evenly and continuously during his literary career, advancing by way of unswerving innovation and insight. *Leaves of Grass* is instead a multivalent record. It is a book that expands, alters, and reorganizes itself according to Whitman's shifting political and artistic focuses, registering numerous retreats and compromises as well as sublime artistic entanglements and militant political commitments. It is an unwieldy collection of verse, a wayward volume whose form and politics are not simply marked by but utterly propelled through mutation, substitution, and revision. And what binds these fluid political and artistic modifications, which cohere over the course of decades, are the book's entanglements with time. Indeed, my argument in these initial two chapters is that Whitman's engagements with questions of temporality and historical change provide something like a structural axis around which his poetic and political thought revolve. From his 1855 depiction of the poet as a historical medium capable of resurrecting the dead and placing "himself where the future becomes present" to his 1888 vision of the rise, "inevitable in time," of "towering roofs" and "solid-planted spires tall shooting to the stars," temporality in Whitman's poetry consistently functions as a crucial vehicle for his political desires, anxieties, and expectations (1855 "Preface," 13; *LG*, III: 719). This first chapter looks at how this nexus for Whitman's thought can help us rethink the contours of his poetic project. In the following pages, I argue that the definitive features of Whitman's liberalism – its electric makeup, its racial principles, and its extraction of consent and consolidation from heterogeneity and antagonism – are most rigorously elucidated in his meditations on and representations of historical time. Moving from early poems like "Song of Myself" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" to later works such as "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" and *Democratic Vistas*, I will posit that Whitman's developing temporal entanglements are in fact fundamental to his liberal politics, and to the developing senses of race, nation, and empire with which they are bound up.

Propelled by Reconstruction and its aftermath, Whitman reconstructed his own project and his poetic persona: he went from being a poet of the conjuncture to an oracle of the imminent. In so doing he transformed *Leaves of Grass* – editing and reediting it for almost four decades – from a vast song of the American present and its historical roots into a chant of liberty's global future. What I hope to disclose in this chapter is the thoroughly chronopolitical nature of Whitman's thought – in other words, the deep structural contiguity between time and politics in his wayward poetics. For Whitman, history and democratic ideology continuously constitute and re-constitute one another: politics is history made flesh, just as time is politics' historical abstraction. And it is only by grasping this dynamic fusion of time with the political in Whitman's project – a fusion that bonds history to the body – that we can begin, at least, to challenge the narrative we have inherited about Whitman's decline and forge in its place another story-form, one that refuses, in equal parts, the empty alternatives of loss and triumph and accounts instead for history's force and the critical power of literary form.

In the following pages, I frame Whitman's thought as a dynamic set of politico-literary investments that evolve, overlap, and at times even contradict one another. In this initial chapter, focusing on the development of Whitman's politics of time, I maintain that *Leaves*' poetic refashioning takes shape as a turn away from the early verse's "now-time" in favor of a teleological "not-yet," and that this shift is in certain respects best understood as having to do with modifications within liberalism more generally. Whitman's gradual displacement of *Leaves*' unbounded *Jetztzeit* with Hegelian

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– "stylistic." The difference of these postwar editions is both a symptom of and a complex response to chronopolitical changes within Whitman's thought, and within American liberal ideology more generally.

anticipation powerfully rearticulates a restructuring of American liberalism in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, as it transitioned from an artisan-individualist ideology to a more market- and mass-oriented form. Releasing itself from its atomized antebellum political subject (the resplendent, monad-like citizen), this burgeoning liberalism, springing from the movement of industrial accumulation, latched onto mass political subjectivities and buttressed teleological conceptions of history in the postwar North.[31] The drama of *Leaves of Grass* after the Civil War, to my mind, thus inheres in how this ideological event impacts *Leaves*' temporal constitution, and in how the latter, in turn, fills out this ideology with an imagined "weight and form and location" (*LG,* I: 104).

In the coming pages we will find that if, as José Martí once claimed, Whitman's poetry is "an index finger," temporality is the index of that index.32 Manifesting in *Leaves of Grass* as both subject and formal principle, as a topic for the democratic prophet and as the mode of his projection, time gauges the revisions that Whitman makes to his political thought. However, this account of how time concretizes the axioms that guide Whitman's ante- and postbellum liberalisms is also the preface to a longer narrative. This chapter proceeds, by and large, by way of symptomatic reading in order to discern how Whitman's chronopolitical modifications to *Leaves of Grass* speak to and about the development of liberalism in the nineteenth century. But symptomatology can only tell part of this story. Chapter two will examine the relationship between Whitman's evolving combinations of political ideas and his postwar methods of formal rearrangement. I contend that Whitman's structural changes and reconstellations promote senses of historical time and political memory which also *escape* the very ideologies that inform his revisionary method. If, as I argue in this initial chapter, Whitman's futural turn is in certain respects a compensatory gesture – an ideological reaction, more specifically, to a certain compression of historical consciousness generated by the rise of post-mercantilist capitalism – it is also at the same time a somewhat unruly, even emancipatory, re-creation of America's temporal world. In and through its teleological restructuring, *Leaves of Grass* also fashions pasts and futures that enable the present to be remade. Releasing memories that continuously return, visions of the

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31 On the realignment of liberal ideology following the Civil War, see especially Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 86-140. Cohen demonstrates that, after the Civil War, modern liberalism renounced "the moral economy of producerism, which valued economic independence above all and held that democracy would fail without a foundation in an economically independent citizenry" (87). With the rise of corporate capitalism, liberal reformers established a set of precepts and ethics that were increasingly amenable to the consolidating tendencies of corporate capitalism and the pressures and impulses of economic liberalism. Other illuminating commentaries on the history of American liberalism in this period include: Arthur Riss, *Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007); Gillis Harp, *Positivist Republic: Auguste Comte and the Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1920* (Univ. Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995); and Kathleen G. Donohue, *Freedom from Want: American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 8-40. My theoretical understanding of liberalism as a political ideology owes much to the scholarship of Wendy Brown, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Saidiya Hartman, and Norberto Bobbio. See Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997); Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 115-63; and Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Verso, 1990).

32 José Martí, "The Poet Walt Whitman," *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin, 2002), 193.

imminent that radically question the status quo, and modes of historical belonging that eclipse the prevailing dimunitions of temporal experience, *Leaves* is ultimately an index with a difference, a 'symptom' which, through its wayward art, succeeds in reflecting on and even surpassing its own situatedness.

But to get to this other side of Whitman's chronopolitics, we must first go through it. We begin, then, at the beginning, with *Leaves*' prewar editions.

"WHAT IS THEN BETWEEN US?": PREWAR TIMES AND BODIES

Before his shift toward a futural poetics, Whitman's is fundamentally a chant of the present. In each of the antebellum editions of *Leaves of Grass* (1855, 1856, and 1860), what possesses the most determining force is not technology, or governments, or the arc of historical development but animate individuals and the past events, both great and small, that have molded them. The very idea of temporal measurement, Whitman writes in the 1855 preface, is fallacious since "all that has at any time been well suggested out of the divine heart of man or by the divinity of his mouth or by the shaping of his great hands" persists without limit. Life is saturated with innumerable prior causes, and the ideal poet – at once necromancer and seer, declaring to the past "Rise and walk before me that I may realize you" and descrying the future-made-present – is singularly capable, Whitman insists, of taking the pulse of the present.

From 1855 to 1860, the future figures into Whitman's politico-poetic vision chiefly as an elusive horizon of transformation, and far more importance is placed on a present charged with social crisis. In "Song of Myself," the heterogeneous inclusions and unexpected juxtapositions are structured through synchronic arrest. Whitman's suicides and hounded slaves, his mechanics, swimmers, lovers, and sailors – each of them alive, yet mute ("I act as the tongue of you" [*LG*, I: 77]) – are brought into relation with one another, and rendered nearly interchangeable, through a shared *now*. The assorted "Voices of the interminable generations of slaves" and "of the diseased and despairing" are not simply channeled through Whitman's barbaric yawp but realized through and made comprehensible by a collective *Jetztzeit*.[33] "There was never any more inception than there is now, / Nor any more youth or age than there is now," because this "now" is a plenum, resembling what Edmund Husserl calls a "'thickened' present," shot through with many times and histories.[34] Full and vibrant and dynamic, it, as much as the twirl of Whitman's tongue, encompasses "worlds and volumes of worlds" (*LG*, I: 32-34). If, as Donald Pease claims, "Song of Myself" produces something like an "intersubjectivity," a "subjectivity reducible to neither self nor other" but instead "a consciousness of the never-ending

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33 Literally "now-time" in German, *Jetztzeit* is, according to Walter Benjamin, the opposite of historicism's "homogeneous, empty time." See his late essay, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938-1940, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 389-400. My use of the term is somewhat different: I am claiming that this imagined now-time provided the conceptual foundations of Whitman's antebellum chronopolitics. As I argue in this chapter's concluding subsection, only with the restructured tension between experience and expectation occasioned by the end of the Civil War did the present begin to be experienced as an instance of unprecedented and accelerated departure.

34 Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. John Barnett Brough, ed. Rudolf Bernet, Vol. 4 of *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 37.

collocation between self and other," it does so only by bringing its diverse elements together under the rubric of this now-time. The present is an elastic force, assimilating the unassimilated, uniting the diverse, and enfolding the self (thereby rendering it paradoxically autonomous) by filling it up with that which is external to it.[35]

This fixation on the present and all it contains runs like a red thread through almost all of Whitman's antebellum poetry. From his erotic inquiries into the nature of liberty in *Children of Adam* and *Calamus* to his paeans to modern simultaneity in "Salut au Monde!" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman consistently echoes the idea, first articulated in "Who Learns My Lesson Complete," that temporal measurement cannot quantify life's vitality and diversity:

> I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman,
> Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man or
> woman,
> Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me or any
> one else. (*LG*, I: 153)

What Whitman is stating here, and in his prewar poetry more generally, is not simply that life constitutes its own infinity (i.e., eternity manifests in individual bodies, acts, and thoughts) but that there is a single, vast *now* that stretches backwards and forward in time indefinitely, through which "past and present and future are not disjoined but joined" (1855 "Preface," 13). Whether this now is construed as the ecstatic moments of amativeness, each making "ages and ages" return "at intervals," or as the transcendent affect of adhesiveness, which makes the "continent indissoluble," it always possesses the ability to harmonize antagonisms and translate cacophony into melody (*LG*, II: 362, 375). In the nineteenth poem of *Chants Democratic* (1860), this extensive, integrative present time illumines history's movement:

> I was looking a long while for the history of the
> past for myself, and for these Chants – and now
> I have found it,
> It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them
> I neither accept nor reject,)
> It is no more in the legends than in all else,
> It is in the present – it is in this earth to-day,
> It is in Democracy – in this America – the old world
> also,
> It is the life of one man or one woman to-day, the
> average man of to-day;
> It is languages, social customs, literatures, arts,
> It is the broad show of artificial things, ships, ma-
> chinery, politics, creeds, modern improvements,
> and the interchanges of nations,
> All for the average man of today. (*LG*, II: 315)

Weighing the world outside of his window with the records and "fables" passed down from previous generations, Whitman declares that history's truth is located not in the past but in the living "present,"

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35 Donald Pease, "Walt Whitman's Revisionary Democracy," *Columbia History of American Poetry*, ed. Jay Parini (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 148-171.

with all its innumerable actions and modern institutions. This gesture speaks to Whitman's tendency, rigorously delineated by Tenny Nathanson, to renounce textual distance in favor of an imagined corporeal immediacy (in this case, the empty "legends" of prior epochs give way to active human bodies and innovations), but it is also exemplary of how Whitman, throughout *Leaves*' first three editions, invests a capacious, differentiated *now* with unparalleled, and almost unbounded, power and significance.[36]

Whitman's militant commitment to the present and the motley "act-poems" it contains is, of course, neither self-generated nor free-floating. M. Wynn Thomas has convincingly argued that, on one level, Whitman's refusal of time's measurability mounts a kind of ontological challenge to the temporal strictures of industrial capitalism. Whitman, Thomas writes, "is supremely Lawrence's poet of 'the quivering nimble hour of the present,' reveling 'in the sheer appreciation of the instant moment, life surging itself into utterance at its very well-head.' He is addicted to the present tense and the present participle, and his descriptions of people always catch them in the very act of living." Writing in the wake of the early- to mid-century market revolution in the United States, which provided the financial and cultural bases for capital's industrialization, Whitman figured time as free and erotic and immeasurable precisely when it was becoming increasingly instrumentalized.[37] Unbound and vibrant, time in Whitman's prewar poetry fills with joy the body that capitalism has frozen. Far from being a quantifiable substance – a soulless index of profit and productivity – time for Whitman is orgasmic. Instead of advancing, it bursts; instead of proceeding, it explodes. Electric and ample, time throbs in unison with bodies, beating in rhythm with arms at work – on the docks, in shops, and in ships. A "subtle electric fire," it pulsates, flowing with and from limbs and hearts and torsos and tongues intertwined. "With each instant the world is created anew in its totality, in a movement of dilation," and this perpetual remaking, working against the temporality of capitalist production, is at once macro- and micro-political, manifesting in legislatures as well as in beds, in bills and speeches as well as in the body's gifts.[38]

Whitman politico-erotic attachment to synchronic multiplicity climaxes in the *Calamus* and *Children of Adam* poems. Added to *Leaves* in 1860, these clusters identify the fullness of the present with the experiences of desire, bodily attachment, and imagined intimacy. Fascinated with the affective and erotic dimensions of liberal freedom, poems such as "Native Moments," "Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand," and "Not Heaving from my Ribb'd Breast Only" are, as critics have pointed out, at once Whitman's most private and his most public poems.[39] In "Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals," Whitman construes history as but the repetition of a plenipotent experience of the now:

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36 Tenney Nathanson, *Whitman's Presence: Body, Voice, and Writing in Leaves of Grass* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1992), 1-2, 7.

37 M. Wynn Thomas, *The Lunar Light*, 56-8, 66; D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beale (London: Heinemann, 1961), 86-7. On the market revolution, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, ed., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1996).

38 Antonio Negri, "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo," in *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003), 185.

39 I am indebted here to Betsey Erkkila's insightful essay, "Public Love: Whitman and Political Theory," in *Whitman East & West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed. Folsom (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2002), 115-44.

> Ages and ages returning at intervals,
> Undestroy'd, wandering immortal,
> Lusty, phallic, with the potent original loins, perfectly sweet,
> I, chanter of Adamic songs,
> Through the new garden the West, the great cities calling,
> Deliriate, thus prelude what is generated, offering these, offering myself,
> Bathing myself, bathing my songs in Sex,
> Offspring of my loins. (*LG*, II: 362)

History is not a succession but a perpetual return: it is the cyclical, incessant, "Deliriate" act of "Sex." Whitman also tries to arrest the reproductive moment and explore its varieties and potentials in "O Hymen! O Hymenee!" ("O why sting me for a swift moment only? / Why can you not continue?"), "One Hour to Madness and Joy" ("To escape utterly from others' anchors and holds! / To drive free! to love free!"), and *Calamus* 43:

> O you whom I often and silently come where you are that I may be with you,
> As I walk by your side or sit near, or remain in the same room with you,
> Little you know the subtle electric fire that for your sake is playing
> within me. (*LG*, II: 406)

This "subtle electric fire" is a longing and attachment that bears directly on the temporality of democratic citizenship. As Whitman later wrote, "the special meaning of the 'Calamus' cluster of 'Leaves of Grass' [. . .] mainly resides in its political significance. In my opinion, it is by a fervent, accepted development of comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man, latent in all the young fellows, north and south, east and west [. . .] that the United States [. . .] are to be most effectually welded together, intercalated, anneal'd into a living union" (*PP*, 1035). If for Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin, generations prior, democracy inhered in the abstract exercise of reason, for Whitman it is something radically different: an affective arrangement, or social relation, that finds its paradigmatic embodiment not in the brain but in desire's ejaculatory temporalities and manifestations.

Time's infinite explosions, however, never engender chaos in Whitman's prewar poetry. The heterogeneous is consistently coordinated, and the multiplicity of animate bodies always becomes, somehow, a single Body. The collective now-time, expanding apparently without restriction, reorders the diffuse by "transpos[ing]," as Wai Chee Dimock aptly phrases it, "seriality into simultaneity."[40] A bard of crisis, Whitman stages through his poetic representations of time a fantasy of union. In its antebellum editions, *Leaves of Grass* is loaded with countless visions of organic simultaneity, as Whitman attempts to find or formulate, in the words of Allen Grossman, "the conjunctive term between [. . .] general and particular, many and one – the hand in hand of union mediated only by the consciousness of continuous vitality."41 The United States, Whitman realized, was in the throes of disunion and entangled in events that were at once specific to yet larger than the world's "greatest poem." (1855 "Preface," 5). "The times are full of great portents," he wrote in 1856, since "[f]reedom

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40 Wai Chee Dimock, "Whitman, Syntax, and Political Theory," in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, ed. Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 73.

41 Allen Grossman, "The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln: An Inquiry toward the Relationship of Art and Policy," in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 201.

against slavery is not issuing here alone, but is issuing everywhere":

> The horizon rises, it divides I perceive, for a more august drama than any of the past [. . . The] [l]andmarks of masters, slaves, kings, aristocracies, are moth-eaten, and the peoples of the earth are planting new vast landmarks for themselves [. . .] What whispers are these running through the eastern continents, and crossing the Atlantic and Pacific? What historic denouements are these we are approaching? On all sides tyrants tremble, crowns are unsteady, the human race restive, on the watch for some better era, some divine war. (*PP*, 1348-9)

That "divine war" was just on the horizon. But before it came, and before that "better era" of "Union" and "compacted imperial ensemble" arrived, Whitman had to correct, in his poetry and political thought, for the raw facts of antagonism (*PP*, 1074). He did so, I am arguing, chiefly through his representations of time. If, as Peter Osborne argues, politics is essentially the struggle over diverging "experience[s] of time," it is possible to view Whitman's visions of multiple, overlapping histories and a transcendent now-time as generating a kind of poetic compensation for the deep conflicts that marked late antebellum culture (200). Arising in the midst of volatile social unrest and the fracturing of the American state, Whitman's times – each of them grand and ample and semi-autonomous – are predicated on, and libidinally invested in, a merger that, as war approached, was decidedly more imagined than real.

Promising unity through difference and merger through simultaneity, this temporal framework is crucial to "Song of Myself." Critics of the poem have tended to focus on the significance of change and transformation in the text. Max Cavitch draws attention to the poem's "universal temporality of becoming, in which death amounts to nothing," while Michael Moon highlight's the text's radical, erotic fluidity, and its dependence on seemingly limitless exchanges and substitutions. In a similar vein, Ed Folsom has noted how Whitman's restless poetic self constantly enfolds its opposite and shifts between varying positions in order to develop "that impossible representative American voice – the *fully* representative voice."[42] While this transformative movement certainly propels much of the poem, Whitman's inaugural chant is also replete with moments of *suspension*. "Song of Myself's" peculiar dynamism, I would argue, is due to its exuberant oscillation between cycles of renewal and instances of poetic arrest. The poem sustains a split temporal structure, such that the regenerative side of Whitman's vision, which figures birth and death as incessant and irrepressible, constantly encounters – and tries to envelop – moments in which the world is halted in synchrony. These arrests make possible the "Song's" ubiquitous lists and catalogs, like this juxtaposition of scenes near the poem's outset:

> The little one sleeps in its cradle,
> I lift the gauze and look a long time [. . .]
>
> The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom.
> It is so . . . . I witnessed the corpse . . . . there the pistol had fallen.
>
> The blab of the pave . . . . the tires of carts and sluff of bootsoles and talk of the promenaders,

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42 Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), 244; Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in* Leaves of Grass (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), 38-49, 86-7, 159-62; and Ed Folsom, "Lucifer and Ethiopia," 50.

> The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
> The carnival of sleighs, the clinking and shouted jokes and pelts of snowballs;
> The hurrahs for popular favorites . . . . the fury of roused mobs, [. . .]
> What living and buried speech is always vibrating here . . . . what howls restrained by decorum,
> Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
> I mind them or the resonance of them . . . . I come again and again. (*LG*, I: 9-10)

In the space of just three stanzas, we encounter a sleeping baby, a suicide, a bustling street, a driver, horses, sleighs, snowballs, a winter scene, urban gatherings, angry mobs, police arrests, and sexual propositions. What renders the diverse elements of this vision interchangeable is an underlying temporal structure: like its numerous counterparts, this catalog is captured through Whitman's singular poetic gaze, which stops the world in an almost sexual act of poetic witnessing ("I come again and again"). This gaze may very well, as David Simpson contends, reproduce the logic of the commodity-form by juxtaposing unlike things and imparting to them a false equivalence – but these lists are hardly autonomous.[43] Particularly in "Song of Myself," Whitman's catalogs are encircled by declarations of rebirth that emphasize the importance of natural cycles and reinscribe the poem's temporality with unsuspended regeneration. Another way of putting this claim is that the now-time I have been describing in this section is both synchronic and diachronic: it manifests horizontally by stretching across a single present moment (chiefly in Whitman's lists), and also extends backwards and forwards by filling out the past and the future with a vision of renewal.

In "Song of Myself," this other, diachronic side of Whitman's *now* emerges most powerfully in his turns to nature, sex, and death. This second temporal movement in the poem enables Whitman to proclaim that he has already "died [. . .] ten thousand times before" and dub the king of terrors nothing but "good manure." And it allows him to depict history as a cyclical eternity:

> Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
> It is not chaos or death . . . . it is form and union and plan . . . . it is eternal life . . . . it is happiness [. . .]
> All is a procession,
> The universe is a procession with measured and beautiful motion.
> (*LG*, I: 81)

For Whitman, this "measured and beautiful motion" is the rhythm of nature itself, which unfolds by way of countless resurrections. Rendering time full yet homogeneous, this inborn "form and union and plan" frames Whitman's description of fallen mariners midway through the poem:

> Distant and dead resuscitate,
> They show as the dial or move as the hands of me . . . . and I am the clock myself.
> I am the old artillerist, and tell of some fort's bombardment . . . . and am there again.
> (*LG*, I: 58)

Whitman's spectacularly capacious and regenerative poetic vision here "resuscitates" the dead by

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43 David Simpson, "Destiny Made Manifest: The Styles of Whitman's Poetry," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 177-195.

constructing another chronometer for the world in Whitman's own body and vision ("and I am the clock myself"). In the span of a decade, this gesture became crucial to Whitman's writing of *Drum-Taps*, but it is structurally and politically significant for "Song of Myself" as well. Critics such as Peter Coviello, Kerry Larson, Ivy G. Wilson, Mitchell Meltzer, and Charles Altieri have disclosed the importance of the poem's construction of a syncretic poetic self and the ways in which it models the very political harmony that Whitman desired for the U.S. and for the whole "bulge of the earth" (*LG*, I: 162). This self, I am arguing, is a decidedly *temporal* construction: its formation hinges not only on Whitman's varied poetic locutions but on the poem's split temporal structure, which shuttles between arrest and rebirth in order to merge them – over and over again – through Whitman's singularly mixed voice.[44]

Whitman's synchronic and diachronic constructions of this now-time impact not only how we should read *Leaves*' antebellum poems but also, more generally, how we should understand his attempts to think through the idea of the "nation." *Leaves*' plural histories, arrests, and renewals, each of them harmonized through a *Jetztzeit* that extends through everything, promote a sense of collective temporal feeling and historical belonging precisely when this subjective unity was manifestly absent. If nationality, as Benedict Anderson asserts, is premised upon a shared experience of transverse simultaneity, Whitman's flexible now-time effectively imparts a felt, nationalized temporality that in many respects did not exist outside the pages of *Leaves of Grass*. Partly for this reason, Wai Chee Dimock terms Whitman's vision of time "prenational," since it forges a model of imagined national temporal feeling prior to that feeling's real historical emergence. Emerging in the midst of antagonism, as the United States' "alternative Americas" (as Anne Norton puts it) threatened to rip the country in two, Whitman's expansive present brings the past and the future together and thereby creates a vision of perfected simultaneity capable of mitigating the dangers of non-synchronous experience.[45]

Leaves therefore offers a promise of national simultaneity in the absence of its concrete reality. The substance of this promise is perhaps nowhere more evident than in that song of accomplished synchronism, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (or the "Sun-Down Poem," as Whitman initially titled it in 1856). Following the "Poem of You, Whoever You Are," in which Whitman laments once again his distance from his readers ("I fear [these] realities are to melt under your / feet and hands [. . .] Whoever you are now, now I place my hand upon you, / that you be my poem" [*LG*, I: 214]), "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is a chant fashioned from – and, in a sense, dedicated to – the nation's collective now-time. Whitman's poetic speaker meditates on the shores of the East River and comes to associate the ebb and tide of the water, as well as the rise and fall of the sun, with the generational cycles of America's past, present, and future. In coming years, Whitman declares,

> Others will enter the gates of the ferry, and cross

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44 The scholarship I am thinking of here includes: Peter Coviello, *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), 127-156; Kerry C. Larson, *Whitman's Drama of Consensus* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988); Ivy G. Wilson, "Organic Compacts, Form, and the Cultural Logic of Cohesion; or, Whitman Re-Bound," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 54.1-4 (2009): 199-216; Mitchell Meltzer, *Secular Revelations: The Constitution of the United States and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 111-24; and Charles Altieri, "Spectacular Antispectacle: Ecstasy and Nationality in Whitman and his Heirs," *American Literary History* 11.1 (Spring 1999): 34-62.

45 Wai Chee Dimock, "Epic and Lyric: The Aegean, the Nile, and Whitman," in *Walt Whitman, Where the Future Becomes Present*, ed. David Haven Blake and Michael Robertson (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2008), 21; Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986).

from shore to shore,
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north
and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,
Others will see the islands large and small,
Fifty years hence others will see them as they
cross, the sun half an hour high,
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred
years hence, others will see them,
Will enjoy the sun-set, the pouring in of the flood-
tide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-
tide.
(*LG*, I: 218)

These unborn "Others" are not truly separated from the present, since Whitman occupies the same time and space and thereby spans these diverse epochs:

Closer yet I approach you,
What thought you have of me, I had as much of
you – I said in my stores in advance,
I considered long and seriously of you before you
were born. [. . .]
Who knows but I am as good as looking at you
now, for all you cannot see me?

Whitman seems to resolve the quandary of transhistorical connection by projecting a kind of immediate corporeal attachment ("Closer yet I approach you," he insists, even across all these years). The poem's fantasy of intergenerational fusion, however, is not simply a matter of Whitman's textual presence. Instead, a distinct temporal consciousness fills out "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and makes possible these surprising proximities:

It is not you alone, nor I alone,
Not a few races, not a few generations, not a few
centuries,
It is that each came, or comes, or shall come,
from its due emission, without fail, either
now, or then, or henceforth.

Everything indicates – the smallest does,
and the largest does,
A necessary film envelops all, and envelops the
soul for a proper time
(*LG*, I: 222)

This "film" encasing "all" is an apt figure for Whitman's antebellum philosophy of time, according to which the world's varied histories continuously overlap and temporality itself is only a boundless, harmonizing *now*. Whitman pushes himself almost bodily into the still-to-come so that tomorrow's readers can "look at" him, while the specificity of these very readers fades under the dispensation of

this universal "film." If *Leaves* more broadly tends to construct an "intimate nationality" out of the pairing of anonymity with attachment, this is an especially intense and important moment for this paradoxical linking.

In the "Sun-Down Poem"/"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," this time frame of an almost unlimited present enables Whitman to not only introduce his unborn readers to the dead but also insert his own poetic persona far into the future. In so doing, he renders the future almost indistinguishable from the past that it follows:

> The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours
> of the day,
> The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated,
> Every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
> The similitudes of the past and those of the future,
> The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and
> Hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over
> the river,
> The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far
> away,
> The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and
> them,
> the certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.
> [. . .]
> What is it then between us?
> What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years
> Between us?
>
> Whatever it is, it avails not
> (*LG*, I: 217-18, 220)

The American present and the American future are not simply linked but, in fact, utterly transposable, since a shared now-time encompasses the whole of the nation's histories. Glories are "strung like beads," punctuating present and future alike, but this is not the rosary of Walter Benjamin's historian. The latter permits "the consequences of eventualities to run through the fingers" and establishes "a causal nexus of the various moments of history," whereas Whitman frames the future as but the present remade ("On the Concept of History," 397).[46] Historical moments for Whitman are not separate

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46 Benjamin was himself a reader of Whitman and, in his essay "Central Park," juxtaposes Baudelaire's deciphering of the city and antipathy toward capitalist progress with Whitman's inimitable – and, for Benjamin, confusing – poetic project. "That Baudelaire was hostile to progress," he writes, "was the indispensable condition for his ability to master Paris in his verse. Compared to his poetry of the big city, later work of this type is marked by weakness, not least where it sees the city as the throne of progress. But: Walt Whitman??" At the heart of Benjamin's puzzlement, it seems, is the difficulty of reconciling Whitman's valorization of progress with his uncanny ability to decode urban life. He is not quite able to grasp that Whitman's project is, on certain levels, strikingly similar to Baudelaire's, insofar as they both take as their subject an emergent modernity. The Joshua-like desire that Benjamin accords to Baudelaire in *The Arcades Project* is just as if not more accurate as a description of Whitman: "To interrupt the course of the world – that was Baudelaire's deepest intention. The intention of Joshua [. . .] From this intention sprang his violence, his impatience, and

constellations; they are not points strung together without touching. Epochs and ages intermingle instead of proceeding; amalgamate instead of advancing. For the Whitman before the break, the Whitman still unbaptized by the blood of the Civil War (and his was, indeed, a baptism-through-trauma, a rebirth through wounding and the witnessing of wounding), the future is no rupture or transition. Instead, it is but the present's afterlife – today's weightless echo.

"LAW OF THYSELF COMPLETE": HEGEL, WHITMAN, AND DEMOCRACY'S DIALECTICS

But the future came to reassert itself, with all the force of a bullet, in Whitman's thought after the Civil War. The war transformed Whitman from a bard of crisis into a prophet of the future, restructuring his politico-poetic thought to such a degree that, later in life, he nearly disavowed his antebellum productions altogether. "I went down to the war fields in Virginia (end of 1862), lived thenceforward in camp," Whitman recalled in 1892, and "partook of all the fluctuations, gloom, despair, hopes again arous'd, courage evoked – death readily risk'd – the cause, too – along and filling those agonistic and lurid following years, 1863-'64-'65 – the real parturition years (more than 1776-'83) of this henceforth homogeneous Union." Without these years and these experiences, he added, "'Leaves of Grass' would not now be existing" ("Backward Glance," 666). *Leaves* had of course already gone through three different editions prior to the war, but the "red war" unsettled Whitman with the power of an earthquake. It spawned new ideological fissures and political fault lines. It effectively shifted his interests, anxieties, and desires, redirecting them from singular bodies onto masses, technology, and "progress." It forced him not only to rethink liberty in world-historical instead of national terms but also to consider liberty as the basis for a future empire. And it prompted Whitman to look to the sciences and philosophy in order to reinterpret history as a singular unity, one powered by the explosive energies of white democracy and structured dialectically. The war shook the very ground underneath Whitman's feet; and it is this earthquake's aftermath, its reconstitution of Whitman's thought after the dust had settled, that interests me.

After dressing wounds and writing the war's book ("my book and the war are one" [*LG*, III: 628]), Whitman metamorphosed into a bard of the imminent: a singer of railroads and world-democracy, of telegraphs, capital's empire, and racial evolution. Whitman's poetic project becomes a project of ensoulment: after the war, his self-described "orbic" task is to invest a vacant industrial order with spirit and realign it with its immaterial, driving forces. When he composes a poem to American unionism in 1872 ("Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood"), he accordingly sings in the conditional, addressing his chant to a people not yet born and a state still unrealized. But whereas in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the future is practically indistinguishable from the present, here it is the issue of a rather profound historical rupture. "For thee, the future," Whitman writes, "the peerless grandeur of the modern" will bear its face:

> Equable, natural, mystical Union thou, (the mortal with
> immortal blent,)
> Shalt soar toward the fulfillment of the future, the spirit of

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his anger; from it, too, sprang the ever-renewed attempts to cut the world to the heart [or sing it to sleep]. In this intention he provided death with an accompaniment: his encouragement of its work." *Selected Writings*, 4: 185; *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 318.

the body and the mind,
The soul, its destinies.

The soul, its destinies, the real real,
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;)
In thee America, the soul, its destinies,
Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!
By many a throe of heat and cold convulsed, (by these
thyself solidifying,)
Thou mental, moral orb – thou New, indeed new, Spiritual
world!
The Present holds thee not – for such vast growth as thine,
For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,
The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.
(*LG*, III: 638, 641)

No longer a version of the present merely repeated, the future becomes for Whitman the exclusive space of liberated experience. The present is incessantly constructed through a not-yet since the coming global "Union," which will endow each soul with its destiny and reality with its kernel ("the real real"), is still on the horizon. This horizon, however, is fast receding. A worldwide spiritual adhesiveness (the subjective complement to capitalist accumulation), whose charge is the translation of multiplicity into unity, is unleashing itself. And the direction and purpose of this new spiritual union of the future – "solidifying" all attachments after its emergence and yielding its own "brood" – are already determined: led by the American state, the future extends itself across oceans and borders, propelled by the irrepressible enlargement of democratic liberty. The genesis of American empire is thus imagined by Whitman to be as much temporal as spatial, manifesting as a rupture in time itself.

Following the Civil War, Whitman endows history with a telos. Whereas the ideal poet in 1855 is the strange offspring of the necromancer and the oracle, after "the real parturition years" he is the lovechild of the prophet and the dialectician. In his antebellum thought Whitman certainly posits a content to history's development (one having to do with the collusion of eternity with the body), but the *shape* of history is still indistinct: without an arc, it is both formless and aimless. Yet following the "shock electric" of the Union's struggle, he comes to understand time as possessing a reason and an object. Inspired by the Lamarckian schema of biological adaptation and aroused by Hegel's dialectical conception of history, he reconfigures his politics and his poetics along new temporal lines.[47] After

47 Whitman's knowledge of Hegel likely came from three different sources: (1) Hedge's anthology, which contained a translation of Hegel's Introduction to *The Philosophy of History* and a very brief excerpt from his *Aesthetics*; (2) Joseph Gostwick's *Outlines of German Literature* (Philadelphia: 1854), which provided a broad outline of Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history and theory of freedom; and (3) personal conversations with Hegelians such as Amos Bronson Alcott and W. T. Harris, the editor of *Speculative Philosophy* (a journal of idealist philosophy published between 1867 to 1893). On Whitman's reading of Hegel, also see Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 448-484; Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 248-267; Robert P. Falk, "Walt Whitman and German Thought," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40 (July 1941): 315-30; Paschal Reeves, "The Silhouette of the State in *Democratic Vistas* – Hegelian or Whitmanian?" *Personsalist* 43 (Summer 1962): 374-82; and Kathryne V. Lindberg, "Whitman's 'Convertible Terms': America, Self, Ideology," in *Theorizing American Literature: Hegel, the Sign, and History*, ed. Bainard Cowan and Joseph G. Kronick (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1991), 233-68.

1865, *Leaves of Grass* is less concerned with synchronic arrest. Devoted more to passages than pasts, more to trains and telegraphs than artisans, it becomes a book that privileges diachrony over synchrony and becoming over being. After the war's quake, the locomotive in winter, that "fierce-throated beauty" heralding the "type of the modern," reaps the power previously employed only by antebellum liberalism's plenipotent and atomized subject:

> Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy
> swinging lamps at night,
> Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an
> earth-quake, rousing all,
> Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,
> (No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)
> Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
> Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
> To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.
> (*LG*, III: 667)

There is nonetheless cogency in this "lawlessness music." The train's anarchic "shriek" blends harmoniously with the prairies and lakes over which it sounds because, Whitman writes, it enthrones the "type of the modern": it is the fated issue of history, of democracy, and of nature itself. Whitman's own "barbaric yawp" – at once rough and eloquent, transparent and "untranslatable" – finds its postwar double here in the locomotive's "madly-whistled laughter," born in the flames of an American factory.

Remade through slaughter, *Leaves of Grass* is generatively restructured through a new understanding of the arc of historical development. And the latter's form is decidedly Hegelian. Indeed, during the period of Reconstruction Hegel exercised an especially strong influence on Whitman, prompting him to reclaim the state as the vital mediator between democracy and liberalism and to rethink history as a collective unity.[48] In his favorite philosophy anthology, Frederic H. Hedge's *Prose Writers of Germany* (1848), Whitman read and was galvanized by Hegel's introduction to *The Philosophy of History*. Not without reason did Whitman declare in his notebooks that "only Hegel is fit for America – is large enough and free enough."[49] Whitman was likely drawn to Hegel's theory of freedom, according to which the state is coterminous with liberty (i.e., right does not precede

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48 Whitman's postwar attempt to retrieve the state as a positive and necessary force likely issued from a growing anxiety about the potential incompatibility of liberal political theory with the practice of democratic governance. This deep-seeded disparity between a commitment to communal liberty and to individual rights is, of course, to a large degree structurally latent within liberal ideology itself. As Norberto Bobbio puts it: "Liberalism highlights the individual's capacity for self-creation, his ability to develop his own faculties and to progress intellectually and morally in conditions of maximum freedom from all externally and coercively imposed constraints; democracy holds in highest regard the individual's capacity to overcome isolation by tyrannical common power. Of the two aspects of individuality, liberalism is concerned with that which is inward-looking, democracy with that which is outward-looking. Two different potential individuals are in question: the individual as microcosm or totality complete in itself, and the individual as particle (or atom) which is indivisible, but which may be combined and recombined with other similar particles in various ways, giving rise to an artificial (and thus always fissionable) unity" (43). After the war, Whitman begins to imagine this "artificial unity" as inseparable from the modern state.

49 Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings*, ed. Richard Maurice Bucke, et al. (New York: Putnam, 1902), Vol. IX, 170.

government but is realized through it); to Hegel's notion of history as a evolving totality made up of interlinking elements, fragments, and events; and to Hegel's reconceptualization of the nation-state as an ethical whole (i.e., an immanent spiritual community) rather than the expression of a general will. What became especially vital to Whitman's thought, however, was Hegel's dialectical theory of historical development. As Hegel writes in Hedge's translation,

> From the consideration of the history of the world itself, we shall come to the result, that [. . .] it has been the rational and necessary course of the spirit which moves in the world, – a spirit whose nature does indeed ever remain one and the same[. . .] [W]e may say that the history of the world is the exhibition of the process by which spirit comes to the consciousness of that which it really is, – of the significancy of its own nature. And as the seed contains in itself the whole nature of the tree, even to the taste and form of the fruit, so do the first traces of spirit virtually contain the whole of history. (450-1)

Whitman's appropriation of Hegel's philosophy of history, however, was precisely that: a making-use-of, or rewriting, of idealist dialectics. For Whitman, Democracy, not *Geist*, is that which "contains in itself the whole nature of the tree, even to the taste and form of the fruit," and shapes time's arc. The seed – a figure for latency – thus comes to occupy the place of simultaneity in Whitman's postwar poetry, and the result is a decidedly more imperialist faith in American hegemony – that future "empire of empires," as he worded it in *Democratic Vistas*, that promised the culmination of "time itself" (*PP*, 1014).

Whitman's postbellum vision of the future is therefore perhaps best grasped as arboreal rather than corporeal. This shift is not only vaguely Deleuzean but also decidedly queer, since, in reconceptualizing social relations as rhizomatic, it reframes reproduction in terms of horizontal bonds instead of linear descent. Whitman's homoerotic poetics can thereby be understood as extending well beyond the antebellum editions of *Leaves of Grass* and the *Calamus* poems, upon which Whitman's critics have – understandably – focused almost all of their attention in terms of gender. In fact, Whitman's postwar poetry records a rather spectacular displacement of sexual desire from male comrades onto American modernity's elements and implements. In "To a Locomotive in Winter," which we just examined, the train's music not only rumbles "like an / earth-quake" but also "rous[es]" all who hear it: the locomotive's smooth, cylindrical shape and rough "trills" invite the same kind of attention Whitman formerly paid to the bodies of antebellum artisans. Likewise, in "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," Whitman can only celebrate the future's "permanent life" by corporealizing – and eroticizing – his relationship with it:

> I feel thy ominous greatness [. . .]
> I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present, transcending the past,
> I see thy light lighting, and thy shadow shadowing, [. . . but]
> I but thee name, thee prophesy, as now,
> I merely thee ejaculate!
> (*LG*, III: 638)

The future is not simply a novel epoch "ablaze, swift-moving, fructifying all"; it is also a kind of body – at once palpable and moving – that solicits Whitman's gaze. Reconstituting and rerouting the earlier investments of Whitman's poetry, the future, after the war, increasingly becomes *the* horizon of politico-erotic experience.

When critics have noted this intimacy, or willed affiliation, between Hegel and Whitman they have tended to construe it as a kind of compensation for Whitman's artistic failures. According to

David Reynolds, Hegelianism provided Whitman with “philosophical consolation” when his own, native political aesthetics diminished. “With his poetic 'I' no longer able to absorb and recycle massive amounts of cultural material,” Reynolds writes, “he looked to outside systems such as Hegelian philosophy to resolve problems he had formerly tried to resolve in his poetry” (449-50). Katheryne V. Lindberg, in the most rigorous study of Whitman's Hegelianism to date, maintains that Hegel's status in Whitman's writing is “that of a philosophical endorsement or legitimation of the poet's own ideas about self, history, and democracy.” For Whitman, in other words, Hegel only “gave a name to the tendencies and ideas that one might have recognized as Hegelian anyway; [and to] certain words, including *spirit*, *self*, and *history*, [that] already bore Hegel's signature.” Both of these readings admirably refuse the perspective of American Studies' first generations, which described Whitman's poetry as somehow naturally inimical to Hegelianism, yet they neglect to account for the full, *generative* influence that Hegel – or, more accurately, that Whitman's wayward *reading* of Hegel – exerted on *Leaves of Grass*' politics and form (234-5). Whitman's engagement with Hegel as a theorist of democracy and its historical dialectics was crucial not only to the restructuring of his own chronopolitics but also – as we will see in the next chapter – to his reshaping and rewriting of *Leaves* in the postbellum decades.

For Whitman, the Hegelian schema of temporal progression offered a way to reimagine history as a series of qualitative transitions. After the war, *Leaves* is consequently far less concerned with time's plurality, regenerative cycles, and temporary arrests. Now fixated on all things still-to-come, Whitman’s poetry tends to figure the past as a more or less harmonious unfolding, as in the 1871 poem “To Thee Old Cause”:

> To thee old cause!
> Thou peerless, passionate, good cause,
> Thou stern, remorseless, sweet idea,
> Deathless throughout the ages, races, lands,
> After a strange sad war, great war for thee,
> (I think all war through time was really fought, and ever will
> be really fought, for thee,)
> These chants for thee, the eternal march of thee.
>
> (A war O soldiers not for itself alone,
> Far, far more stood silently waiting behind, now to advance
> in this book.)
>
> Thou orb of many orbs!
> Thou seething principle! Thou well-kept, latent germ! Thou
> centre!
> (*LG*, III: 628)

Past events, Whitman contends, are neither chaotic nor loosely connected but profoundly interwoven: history’s moments comprise so many instances of democracy’s gradual blossoming (a “stern, remorseless, sweet idea” incessantly advancing). The Civil War, according to this poem, was itself a kind of blood sacrifice, a ritualistic offering en masse for liberty’s “eternal march” forward; and this underlying Democratic Spirit, time’s “seething principle,” functions as the animating “centre” of historical movement. The latter is a telling metaphor: if in 1855 Whitman’s thought developed by way of concentric circles, expanding outwards in an almost limitless spiral, after the war his thought acquires a single center from which related ideas and representations proceed. *Leaves of Grass*

becomes a sourcebook – and songbook – of history's linear development, disclosing, as Whitman puts it in 1891, "Evolution – the cumulative – growths and generations" across time's singular arc (*LG*, III: 748).

"A REBORN RACE APPEARS": *DEMOCRATIC VISTAS* AND TIME'S CONDENSATION

Whitman's reordered chronopolitics, and the liberal philosophy of history upon which it is based, find their most comprehensive prose voice in *Democratic Vistas*. Written over the course of four years (1867-71) and composed initially as a critique of Thomas Carlyle's anti-democratic diatribe "Shooting Niagara" (1867), *Democratic Vistas* performs a kind of political and philosophical exorcism. The "lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close," confesses Whitman, "continually haunts me" (*PP*, 959). The demon that he yearns to cast out is the prospect of America's metaphysical emptiness. Material progress, he fears, has hitherto been unaccompanied by *spiritual* progress: "In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul." This exorcism is thus an exorcism with a difference: after the body is dispossessed, it must be re-ensouled. Praising the United States' "mighty, many-threaded wealth and industry," which "can no more be stopp'd than the tides, or the earth in its orbit," Whitman calls out for this wealth and industry to be spiritualized – or, more accurately, to be supplemented by an equally potent and inescapable metaphysical unity (*PP*, 962-3, 980).

Democratic Vistas, numerous critics have noted, is constructed by and large as a jeremiad that looks forward to the Gilded Age. M. Jimmie Killingsworth describes it as "the last gasp" of Whitman's "political aesthetics" and, similarly, David Reynolds construes it as the apex of Whitman's turn from radicalism to conventionality (Killingsworth, 161; Reynolds, 474-84). To be sure, *Democratic Vistas* in part fits the formal imperatives of the jeremiad as delineated by Sacvan Bercovitch: mounting a narrative of declension about American democracy's lack of a divine "osseous structure," it aspires to secure ideological consensus and join public to private identity.[50] Reading *Democratic Vistas* first and foremost as a jeremiad nonetheless redeploys the tragic interpretation of Whitman and his career. It turns Whitman's most strident and nuanced piece of postbellum writing into the expression of a vacancy, a call out to or from the wilderness which opts to "affirm rather than question, declare rather than suggest, [and] exclaim rather than explain." This reading of *Democratic Vistas* as an essentially *negative* political and philosophical articulation also bypasses the novel precepts and impulses that guide Whitman's politico-poetic thought and, in turn, are bound up with the postbellum transformation of American capitalism and its ideological effects. As Russ Castronovo notes, "Whitman's purpose [in *Democratic Vistas*] *seems* conservative [. . . but] [o]n closer inspection, [. . . it] is as productive as it is conservative; his hope is that aesthetics will not only safeguard what already exists but also produce a new political language."[51]

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50 Bercovitch describes *Democratic Vistas* as Whitman's most "towering state-of-the covenant address." It "has proved disappointing as political or social commentary," he writes, "because it is a work of symbolic interpretation. Its terms are doomsday or millennium, its text 'the problem of the future of America.' When Whitman considers the conditions actually prevailing in the country ('bribery, falsehood, maladministration') he can only conclude that 'the lowering darkness falls [. . .] as if to last forever.'" *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 198.

51 Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 273; Russ Castronovo, *Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and*

As imaginative as it is critical, Whitman's essay takes as its aim the translation of a liberal philosophy of history into a prophetic project for the American future. Echoing Heinrich Heine's assertion that liberalism "advances at the same pace as time itself, or is inhibited to the degree that the past survives into the present," Whitman reclaims the state as an affirmative, indispensable, and gradually evolving social force and constructs a theory of modernity that derives from a markedly *post*bellum liberal ideology.[52] Equal parts romance and tragedy, advancing a vision of redemption as well as a censure of corruption, *Democratic Vistas* is essentially a historical narrative. The story it constructs is that of liberty's progressive unfolding: from out of the depths of feudalism, obeying its own laws, democracy erupts, thereafter culminating in the American state and, eventually, in an immense global union. This narrative – liberal, teleological, and evolutionary – is actualized through political prophecy, since democracy's fruition "resides altogether in the future" (*PP*, 980). One discerns in democracy's prehistory, writes Whitman, feudalism's unfettered dominance: "we see in it, through the long ages and cycles of ages, the results of a deep, integral [. . .] principle, or fountain [. . .] whose centre was one and absolute." Similarly, Whitman conjectures, "long ages hence, shall the due historian or critic make at least an equal retrospect, an equal history for the democratic principle. It too must be adorn'd, credited with its results – then, when it, with imperial power, through amplest time, has dominated mankind – has [. . .] fashion'd, systematized, and triumphantly finish'd and carried out, in its own interest, and with unparallel'd success, a new earth and a new man" (*PP*, 980-1).

Whitman's secular chiliasm proceeds from historiography, but it also derives from fear. Like Thoreau, whose dreams are interrupted by the wail of steam engines, Whitman is incapable of peaceful sleep. He is haunted by premodernity's subtle hold on liberty's New Canaan. "For feudalism," he laments, "caste, the ecclesiastic traditions, though palpably retreating from political institutions, still hold essentially, by their spirit, even in this country." Not materially but spiritually: the American state and the Civil War have demolished feudalism as a political system but not as a system of beliefs and habits. The United States is a nation arrhythmic. Evolving materially in pace with capital's industrialization, it lags in spirit. It is torn between two rhythms, one feudal and metaphysical, the other democratic and concrete. What Whitman calls for is a realignment: he wants the nation's soul to march in tempo with its body. Everything premodern, feudal, and anti-democratic must therefore be rooted out micro-politically: it is "not enough that the new blood, new frame of democracy shall be vivified and held together merely by political means, superficial suffrage, legislation, etc" (*PP*, 955-6). Democracy must go deeper and get "at least as firm and as warm a hold in men's hearts, emotions and belief, as, in their days, feudalism or ecclesiasticism, and inaugurat[e] its own perennial sources, welling from the centre forever" (*PP*, 959). Not just governments but subjectivities themselves must be cleansed of feudal traces. Only then, when the modern gains absolute sovereignty over people's hearts and souls, will liberty's eternal "centre" bear its fated form.

The revealing of this (undoubtedly imperialist) "centre," and the rhythmic realignment it will effect, hinges on two figures, the poet and the state. The poet is still, as in 1855, the agent of distillation, but now he is also a dialectician. "[C]onsistent with Hegelian formulas," he records history's movements and "put[s] the nation in form" (*PP*, 1012, 996). After the Civil War, the poet and the state are categorically doubled in Whitman's thought. Constantly folding into and realizing one another, they allow democracy to unleash itself in "ceaseless succession through time." And their joint development correlates to the more general law of democracy's historical progression, which, Whitman contends, consists of three stages: (1) the moment of the founding (i.e., the establishment of rights embodied in the founding documents); (2) the period of material and economic expansion (involving

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Anarchy in a Global Era (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), 89 (my emphasis).

52 Heinrich Heine, "Französische Zustände" (article IX, 16 June 1832), *Sämtliche Schriften* (Munich: 1981), 1: 450; as quoted by Koselleck in *Futures Past*, 95.

"wealth, produce, labor-saving machines, iron, cotton, local, State and continental railways, intercommunication and trade with all lands, steamships, mining"); and (3) the establishment of a "sublime and serious Religious Democracy" (in which "native expression-spirit" takes "command, dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society" [*PP*, 1018, 1000-1]). This third and final phase of democracy's development is crucial, since Whitman construes the postbellum moment as the occasion of its birth. Liberty, he claims, has already acquired an uncontested dominance via railroads, but its spiritual ascension is still incomplete. The climax of democracy's teleological advancement – the codification, in every corner of the globe, of "imperial Republican forms" blending spirit with body and faith with capital – will come about, he prophesies, only when the poet and the state envelop themselves in an effective and unprecedented union (*PP*, 983).

We are, of course, far from the individualist liberalism upon which Whitman's politico-poetic thought was based before the war, a liberalism fixated on artisans' labors, bodies, and desires. Whitman's future-oriented, postbellum liberalism – grounded in an idealist philosophy of history accommodating multiplicities and markets – has not simply reconciled with the state: the state is now conceived of as an imperialist and vibrant life-force all its own. "Would you have in yourself the divine, vast, general law?" Whitman asks. "Then merge yourself in it." The poet, like the people, must dissolve himself in the nation; and the state in turn will sublimate all that it incorporates, turning "this American world" into "the final authority and reliance" (*PP*, 972, 980). On one level, the U.S. in Whitman's postbellum thought quadrates with the idealized Prussian state in Hegel's philosophy. But whereas Spirit according to Hegel progresses dialectically through time, history's center for Whitman is freedom itself, and its completion depends on the blending of poetic expression with the state's unbounded authority. "Come forth, sweet democratic despots of the west!" Come forth, and ensoul America's imperial body: fill it with spirit, Whitman implores, so that it can attain its "destined [. . .] mastership" (*PP*, 998, 976).

The underlying Hegelianism of *Democratic Vistas* is recognizable, Betsy Erkkila points out, in the essay's very structure, which constantly "works through oppositions and contradictions toward some higher synthesis." "In addressing the problem of democracy in *Democratic Vistas*," Erkkila notes, "Whitman never doubted the fact of democratic advance. Appealing neither to the Rousseauistic doctrine of natural good nor even to the Jeffersonian notion of inalienable right, he represents democracy as an irreversible movement of history" (*Whitman the Political Poet*, 253). But why? Critics have insisted that this imperialist faith in democratic advance originates in Whitman's self-removal from contemporary politics following the Civil War – his willed disarticulation from a politics, and poetics, of the concrete. I would like to suggest, however, that Whitman's conception of democracy as history's prime mover (its "latent germ") is based instead on a distinct theory, formulated after the Civil War, of *modernity*. When Whitman writes in *Democratic Vistas* of "the peerless power and splendid *eclat* of the democratic principle, arriv'd at meridian," he is engaging a specific model of historical time in which there is no longer a now-time extending backwards and forwards indefinitely but, in its place, a present that is grasped as a becoming.[53] His "democratic ethnology of the future" is

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53 Whitman himself insisted on the Hegelianism at the heart of *Democratic Vistas* in his private writings. In an 1872 letter to Rudolph Schmidt, his German translator, Whitman claims that the "central purpose of 'Democratic Vistas' is to project & outline a fresh & brawny race of original American Imaginative authors, with *moral purpose*, Hegelianism, underlying their works, poems – & with Science and Democracy – also thoroughly *religious* (not ecclesiastical or sectarian merely)." He makes a similar assertion in a letter to Edward Dowden, the editor of the *Westminster Review*: "In 'Democratic Vistas' I seek to make patent the appalling vacuum, in our times & here, of any school of great imaginative Literature & Art, fit for a Republican [. . .] people – and to suggest & prophesy such

also, necessarily, an ethnology of the present and its link with the future (*PP*, 981, 987). The structuring axiom of this link – the connective bond between now and the to-come – is the idea of modernity.

The latter acquires numerous, alternating forms and names in Whitman's postbellum writings – "Democracy," the epoch of "modern man," even America itself – which comprise related variations on a theme. At the root of Whitman's many postbellum representations of time and democracy is a single proposition: that the modern age – occasioned by the defeat of the Confederacy, the ascent of the American state, and the dissemination of capitalist wealth and technologies – is a point of absolute transition. As Whitman writes in his 1872 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, noting the peculiar acceleration of time native to modernity and heralding the latter's guarantees of rupture,

> As if in some colossal drama [. . .] the Nations of our time, and all the characteristics of Civilization, seem hurrying, stalking across, flitting from wing to wing, gathering, closing up, toward some long-prepared, most tremendous denouement. Not to conclude the infinite scenes of the race's life and toil and happiness and sorrow, but haply that the boards be clear'd from oldest, worst incumbrances, accumulations, and Man resume the eternal play anew, and under happier, freer auspices. To me, the United States are important because in this colossal drama they are unquestionably designated for the leading parts, for many a century to come. In them history and humanity seem to seek to culminate [. . .] And on these areas of ours, as on a stage, sooner or later, something like an eclaircissement of all the past civilization of Europe and Asia is probably to be evolved. (*PP*, 1024-5)

An "eclaircissement": a deciphering, or flash of realization. History has no truck with chaos. It is evolutionary, grand, intricate – and the United States is the potent vehicle of its fulfillment.

Whitman's imperialist sense of American modernity goes where Hegel himself never did. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel famously describes America as "the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself."[54] For Hegel, this American exceptionalism nonetheless derives from the New World's *non*-historicity, from its definitive removal from time's dialectical oscillations. In the space of Hegel's own text, this famous statement is deployed to justify *passing over* the Americas in his explication of Spirit's world-historical development. On one level, then, *Democratic Vistas* can be read as an extended and eloquent response on Whitman's part to Hegel's qualified statement about America's futural transformation. Against his German interlocutor, Whitman posits that America is not only the telos, or endpoint, of history's

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a Literature as the only vital means of sustaining & perpetuating such a people. I would project at least the rough sketch of such a school of Literatures – an entirely new breed of authors, poets, American, comprehensive, Hegelian, Democratic, religious – & with an infinitely larger scope & method than any yet." Whitman, *The Correspondence*, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), Vol. 2, 151 and 154.

54 Here is the full quote: "America, therefore, is the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself [. . .] It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of old Europe. Napoleon is reported to have said: '*Cette vieille Europe m'ennuie*.' It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself. What *has* taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World – the expression of a foreign Life; and as a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History* our concern must be with what has been and that which is." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 86-7.

movement but the *medium* of its becoming. Time, Whitman comes to believe, is not some striated plurality but a vast and dialectical unity, and its privileged locus – the agent of modernity's fruition – is the postwar United States, now growing into a hemispheric empire, a "leviathan" that cannot be "bridle[d]" (*PP*, 1013).

After the war, this nascent conception of history's unilinearity acquires a spinal function in Whitman's thought. It allows him to designate an "AMERICAN TOTALITY" as "the custodian of the future of humanity" and to speak, in "Passage to India," of America as the "rondure of the world at last accomplished" (*PP*, 1074; *LG*, III: 533). And it enables him to compose a poem in 1872 ("The Mystic Trumpeter") that envisions the future as a state of perfected democracy:

> Marches of victory – man disenthral'd – the conqueror at
> last,
> Hymns to the universal God from universal man – all joy!
> A reborn race appears – a perfect world, all joy!
> [. . .]
> War, sorrow, suffering gone -- the rank earth purged --
> nothing but joy left!
> The ocean fill'd with joy -- the atmosphere all joy!
> Joy! joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in the ecstasy of life!
> Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!
> Joy! joy! all over joy!
> (*LG*, III: 645)

Past, present, and future are no longer conjoined through a shared *Jetztzeit*. Instead, time is "condensed to a collective singular" and the present is posited as an instance of sudden and irreversible change (Koselleck, 50).

"PROOF OF THIS PRESENT TIME": WHITMAN'S WHITE TELEOLOGY

Arising out of the depths of war and the rhythms of industrialization, this poetic philosophy of history – or, more accurately, of modernity – was in some respects unique to Whitman. His peculiar readings of Hegel, his experiences in Washington's wartime hospitals, and his own wayward poetic sensibilities make the postbellum *Leaves* a rather unique literary document. Yet there is also a broader sense of time with which Whitman's historical thought is bound up. Accordingly, what is at stake here, as Jacques Rancière puts it, "is not the 'influence' of a thinker, but the efficacy of a plot – one that reframes the division of the forms of our experience."[55] The historical schemas that ground Whitman's thought register a more general modification of temporal consciousness in the postbellum period, and here, in this final subsection, I will draw out this symptomatic part of my analysis.

When Whitman claims that the "earth, restive, confronts a new era" – an unprecedented age of "The Modern Man" and his "laws divine" (*LG*, II: 558) – he is engaging with a distinct, and distinctly postbellum, set of temporal sensibilities and presuppositions. The increasing industrialization of capital and the cultural effects wrought by the war's end transformed common American conceptions

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55 Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy," *New Left Review* 12 (March/April 2002): 133.

of historical time, reordering the temporal frameworks in which desire, thought, and linguistic expression were enmeshed. After 1865, capital and "unionism" (as Whitman liked to call it) split open the anticipatory horizon, and *Leaves of Grass*, composed to take the pulse of the nation, records this shift.

Whitman's postbellum liberalism, as well as the idealist philosophy of history that permeates it, is made possible by a restructured dissonance between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" in the United States (Koselleck, 259-63). *Leaves*' figurations of time and history stem from and respond to a discourse, dominant in the war's aftermath, that grasps the present epoch as patently novel, marked by an inexorable tendency toward consolidation, and guided, almost providentially, by a progressive democratic telos. Especially discernible in liberal meditations on the war's close, this discourse is predicated on the notion, as one writer put it, that "the old world is now sloughing off its skin." Another world, resplendent in democratic vigor and exceptional in scope and reason, has been hatched. As George William Curtis, political editor of *Harper's Weekly* in the 1860s, contended in his 1866 speech "The Good Fight," the Civil War had two effects: it made the nation attain "a living consciousness of its inevitable unity" and it brought about the "total overthrow of the spirit of caste" and feudalism. The "normal social condition," he writes, "is the constant enlarging of liberty": not liberty's attainment but its perpetual expansion.[56] Another theorist of premodernity's end, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., likewise construed history as a process of fixed growth, figuring steam-power as the very symbol of evolution's arc: "Our times are not those of our fathers. The seventh day of August, 1807, marks an era in human progress, and the years since that day have seen [. . .] a progress vastly more accelerated, than any that preceded them: they have been years of another world." The "revolution" wrought by the train and its technological siblings "has been all-pervading," Adams contends: "The tendency of steam has universally been towards the gravitation of the parts to the centre, – towards the combination and concentration of forces [. . .] The days of small barrier kingdoms and intricate balances of power are wellnigh numbered." According to Adams, writing in the same year that Carlyle published "Shooting Niagara," the effects of modernity's break are twofold. First, antagonism and heterogeneity have entered their death throes: "Whatever is homogeneous is combining all the world over in obedience to an irresistible law. It is the law of gravitation applied to human affairs. One national centre regulates the whole daily thought, trade, and language of great nations, and regulates it instantly." Second, this "irresistible law" of gravitation – a variation on Whitman's privileged postbellum figure of the "centre" – rapidly empties out the past, rendering the world's parts and places identical: "London is, in all essentials but size, like Boston; Paris, like New York. Paris and London have yielded to the new influence [. . .] to become the stereotyped railroad centres of the future."[57] Echoing Whitman's proclamation in "Years of the Modern" that a force is

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56 Charles Francis Adams, Jr., "The Railroad System," *North American Review* 104.2 (April 1867): 495; George William Curtis, "The Good Fight," *Orations and Addresses*, Vol. 1: On the Principles and Character of American Institutions, and the Duties of American Citizens, 1856-1891, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), 153; Curtis, "The American Doctrine of Liberty," *Orations and Addresses*, I: 99. In "The American Doctrine," Curtis goes on to frame progress as "the divine order of human development": "it is the same human family that streams across ages, its progress like the fluctuating mass of an advancing army, with its daring outposts and pickets, its steady centre, its remote wings [. . .] with one heart beating along the endless line, with one celestial captain [. . . and] one inspiring, consecrated hope" (100).

57 Adams, "The Railroad System," 483-4. Early on in the passage, Adams is referring to the first embarkation of the modern steam ship on August 7, 1807. His vision of a homogenized world is in fact shared by another writer, T. W., whose article "Our Millionaires" immediately precedes Whitman's "Democracy" in the May 1868 issue of *The Galaxy* magazine. "Just now the centralizing

"advancing with irresistible power on the / world's stage" (*LG*, II: 504), Adams concludes that this new consolidating tendency is both formative and inescapable: "We must follow out the era on which we have entered to its logical and ultimate conclusions, for it is useless for men to stand in the way of steam-engines."

A new horizon of expectation shot through with the promise of amelioration: this is the horizon of Whitman's "modern man" who, with "the steamship, the electric telegraph" and "the wholesale engines of war [. . .] interlinks all geography, all lands" (*LG*, II: 504). Almost palpable, in the words of William Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State, is an "irresistible tendency to Union" ensuring an imperial future in which "the borders of the federal republic, so peculiarly constituted, shall be extended so that it shall greet the sun when he touches the tropic, and when he sends his glancing rays toward the polar circle, and shall increase a thousand fold." "Power is stealing the world over from the few to the many, and with an impetus unprecedented in the world's history," adds Amos Bronson Alcott, one of the foremost American proponents of Hegel after the war. Charged with a collective feeling of uncanny acceleration, the present is an age of "Bronze and Iron" and "mechanism."[58] It marches – harmoniously and in unison, directed by the secular providence of capital – toward a fated end, or final fruition. To the degree that the past is even considered in this postwar liberal discourse, it is tends to be apprehended as either an empty shell or a mere container of portents. As one economic text in the 1880s claims, "[i]t would seem, indeed, as if the world, during all the years since the inception of civilization, has been working up on the line of equipment for industrial effort." All of Western civilization's material advancements, including the "inventing and perfecting [of] tools and machinery, [the] building [of] workshops and factories, and [the] devising [of] instrumentalities for the easy intercommunication of persons and thoughts," comprise related elements or instances a single, teleological process. This "equipment having at last been made ready, the work of using it has, for the first time in our day and generation, fairly begun; and [. . .] every community under prior or existing conditions of use and consumption, is becoming saturated, as it were, with its results."[59] Cracked open for the very first time, the world is no longer a plenum – filled to the brim, as Whitman sang joyously before the war, with labor and love, with "act-poems" and wild tongues. It is instead a space of imminence. And its temporality is split, paradoxically, between two tendencies: one rigid and unwavering, corresponding to the pace of technological advancement; the other open and uncertain, entailing the prospect of unceasing novelty.

What Whitman's postbellum thought articulates are those temporal schemas that guide American liberalism after the Civil War: the modes of historical experience and temporal

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process seems in the ascendant," he notes, "great cities are eating up small ones, and are growing greater; great nations are moving in the same direction, and great businesses, and great fortunes. It seems to be the law, too, that no thing, nor no man, shall stand still; either they grow greater or smaller, are eaten or eat. Paris now devours France; London, England; and New York, America. France is not at this moment, perhaps, engaged in devouring other nations, but is getting ready; Prussia is eating up Germany; Russia, Turkey; the United States, this whole continent; England, Abyssinia and India, and so on. Even Italy is not content unless she can digest the poor old Pope, who, like the fretful porcupine, is hard to swallow" (535).

58 William Seward, "Restoration of Union" (1866), *Collected Works*, ed. George E. Baker (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1884), Vol. V, 537; Seward, "The Destiny of America," *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, 122; Amos Bronson Alcott, *Concord Days* (Boston: 1872), 168, 178. Alcott was one of Hegel's foremost philosophical advocates in New England, and, in the *July* section of *Concord Days*, goes so far as to suggest that "The Dialectic [. . .] constitutes the basis of all culture" (155).

59 David Wells, *Recent Economic Changes: and their Effect on the Production and Distribution of Wealth and the Well-being of Society* (New York: 1896), v.

conceptualization that are at once immediately available to consciousness (arising through desire, reflection, and sentiment) and part of, to use Ernst Bloch's formulation, an "auroric 'pre-conscious'" operating "in the darkness of the lived moment."[60] Both levels of temporal experience emerge in poems such as "Orange Buds by Mail from Florida," which Whitman wrote in 1888 as a meditation on America's evolved perfection. "Voltaire," he notes, "closed a famous argument by claiming that a ship of war and the grand opera were proofs enough of civilization's and France's progress, in his day." But America has its own material testimony:

> A lesser proof than old Voltaire's, yet greater,
> Proof of this present time, and thee, thy broad expanse,
> America,
> To my plain Northern hut, in outside clouds and snow,
> Brought safely for a thousand miles o'er land and tide,
> Some three days since on their own soil live-sprouting,
> Now here their sweetness through my room unfolding,
> A bunch of orange buds by mail from Florida.
> (*LG*, II: 724)

From ships of war and opera houses to railroads and post-offices: modernity's progress is steady and ceaseless, each of its wonders more miraculous than the last. Space itself is conquered in this nascent age of ensemble: "a thousand miles o'er land and tide" are no obstacle to technology's march. Whitman's faith is interlocked with a historical arc that, he realizes, is simultaneously advancing towards democracy's *eschaton* and filling out this "present time" with incessant progress and innovation.

In his many "morning-poems" – those chants of birth about seeds and skyscrapers and the bodies of the multitude, which, he once claimed, make up the whole of *Leaves of Grass* (*PP*, 668) – Whitman "tends to followings," taking as his subject a world-democracy both latent and inexorable. Only the future, he asserts, can yield its consummation since "America, too, is a prophecy" (*PP*, 1035). A nation that is, at heart, a divination, America "awaits the coming of its bards in silence and in twilight." But it is already, Whitman adds, "the twilight of the dawn" (*PP*, 1054). Neither night nor day but inbetween: Whitman's gambit is his self-insertion in this transitional moment between present and future, between prophecy and its fulfillment. At once seer and dialectician, Whitman constructs a poetics of imminence after the war's close, the task of which entails a kind of temporal decoding – an attempt to encapsulate, through representations and reimaginings of time's singularity and power, the content of modernity's birth. And it is in Whitman's poetry that these motley instants of historical inception, "sweeping the present to the infinite future," find their most orbic voice (*LG*, III: 659) – a voice in equal parts wild and oracular, sounding "over the roofs of the world" and underneath bed sheets.

What I am pointing out here are not homologous links in the new historicist sense – that is, displaced connections of some essential identity between forms, origins, or structures – but a collective temporal consciousness that precedes and shapes the very discourse in which it is articulated. Anticipatory, intersubjective, and broadening in pace with the process of deterritorialization, this temporal consciousness simultaneously systematizes the world by perceiving its maturation as fixed and couches the present as replete with newness.[61] Liberal and idealist, it posits steady amelioration

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60 Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 95.

61 I am using this term roughly in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari use it in *A Thousand Plateaus*: as a rhizomatic process of dispossession and reappropriation. See *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism*

and progressive democratization as time's self-enclosed ends, effectively joining a philosophy of history to an American politics of natural rights. I am suggesting, in other words, that if modern liberalism was born out of the transition from proprietary to corporate-industrial capitalism in the four decades after the Civil War (as a number of social historians have convincingly argued), this reconstructed liberalism was assembled through a distinct sense of historical time. Liberalism's modernization, from its increasing engagement with mass political subjectivities to its interest in history's processual character, hinged on a mode of temporal experience that materialized only after the war and, in some respects, was poetically refigured in Whitman's postbellum *Leaves*. The latter is therefore best understood as a chronopolitical document, as a poetic artform whose politics are necessarily those of a politics of time.

Reframing Whitman in this manner effectively resituates some of the troubling, concrete expressions of his political thought after the war, from his various encomiums to industrial production ("Mightier than Egypt's tombs, / Fairer than Grecia's, Roma's temples [. . .] We plan even now to raise, beyond them all, / Th[e] great cathedral sacred industry" [*LG*, III: 616]) to his derogatory statements during and after Reconstruction about black civil rights. The latter comments have frequently, and not without reason, been interpreted as the most striking evidence of Whitman's fall. Whitman's denunciations of "black domination, but little above the beasts" and encomiums to white Southerners ("the blacks can never be to me what the whites are . . . The whites are my brothers & I love them") tend to be understood by critics as proof of a contradiction: underneath Whitman's erotic universalism there teems a deep-rooted but often unvoiced racial ideology.[62] On one level this is of course certainly the case. Informed by a vulgar Lamarckian theory of evolutionary adaptation and the dubious insights of racial pseudo-science, Whitman – as critics such as Ed Folsom, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Karen Sánchez-Eppler, and Dana Phillips have amply demonstrated – often expresses racist views, evermore virulent after the Confederacy's defeat, that are basically commensurate with those of the white Northern majority.[63] This racism also buttresses, and in large part shapes, the imperialist bent of Whitman's postwar political ideas: the assurance of a global union led by "Americanos! conquerors!" is energized by a belief in the naturalness and inevitability of Anglo-Saxon dominance (*LG*, II: 275).

Construing Whitman's racist statements as so many contradictory fragments, however, ignores the ways in which racial exclusion has not been anathema to liberalism but, instead, integral to its concrete functioning. Shoring up David Theo Goldberg's claim that liberalism's "commitment to principles of universality is practically sustained only by the reinvented and rationalized exclusions of racial particularity," Whitman's hostility to black freedom is articulated through specifically liberal notions of will and embodiment: "That is one reason why I never went full on the nigger question – the nigger would not turn – would not do anything for himself – he would only act when prompted to act. No! no! I should not like to see the nigger in the saddle – it seems unnatural [. . .] Till the nigger can do

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and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), especially 424-73.

62 Whitman, *Prose Works*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York Univ. Press), Vol. 1, 326; Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1984), Vol. 6, 2160; as quoted in David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 470-1.

63 See Dana Phillips, "Nineteenth-Century Racial Thought and Whitman's 'Democratic Ethnology of the Future,'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49.3 (December 1994): 289-320; Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *The Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 108-135; Martin Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of "Leaves of Grass"* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995); Ed Folsom, "Lucifer and Ethiopia"; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "To Stand Between: A Political Perspective on Whitman's Poetics of Merger and Embodiment," *ELH* 56.4 (1989): 923-49; and Luke Mancuso, *The Strange Sad War Revolving*.

something for himself, little can be done *for* him." In terms of its theoretical construction, liberalism is tragically sutured by an atomistic conception of social relations (wherein each individual is a kind of demi-god uniquely capable of self-realization) which, as Saidiya Hartman argues, short-circuits equality by "the apportioning of individual responsibility, if not blame, for what are clearly the consequences of dominative relations." Commenting on the freedmen's journals and pamphlets handed out to former slaves after the Civil War, Hartman writes that, in the minds of many postbellum liberals, "blacks gained entry to the body of the nation-state as expiators of the past, as if slavery and its legacy were solely their cross to bear."[64] Moreover, Whitman's racial thought is intimately bound up with the liberal philosophy of history I have been discussing: the latter is at once the condition of possibility and the formal imperative of the former. Figuring history as a teleological process enables Whitman to think of African Americans as little more than feudal cogs in the democratic machinery of American modernity, as one recently recovered manuscript from the late-1860s demonstrates:

Of the black question.

> After the tender appeals of the sentimentalist, the eloquence of freedom's hottest orators, and the logic of the politico-economist, comes something else to the settlement of this question – comes Ethnological Science, cold, remorseless, not heeding at all the vehement abstractions of equality and fraternity, or any of the formulas thereof – uninfluenced by the Acts of Congress, or Constitutional Amendments – by noiselessly rolling on like the globe in its orbit, like the summer's heat or winter's cold, and settling these things by evolution, by natural selection by certain races notwithstanding all the frantic pages of the sentimentalists helplessly disappearing by the slow, sure progress of laws, through sufficient periods of time.[65]

History's laws, slowly progressing, are productive of ruptures. Discernible only through science, they underwrite governments and legal codes; effect change, both violent and mute; and adhere to a specific logic of development. Racial "evolution" and Hegelian progress are one and the same for Whitman:

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64 David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 39; Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), Vol. 6, 323; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 133.

65 Geoffrey Sill, "Whitman on 'The Black Question': A New Manuscript," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 8 (Fall 1990): 69-75. This evolutionary racism manifests again in 1888, in a response that Whitman gave when he was asked about racial mixing: "I don't believe in it – it is not possible. The nigger, like the Injun, will be eliminated: it is the law of history, races, what-not: always so far inexorable – always to be. Someone proves that a superior grade of rats comes and then all the minor rats are cleared out." Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Vol. 2, 283. The importance of the idea of progress to this racism is also evident in a stray manuscript note, unpublished but perhaps intended to be part of *Democratic Vistas*, in which Whitman promises to "[m]ake a full and plain spoken statement of *the South* – encouraging – the south will yet come up – the blacks must either filter through in time or gradually eliminate & disappear, which is most likely though that termination is far off, or else must so develop in mental and moral qualities and in all the attributes of a leading and dominant race, (which I do not think likely)." Kenneth M. Price, "Whitman's Solutions to 'The Problem of the Blacks,'" *Resources for American Literary Study* 15 (Autumn 1985): 205-8. This connection between Hegel and race in Whitman's thought is of course part of a much broader theoretical problem regarding the historical roots of the idea of "universal history." See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, History, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

the world whitens as it industrializes, and homogenizes as it consolidates around an animating center. Liberal in conception and eschatological in form, Whitman's racism is a constituent element in his philosophy of history. In a sense, then, Whitman's ideas about black freedom (or the undesirability thereof) are inseparable from his most famous postbellum productions: "Passage to India" and "Eidólons," *Drum-Taps* and his *Songs of Parting*, share with Whitman's most disturbing discussions of race a common chronopolitical foundation.

Such moments force us to pause and consider the potential unevenness, or disparity, between Whitman's postwar politics and his postwar aesthetics. I claimed at the outset of this chapter that the story of *Leaves of Grass* is anything but linear. This is no less true of Whitman's career and thought more broadly. As critics and teachers, we tend to privilege narratives that are orderly, or at least fit into some basic mythopoetic pattern (romance, tragedy, comedy). Accounts of collapse, withdrawal, and unfettered overcoming are, simply put, easier to write about and easier to wrap one's mind around. It would be convenient if Whitman's poetic project withered along with his democratic vision; such a declension would make his poems easier to disentangle and his statements about race and empire easier to digest. What I have tried to show through this chronopolitical reading of *Leaves* is the discomfiting fact that Whitman's aesthetics continued to grow and complicate precisely when many of his most egalitarian political commitments either flagged or weakened. To read Whitman as a wayward poet – that is, immanently and within the terms of his own unevenness – thus demands recognizing that as he ceded more and more ground to the birth of American empire and the evolution of its ideologies, his poetic art continued to develop in ways that are at once powerful, nuanced, and important.

Leaves of Grass records and refigures liberalism's transformation in the ante- to postbellum period. Nonetheless, as Whitman himself insisted time and time again, *Leaves* is no mere archive. He preferred to couch the difference of his book in terms of either its unprecedented corporeality ("Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man" [*LG*, II: 452]) or its display of Whitman's own integrative spectacle of a self ("through me the current and the index"). Yet I think what anchors *Leaves* to its surroundings – its chronopolitics – is also, paradoxically, what separates it from its subtexts. Whitman's orbic historical voice and political vision occasionally eclipse the empirical world that they ostensibly celebrate. Across its extensive revisions and reconstellations of historical time, *Leaves* in fact develops chronopolitical forms that elude, and at moments even resist, the very ideologies of time which inform and sustain Whitman during these important, postwar years. These forms – their structures, meanings, and potentials – are the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Arranging the Universal: The Labor of *Leaves* in the Age of the Strike

Even in Whitman's most sanguine chants after the war, a kernel of the unaccomplished nonetheless persists. Into the 1870s, 80s, and early 90s, Whitman's attempts to ensoul the vacant shells and exteriors of America's outward growth become all the more insistent – and, as we shall see, all the more streamlined in both their form and content – precisely when the gap in the U.S. between potentiality and actuality was widening rather than closing. In the decades following the Civil War, no *eclaircissement* of global "fervid comradeship" and state-centered freedom ever materialized; and feudalism, instead of withering as Whitman had predicted, returned with a vengeance (*PP*, 1005). Liberty in the south was vitiated by the black codes and emancipation was reversed through slavery's renewal in new forms. The literary blossoming that *Democratic Vistas* heralded, which would enable Hegelian auteurs to "span the vast revolutionary arch thrown by the United States over the Centuries [. . . and] [in]to the endless future," never came about (*PP*, 1041). And the paradise for artisanal labor that Whitman imagined as the fated issue of the war was imperiled by massive unemployment (at one point in the 1870s reaching almost 25% in New York City), periodic economic recession (including the United States' "longest period of uninterrupted economic contraction" from 1873 to 1879), and an unprecedented centralization of wealth during the Gilded Age. In 1869, the *New York Times* went so far as to claim that the disappearance of the independent artisan has proven to be one of the most enduring legacies of the Union's victory: "[O]ne capitalist employs five men now where he employed one twenty years ago; and thus there is gradually developing at the North a system of slavery as absolute if not as degrading as that which lately prevailed at the South. The only difference is that there agriculture was the field, landed proprietors were the masters and negroes were the slaves; while in the North manufactures is the field, manufacturing capitalists threaten to become the masters, and it is the white laborers who are to be slaves [. . .] A casual observer, walking the streets of a city familiar to him [. . .] cannot fail to notice this fact."[66]

By 1880, nearly eighty percent of all the manufactoring workers in the United States were part of a vast industrial factory system, and the American upper-class reaped the benefits of this shift. By 1890, in the words of Alan Trachtenberg, "the richest one percent earned more than the total income of the poorest 50 percent, and commanded more wealth than the remaining 99 percent," while roughly "half of all American families lived without property."[67] This rift between rich and poor, and between democracy's envisaged future and its concrete present, was especially palpable when a strike initiated by railroad workers in Martinsburg, West Virginia spread from the eastern seaboard to the western territories in the summer of 1877. In Baltimore, working-class citizens descended upon the state militia to prevent their going down south to suppress the strike in its birthplace. They hurled rocks and other projectiles at the passing soldiers, half of whom deserted out of sympathy with the strikers. In Chicago and St. Louis, workers halted commerce in the city and challenged the municipal government. In Pittsburgh, a general strike among workers in the iron mills, glass factories, coal mines, and steel

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66 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, 513; Rendigs Fels, *American Business Cycles, 1865-1897* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1959), 107-11; "Our Working Classes: Their Condition and Prospects – Concentration of Capital in the Hands of the Few – Employers Becoming Fewer and Laborers More Numerous – The Rich Richer, the Poor Poorer," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1869.

67 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, 2:16; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 99.

plants was stopped only when the National Guard of Pennsylvania was brought in. President Hayes eventually ordered federal troops to put down each of these strikes, but similar insurrections increased and intensified in the following years. In 1886 alone – the year of "Great Unrest" according to labor historians – over 1,400 strikes were carried out by approximately half-a-million workers.[68]

Such outbreaks of discord resurrected visions of domestic strife born during the war and posed a direct challenge to the senses of felt or expected unity forged among Americans in the war's aftermath. The "civil war" of capital and labor – as numerous reporters termed it, particularly in the mid- to late-1870s – restructured the links between experience and expectation in a manner not unlike that of the Civil War itself.[69] If, as I argued in chapter one, the ideology of liberalism was reorganized through a belief in teleological evolution, this was because, in a sense, it *had* to: poverty, social and political disunity, and proletarian agitation threatened the very idea of capitalist democracy's progressive drive. The latter's guarantee could be salvaged only by reconceiving it as processual, as inhering in deferral and seeming contradiction. The discontent of America's expanding and increasingly impoverished working class thus became, for capital's ministers, not testimony of some deep-seated systemic problem but a transitory disturbance, the necessary outcropping of a long process of development and self-correction.

These events did not go unnoticed by Whitman, who not only continued to enjoy wandering Manhattan's streets even after his stroke in 1873 but also surrounded himself with people who were directly connected with the labor movement, like the socialist Horace Traubel. Just two years after the 1877 strikes, Whitman wrote that "I saw to-day a sight I had never seen before – and it amazed, and made me serious": "three quite good-looking American men, of respectable personal presence, two of them young, carrying chiffonier-bags on their shoulders, and the usual long iron hooks in their hands, plodding along, their eyes cast down, spying for scraps, rags, bones, &c" (*PP*, 1089). These gleaners are a far cry from the artisans of Whitman's antebellum poetry. The loved and loving bodies of "I Sing the Body Electric" and the swinging arms and heaving torsos of "A Song for Occupations" are supplanted here by their sad opposite: the dejected face and slumped shoulders of the unemployed. In 1855 the proud worker's body "balks account":

> The expression of a wellmade man appears not only in his face,
> It is in his limbs and joints also . . . . it is curiously in the
> joints of his hips and wrists,
> It is in his walk . . the carriage of his neck . . the flex of his
> waist and knees . . . . dress does not hide him,
> The strong sweet supple quality he has strikes through the
> cotton and flannel;
> To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem . .
> perhaps more,

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68 On the strikes of 1877, I am borrowing from several sources, including: Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York: Monad Press, 1997); Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1998), 47-118; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 245-251, 273; David Burbank, *Reign of Rabble: The St. Louis General Strike of 1877* (Fairfield, NJ: Augustus Kelley, 1966); and David O Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999).

69 On the links between political reactions to labor revolts and American memories of the Civil War, see also Troy Rondinone, "'History Repeats Itself': The Civil War and the Meaning of Labor Conflict in the Late Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly* 59.2 (2007): 397-419.

> You linger to see his back and the back of his neck and
> shoulderside.
> (*LG*, I: 122)

Now, in the age of the industrial strike, there is still a "divine nimbus" that "attracts with fierce undeniable attraction," but the body has been broken and misused. If the "expression of the wellmade man" manifests in "his walk" and in the "carriage of his neck," the gleaners, who shuffle and "plod along" with "their eyes cast down," manifest the absence of this expression.

Not knowing what exactly to do with this remembrance, Whitman appended it to a lecture that he drafted but never delivered, first published as "The Tramp and Strike Questions" in the 1892 prose cluster *Notes Left Over*. Addressing "the Poverty Question ('the Science of Wealth,' and a dozen other names are given it, but I prefer the severe one just used)," Whitman's reflections spin out into an incisive and, at moments quite radical, meditation on labor and the possibilities of democracy. "The American Revolution of 1776," he writes,

> was simply a great strike, successful for its immediate object – but whether a real success judged by the scale of the centuries, and the long-striking balance of Time, yet remains to be settled. The French Revolution was absolutely a strike, and a very terrible and relentless one, against ages of bad pay, unjust division of wealth-products, and the hoggish monopoly of a few, rolling in superfluity, against the vast bulk of the work-people, living in squalor.[70]

Whitman concludes by collapsing the very division between feudalism's past and America's future upon which much of his postwar project is based:

> If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years – steadily, even if slowly, eating into them like a cancer of lungs or stomach – then our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure. (*PP*, 1088-9)

Rather than separating the strikers of Gilded Age America from their revolutionary forebears, as numerous commentators and reporters were wont to do, Whitman reads the American and French Revolutions as the founding instances of the modern labor movement. The latter is not simply a belated repetition of the revolutions that preceded it and made it possible; the labor movement also attempts to finalize those political demands delivered one hundred years prior. Yet uncertainty and anxiety loom in Whitman's words. Once "the world's greatest poem," the United States has

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70 Whitman's use of the word "tramp" is likewise tied to the political and historical conjuncture in which he is writing. Scholars of the late-nineteenth-century underclass have found that the use of "tramp" as a noun originated to denote transient workers in the aftermath of the 1873 depression. As strikes proliferated and the threat of worker insurrection loomed, middle- and upper-class fears were increasingly directed toward the nomadic elements of the poor. When, for instance, Allan Pinkerton, the Union veteran and infamous detective, penned his 1878 memoirs, it was no accident that these transient workers were conspicuous in both the title (*Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives*) and the text (several chapters are devoted exclusively to the history and character of American "tramps"). Todd DePastino provides an account of this history in *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

metamorphosed into a potentially failed "experiment." The iron constructions and steel machines of industrial modernity may curtail or perhaps even extinguish the principles of that first great strike: this is the nightmare that, Whitman attests, "continually haunts me" (*PP*, 959). It is the specter of a dream not deferred but stamped out.

Keenly aware of a developing, and possibly cataclysmic, antagonism between capitalism and democracy, Whitman increasingly writes poems in the postwar years designed to contain, defer, or refuse this conflict. In "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days," a poem about the present's flawless totality which first appeared in the 1860 *Chants Democratic*, Whitman adds these beginning lines in 1871:

> As I walk these broad majestic days of peace,
> (For the war, the struggle of blood finish'd, wherein, O terrific Ideal,
> Against vast odds erewhile having gloriously won,
> Now thou stridest on, yet perhaps in time toward denser wars,
> Perhaps to engage in time in still more dreadful contests, dangers,
> Longer campaigns and crises, labors beyond all others)

Building on the notion, first proposed in the 1860 version, that everything from the "growth of cities" to the spread of "vast factories" is "as it should be," this "terrific Ideal" is the animating force of history's procession (*LG*, II: 317). Even if more "campaigns and crises" and "still more dreadful contests" crop up, liberty's progressive advance is both potent and inexorable. A similar sense of democracy's permanence surfaces in the poem "America," composed in the late 1880s:

> Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
> All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
> Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
> Perennial with Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
> A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
> Chair'd in the adamant of Time.
> (*LG*, III: 701)

Engaging what critic Kerry Larson terms an "insistently proleptic drive," which enables the future to appear in the present as already perfectly accomplished, these lines commence with a circular image that makes the diverse ("All, all alike") cohere and interlink (18). This permeating circularity makes the abstract characteristics of America's workers ("Strong, ample") correlate with those of their employers ("fair," "capable," rich"). But the most powerful figure of democratic "Unionism" manifests in the concluding line, where America's matriarchal embodiment is seated "in the adamant of Time." At the outset of chapter one we encountered a similar version of temporality's collective singular, but whereas "Time" in "Song of Myself" encloses and condenses historical multiplicity, here it is identified chiefly through its solidity (appearing as a kind of rock) and through its providential assurance (proceeding in harmony with "the Earth" and with "Freedom, Law and Love"). In the midst of widespread disunion, precisely when the violent acts of civil strife have been reborn, "Time" emerges as America's guarantor and protector.

Yet "adamant" is also a peculiar word, containing its own untold latencies. In the Middle Ages it referred to a stone or surface that was believed to be unbreakable. It designated a magic substance loaded with unknowable and perhaps otherworldly powers. Writing long after the demise of such myths, in an era of perpetual impermanence, Whitman invests not a mystic stone but time itself with magical properties. Indeed, one way of reading this poem is as a reaction against the impending

discord in the nation's factories, workshops, and railroad camps. Because of the "almost maniacal appetite for wealth" that plagues this New World nation, Whitman wrote after the war, today's democracy suffers from a self-inflicted "hollowness": "In business, (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field" (*PP*, 961). If the capitalists have usurped Moses's position, repeating in a profane manner his legerdemain in Egypt, Whitman corrects for this waywardness in the lines of this poem. Whitman's fantasies of America's perfected future offer, in a sense, a magic inoculation against the very real possibility, and impending likelihood, of that future's non-arrival.

However, this is only a partial explanation of the distance between the "America" poem and Whitman's observations about the "all-devouring" serpent of capital. The stanza about America "Chair'd in the adamant of Time" and the sentence about the evils of "money-making" in fact seem, at first glance, to be written by two entirely different people. It often seems, more generally, as though two Walt Whitmans present themselves in his postwar writings: one, inhabiting poems like "Song of the Exposition" and "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," who praises America's immaculate accomplishments and teleological purpose; and another, surfacing in parts of *Drum-Taps* and in prose pieces like "The Tramp and Strike Questions," who is all too aware of the past's powerful returns. But this is no case of split identity. If two senses of the nation and its direction – one unilinear and Hegelian, and another curved and retrospective – stretch across *Leaves of Grass*' postwar stanzas and sentences, Whitman balances this tension, by and large, by developing strategies of poetic recomposition that draw from his philosophy of history in order to correct for America's "anti-democratic disease" (i.e., the "[e]xceptional wealth, [. . .] countless manufactures, excess of exports, immense capital and capitalists [. . . and] artificial improvements" which afflict the country [*PP*, 1098]). Whitman sensed that the visions of democracy's present and future to which *Leaves* is so intensely devoted in all of its motley editions were in danger. What was needed, he came to realize, was a poetry capable of counter-balancing, in both its form and content, the spread of the contagion of the purely profane – and *Leaves*' postwar editions are the fruit of this realization.

The postbellum dissonance between capitalism and democracy compelled Whitman, as critics such as Mitchell Meltzer, Betsey Erkkila, and Michael Moon have demonstrated, to assiduously revise his poems.[71] But it also led him to rethink the nature and mission of poetry itself. *Democratic Vistas*, whose chronopolitics we examined in chapter one, is in some respects but a manifesto for future poetry writ large. His "demand" for "orbic bards" and lyrical "despots" wholly "consistent with Hegelian formulas" is the endpoint of his political analysis and critique: poetry's democratic consummation is his proposed solution to America's tragic arrhythmia. And this same sense of connection between time's politics and verse's potentials helped Whitman reshape the structure of *Leaves* in radical ways. Over the course of his postwar career, he crafted a literary praxis that translated this understanding of history's progressive shape into a method of poetic recomposition and formal rearrangement. In a sense, the "new esthetics of our future" that Whitman welcomed in 1871 was already developing in his own poems, particularly in his revisionary practices – those fluid acts of syntactic and structural modification that unfold in edition after edition and make *Leaves of Grass* so singularly protean. This chapter takes as its subject this other side – the aleatory, fluctuating framework – of Whitman's chronopolitical poetics. Attuned to what Moon calls the evolving "patterns of meaning" in *Leaves*, it examines the relationship between the volume's inner mutations and Whitman's postwar conceptions of poetry's political function (1). Focusing on the interface – and, at the chapter's end, on the interference – between ideology and form, I argue that what we find in this volume's deletions,

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71 See Meltzer, *Secular Revelations*, 111-124; Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 260-292; and Moon, *Disseminating Whitman*.

substitutions, additions, and rearrangements is that *Leaves of Grass* is just as flexible and dynamic as the bodies that populate it, and that its peculiar volatility continues to develop not despite but because of Whitman's teleological restructurations in the postwar years.

There is, in other words, another story that still needs to be told about Whitman's chronopolitical aesthetics after 1865. His syntactic revisions (which tend to supplant catalogs of the present with apostrophes toward the future), repositioning of clusters (which alternatively break apart and reconstellate *Leaves*' various mini-volumes), progressive reordering of poems (which are increasingly filled out with stanza and section numbers and thereby infused with a streamlined poetic temporality), all originate in, and in turn revolve around, a dialectical philosophy of history. But these numerous attempts to secure some formal sublation of conflict and difference within *Leaves* also carve out spaces for alternative temporal experiences. In many of these restructured poems, we encounter memories that return irrepressibly, past events that curve through the future and beyond, and dreams of the to-come that are not imminent but, instead, infinitely deferred – and these refractive temporalities cut across the postwar United States in a wayward manner.

To unpack these unruly temporalities, we will move from *Drum-Taps* (and its manifold afterlives) to the poems and clusters that Whitman composed in the Gilded Age and after. Across these motley verses and editions, we will discover that as Whitman attempted to envision some hidden equipoise between capitalism and democracy, and as he tried repeatedly to locate a poetic negation of the negation in the age of the strike, he not only crafted an imaginary temporality for the nation that was far more expansive, unilinear, and harmonious than the country's real synchronic experience, but also produced other time frames which eclipsed the very state that he regarded as so perfectly capacious and singularly unified.[72]

CANNONS AND AXLES:
DRUM-TAPS AND THE POLITICS OF RETROSPECTION

When Whitman published *Drum-Taps* in 1865, he deemed this new volume not merely equal but utterly "*superior* to *Leaves of Grass*." It is "certainly more perfect as a work of art," he wrote in a letter that year, since it is perfectly"adjusted in all its proportions." "I am perhaps mainly satisfied with Drum-Taps," he added, "because it delivers my ambition of the task that has haunted me, namely to

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72 This chapter thus takes up Betsy Erkkila's provocative call to resituate Whitman's poetry and politics in relation to the nineteenth-century "debates about labor, slavery, capital, and class" that extended from England and France to Germany and the United States. "Whitman's revolutionary poetics," she asserts, can be properly understood only as part of "a more global democratic struggle for human liberation and popular cultural expression," a struggle that led to the rise of transatlantic socialism. "Whitman, Marx, and the American 1848," in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*, ed. Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2007), 35-61 (the quotes come from 36 and 37). The critical trajectory of this chapter is also informed by M. Wynn Thomas's contention that "the passion of Whitman's identification with the workers never really waned," but, in fact, subsisted throughout his poetic career. See his essay "Labor and Laborers" in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 60-75. Alan Trachtenberg also offers an illuminating reading of Whitman's poetic engagements with the world of American laborers in "The Politics of Labor and the Poet's Work: A Reading of 'A Song for Occupations," in *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1994), 133-152.

express in a poem [. . .] the pending action of this *Time & Land we swim in*, with all their large conflicting fluctuations [,] [. . .] the shiftings, masses, & the whirl & deafening din, (yet over all, as by invisible hand, a definite purport & idea)." Whitman's preference for *Drum-Taps* over *Leaves of Grass* inhered primarily in the former's ability to translate this balance between "conflicting fluctuations" and the invisible "purport & idea" into a nearly flawless organization. Or, as he worded it: "Drum-Taps has none of the perturbations of Leaves of Grass."[73]

I want to consider a counter-factual – a history, in other words, that was entirely possible at one point but never actually occurred. Let us suppose that in 1866, Whitman, having deemed his war poems "superior to" and "more perfect as a work of art" than *Leaves of Grass*, decided to subsume the latter into *Drum-Taps* rather than vice versa. All of his following poetic productions, from "Proud Music of the Storm" to the *Centennial Songs*, become outgrowths of this more war-focused volume. Prewar texts like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Song of the Open Road" are either fundamentally revised or, because of their seeming extraneousness, excluded altogether. And *Memoranda of the War* becomes the primary text into which all of Whitman's other prose is collated, the nexus and index of his postwar thought.

Such a revisionary act would not have been beyond Whitman's imagination, especially considering the immense literary importance he placed on the war. Those "[f]our years," he claimed in his *Memoranda*, contained "centuries of native passion, first-class pictures, tempests of life and death," which in time will prove "an inexhaustible mine for the Histories, Drama, Romance and even Philosophy of centuries to come – indeed the Verteber of Poetry and Art [. . .] for all future America, (far more grand, in my opinion, to the hands capable of it, than Homer's siege of Troy, or the French wars to [sic] Shakspere)" (4). This conception of the war as the fated "Verteber" of American cultural production manifests repeatedly in Whitman's postwar writing, for instance in his 1876 essay on Shakespeare and poetry: "What the ancient siege of Ilium, and the puissance of Hector's and Agamemnon's warriors proved to Hellenic art and literature, and all art and literature since, may prove the war of attempted secession of 1861-'65 to the future aesthetics, drama, romance, poems of the United States" (*PP*, 1048). If the Civil War was an event of such world-historical significance, why did Whitman not make *Drum-Taps* his own poetic "Verteber"? Or, more to the point: what precisely is at stake, in terms of Whitman's postwar politics and revisionary praxis, in *Leaves of Grass* absorbing *Drum-Taps* rather than the reverse?

Our answer resides, in large degree, in the words and sentences of *Drum-Taps* itself, and in the volume's textual fate during the postwar decades. *Drum-Taps*' ostensibly perfect form in fact plagued Whitman in subsequent years, as he tried to incorporate these motley war poems into *Leaves of Grass*. If, as he claimed in 1892, *Leaves* was structured around a principle of absolute equilibrium ("In it each claim, ideal, line, by all lines, claims, ideals temper'd; / Each right and wish by other wishes, rights"), *Drum-Taps* threatened to disrupt this harmony (*LG*, III: 752). In 1867, *Drum-Taps* is included as a cluster for the very first time. Set apart from the rest of the volume and preceded by lines (in "Now Lift me Close") that separate the celebratory chants of *Leaves* from the trauma of the war, *Drum-Taps* comprises a set of poems and events not yet fully integrated into either the nation's historical coherence or Whitman's own poetic project. What we witness in the following decades is an effort, at once massive and detailed, on Whitman's part to merge the war's explosive contents into a progressive understanding of the United States' past, present, and future.

After he discovers time's democratic motive force, something quite remarkable happens to these war poems: they split up and disperse. Instead of retaining his nearly "perfect" volume of battle-songs, Whitman, in 1871, divides it into mini-clusters (*Marches Now the War is Over* and *Batched in War's*

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73 Whitman, letter to William D. O'Connor, January 6, 1865, *Selected Letters*, 109.

Perfume) and relocates certain poems (like "Year of Meteors") into *Leaves'* own subsections. The war essentially spills over into the rest of the volume, and Whitman tries to contain it by splitting up its contents and bringing them into relation with his philosophy of history. From 1871 onward, the war's "martial dirge[s]" and "convulsive throb[s]" are assiduously revised to blend with the mutations of Whitman's own chronopolitics (*LG*, II: 500). Here, for instance, is the 1865 version of "Shut not Your Doors":

> Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
> For that which was lacking among you all, yet needed most, I bring;
> A book I have made for your dear sake, O soldiers
> And for you, O soul of man, and for you, love of comrades;
> The words of my book nothing; the life of it every-thing;
> A book separate, not link'd with the rest, nor felt by the intellect;
> But you will feel every word, O Libertad! arm'd Libertad!
> It shall pass by the intellect to swim the sea, the air
> With joy with you, O soul of man.
> (*LG*, II: 456)

In 1871, Whitman transfers this chant from *Drum-Taps* to *Now Finale to the Shore* (a cluster about death and transition), and makes a number of substantial revisions:

> Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
> For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet needed most, I bring,
> Forth from the army, the war emerging – a book I have made,
> The words of my book nothing – the drift of it every-thing;
>
> A book separate, not link'd with the rest, nor felt by the intellect;
> But you, ye untold latencies, will thrill to every page;
> Through Space and Time, fused in a chant, and the flowing, eternal Identity,
> To nature, encompassing these, encompassing God -- to the joyous, electric All,
> To the sense of Death – and accepting, exulting in Death, in its turn, the same as life
> The entrance of Man I sing.
> (*LG*, II: 456)

These textual changes not only rededicate the volume (from dead soldiers to the more active and collective "army"), but also reframe *Drum-Taps* as a record of the war's "latencies" rather than a text sounding the ecstasies of "Libertad!" Recasting the war as an object-lesson in "Unionism" (that single,

"joyous, electric All" that infuses both "Space and Time"), Whitman concludes with a telling utterance: "The entrance of Man I sing." This is still an Adamic declaration, but now it is also a temporal judgment: this is not the "Man" of the 1855 *Leaves* but the "Man" of the Union army, the "Man" en masse who, in Washington's hospitals, gave Whitman a glimpse – as he put it in a letter to Emerson – of a deeper "medium world" that oscillates between the spheres of spirit and matter. This, in other words, is *modern* "Man," the fated offspring of the "great cathedral sacred industry" in whom "[n]estles the seed perfection" (*Selected Letters*, 46; *LG*, III: 616, 679).

Such future-oriented revisions proliferate in the post-1871 *Drum-Taps*. "Years of the Unperform'd" becomes "Years of the Modern," and the newly added technologies (i.e., the "world-spreading factories," the "steamship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, [and] the wholesale engines of war") herald a burgeoning and unprecedented era, "more gigantic than ever" (*LG*, II: 503-4). This sense of unburdened becoming is revoiced in "Turn O Libertad" (1865), which portrays the war as an epochal transition:

> Turn from lands retrospective recording proofs of the past,
> From the singers that sing the trailing glories of the past,
> From the chants of the feudal world, the triumphs of kings, slavery, caste,
> Turn to the world [. . .]
> and do not be alarm'd O Libertad – turn your undying face,
> To where the future, greater than all the past,
> Is swiftly, surely preparing for you.
> (*LG*, II: 525)

After studying Hegel and evolutionary theory in the late-1860s, Whitman amends this verse by adding a line that extends the assertion that "the war is over": "From it and all henceforth expanding, doubting no more, resolute, sweeping the world." The war is not simply an instance of freedom's dialectical unfolding; it is the latter's pivotal event. "Sweeping the world" and dealing a deathblow to all "proofs of the past," the war sublimates contradictions by remaking laws and creeds and poems. This teleological vision surfaces again at the very end of Whitman's *Memoranda*, where, after providing glimpses of "the Untold and Unwritten History of the War" in the prison camps and hospitals, Whitman offers this *Aufhebung*: "Great as they are, [. . .] and greater far to be, the United States too are but a series of steps in the eternal process of creative thought. And here is to my mind their final justification, and certain perpetuity [. . .] The glory of the Republic of The United States, in my opinion, is to be that, emerging from the light of the Modern and the splendor of Science, and solidly based on the past, it is to cheerfully range itself, and its politics are henceforth to come, under [. . .] universal laws, and embody them, and carry them out to serve them." Whitman concludes by descending from these speculative heights, ever so briefly, and then mounting them once again: "And the real History of the United States – starting from that great convulsive struggle for Unity, triumphantly concluded, and the South victorious, after all – is only to be written at the remove of hundreds, perhaps a thousand, years hence" (5, 68).

There is of course something deeply quietist, and perhaps even politically retrograde and naive, about this declaration of future fulfillment out of a "series of [historical] steps." Written on the eve of a compromise between the North and South that would terminate black Reconstruction and literally make "the South victorious, after all," Whitman's optimistic, evolutionary interpretation of the war – developed in the altered lines of *Drum-Taps* as well as in prose passages like the one above – seems woefully farsighted.[74] And yet, beyond and between its lines, Whitman's projection is also more than

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74 I am referring, more specifically, to what W.E.B. Dubois calls "the counter-revolution of property"

this. Composing these war poems and memoranda precisely when the "Union" was violently deferring – as Langston Hughes would later word it – the dream of freedom for generations to come, Whitman hints that, in a sense, the ideal readers of *Drum-Taps* have not yet even been born.[75] The true "weight and form and location" of the "world's greatest poem" is utterly unavailable to the Americans of the Gilded Age, who are surrounded by inequality. Freedom will arrive only "at the remove of hundreds, perhaps a thousand, years hence": there is a capitulation here, but there is also an insistence on the present's radical inadequacy. And this condition of continued deferral positions us, as much as Whitman, in a present that is still ongoing, a present in which "the light of the modern" has emerged as a fantasy of illumination, and in which the "vast crops of poor" have cast doubt upon the success of our great strike.

The gap between democracy's present and future is gauged not only in *Drum-Taps*' inner and outer modulations but also in its tendency to seep into, disrupt, and refashion *Leaves*' other, previously unrelated poems. After Appomattox, the introductory poem in 1860, "Proto-Leaf," is transformed from a song about the nation's synchronic perfection into a battle chant that indexes the emergent. In the poem's prewar version, Whitman equates his poetic design with America's democratic equilibrium:

> I will make a song that there shall be comity by
> day and by night between all The States, and
> between any two of them,
> And I will make a song of the organic bargains of
> These States – And a shrill song of curses on
> him who would dissever the union;
> And I will make a song for the ears of the President,
> full of weapons with menacing points,
> And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces.
> (*LG*, II: 277)

Here is the same passage in 1882, after the poem has been revised, retitled (now "Starting from Paumanok"), and relocated (so as to preface "Song of Myself"):

> I will make a song that there shall be comity by day and by night between
> all the States, and between any two of them,
> And I will make a song for the ears of the President, full of weapons with
> menacing points,

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that culminated in the negotiated election of 1876. Dubois summarizes: "On the 26th of February, [. . .] there were three conferences. The outcome was an agreement. The Republicans guaranteed that Mr. Hayes, when he became President, would by non-interference and the withdrawal of troops allow the planter-capitalists, under the name of Democrats, to control South Carolina and Louisiana [. . .] This meant that Southern landholders and capitalists would be put in complete control of disfranchised black labor." *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 692. On the endpoint of Reconstruction, see also Michael F. Holt, *By One Vote: The Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 2008), and C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

75 Ed Folsom also links Whitman to Langston Hughes in his essay, "So Long, So Long! Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, and the Art of Longing," in *Walt Whitman, Where the Future Becomes Present*, ed. Blake and Robertson, 127-143.

> And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces;
> And a song make I of the One form'd out of all,
> The fang'd and glittering One whose head is over all,
> Resolute warlike One including and over all,
> (However high the head of any else that head is over all.)
> (*LG*, II: 277-8)

Both stanzas begin by declaring *Leaves'* unwavering commitment to adhesiveness, but the lines that follow diverge sharply. While the prewar text anticipatively writes against the spirit of the *Songs of Insurrection* by praising the nation's "organic bargains" (i.e., the immutable but generative split between free states and slave states), the postbellum version retroactively integrates the fact of fratricidal violence into history's unitary schema. Personified as "fang'd" and"warlike," the State replaces the "song" as the sole agent of force. It alone, by extracting unity from difference ("the One form'd out of all") and absorbing every opposition, can manage conflict and govern "over all." If one of the main insights that Whitman drew from Unionism's ascent was the State's necessary and absolute centrality, here he is using this insight to revise a poem which, at least in its original inception, had nothing to do with either *Drum-Taps* or the war itself. Born in the blood of civil violence and culminating history's progressive drive, the State not only complements the bard's song but also embodies Whitman's haunting call for unbroken cohesion. Moreover, the equivalence between song and State, like the balance between spirit (democracy) and body (capitalism), is already accomplished within the terms of this poem: while the lines retained from 1856 project into the future ("I will"), the new lines which follow frame that future as already complete (the "One" is definitively "form'd," even "glittering" in its completeness).

Emerging, in equal parts, from the waking nightmares of Washington's hospitals and from the ecstatic fantasy of dialectics, Whitman's dream for the war is a dream of absorption. Blood is not simply spilled, but sacrificed; the Union is not simply severed, but reborn with new splendor. It is this desire for symbolic intercalation that guides his revisions from 1865 on through the rest of his life. At once renouncing and fixating on civil war, this revisionary impulse reaches far beyond *Drum-Taps*, altering poems as seemingly far removed as "The Poem of Many in One." The latter, which first appeared in 1856, was, after the war, renamed "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and endowed by Whitman with new thematic and formal importance. He even insisted in later years on placing the poem either around *Drum-Taps* (leading off *Songs of Parting* in 1867) or in the volume itself (the first text in *Marches Now the War is Over*). Its original opening lines, which lay claim to universality and reproduction, are much closer to "Song of Myself" than to "Eighteen Sixty-One" or "First O Songs for a Prelude":

> A Nation announcing itself,
> I myself make the only growth by which I
> can be appreciated,
> I reject none, accept all, reproduce all in my own
> forms.
>
> A breed whose testimony is behaviour,
> What we are, we are – nativity is answer enough
> to objections

Here, in contrast, is the beginning of the reconstructed text:

As I sat alone, by blue Ontario's shore,
As I mused of these warlike days, and of peace return'd, and the dead that return no more,
A Phantom, gigantic, superb, with stern visage accosted me;
Chant me the poem, it said, *that comes from the soul of America, chant me the carol of victory;*
And strike up the marches of Libertad – marches more powerful yet,
And sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy.

(Democracy, the destin'd conqueror, yet treacherous lip-smiles everywhere,
And Death and infidelity at every step.)
(*LG*, I: 190)

In Whitman's new lines, a disturbed past and threatened future interrupt a tranquil present. The poet's quiet musings are immediately cut short by the appearance of a "gigantic" "Phantom"; and then, following the speech of this unnamed spirit, comes that remarkable couplet: "(Democracy, the destin'd conqueror, yet treacherous lip-smiles everywhere, / And Death and infidelity at every step.)" This "Democracy" is wholly removed from the one we encountered in *Democratic Vistas* and "Turn O Libertad." It is less a self-contained telos than an unstable promise; less an *eclaircissement* of history and more an idea under siege. Whitman, however, does not *replace* the prior opening with these new lines. He instead retains the antebellum beginning ("A Nation announcing itself…") but relocates it to section two. Democracy's negation is thereby presented, but then immediately contained. Whitman, as always, is not interested here in simply denying contradiction but in making it productive. His revisions thus double the dialectical labor of history itself, searching out latent seeds and making them bear fruit. In the revised text above, he controls the very threat released in the poem's new opening by integrating death and infidelity into his own representative person ("I reject none, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms" [*LG*, I: 191]). A similar containment is achieved in the postwar text by an evolutionary framing of the democracy's past, present, and future:

I will make cities and civilizations defer to me,
This is what I have learnt from America – it is the amount, and it I teach again.

(Democracy, while weapons were everywhere aim'd at your breast,
I saw you serenely give birth to immortal children, saw in dreams your dilating form,
Saw you with spreading mantle covering the world.)
(*LG*, I: 208)

Michael Moon rightly notes that "[o]f all Whitman's poems," "By Blue Ontario's Shore"/"The Poem of Many in One" registers "perhaps most fully the scope of his revisionary practices" (*LG*, I: 201). These practices are at once political and literary, bearing on the question of democracy's fate as well as on the use and placement of words. If the U.S. before the war was, as Whitman elsewhere puts it, "barren, barren," after the Union army's "work [of] giants," the U.S. is full of eternal force (*LG*, I: 198, II: 455). It is a "dilating" empire that will finally and unreservedly realize Whitman's dream, first born in the 1840s, of annexing Canada and Cuba and the islands of the Pacific – but not before annexing *Leaves* as well, by bringing its motley sentences and scenes and desires into the unitary fold of democracy's imperial future.

This vision of impending unity is dependent, however, on something far less certain, and far less palpable, than territories or armies. The "flashing" of the United States' "power, weapons, [and] testimony" issues not from sheer might but from erasure and psychic resolution:

> America is only you and me, [. . .]
> Its endless gestation of new States are you and me,
> The war, (that war so bloody and grim, the war I will henceforth forget),
> was you and me,
> Natural and artificial are you and me,
> Freedom, language, poems, employments, are you and me,
> Past, present, future, are you and me.
> (*LG*, I: 207)

Whitman's antebellum liberalism has not simply disappeared; it has been subsumed. The atomized subject returns here only to partake in an "endless gestation." Time is embodied by discrete individuals, but also by the relations between them ("you and me"). Yet the most surprising declaration arises only in parentheses: Whitman, who has claimed repeatedly that the war will – and should – become the "Verteber" of all future American art, literature, and philosophy, pledges to "forget" this pivotal event altogether. This tension between remembrance and forgetting manifests again near the end of the poem:

> Bards for my own land only I invoke,
> (For the war the war is over, the field is clear'd,) [. . .]
> Bards of the great Idea! bards of the peaceful inventions! (for the war,
> the war is over!)
> (*LG*, I: 208)

Whitman may revel in the war's completion, but the damned thing keeps on returning. Despite being "over," the war here unsettles the poetic sentence, fracturing it with parentheses and warping its temporality by taking reader, poet, and text back, almost out of necessity, to that which is already supposedly rounded out. And in spite of Whitman's celebratory punctuation ("the war is over!"), the excessive repetition of the same idea, and indeed its reiterated presence throughout the rest of the poem, undermine the declaration's veracity and prompt one to ask: if indeed "the field is clear'd," why continue to plow it for remains? If democracy's future is both resplendent and assured, why do its past threats, like irrepressible phantoms, continue to resurface?

Literary critics of have tended to attribute the war's continuous return in *Leaves of Grass* to Whitman's "nostalgia." Noting the link between the dismantling of Reconstruction in 1876 and the "dismantling and dispersion of the poems in *Drum-Taps*," Ed Folsom argues that Whitman comes to embrace "the role of the old soldier, seeking out ways to make the country pay its obligation of memory." Luke Mancuso attributes Whitman's lasting attachment to the war to a "conservative nostalgia for antebellum cultural stability," a retrograde politics of memory that causes "traces of ghostliness" to "linger" throughout his Civil War writings. Robert Leigh Davis and Charley Shivley have brought attention to the literary and political importance of Whitman's hospital experiences, and have illuminated how his war poetry is connected to his development of a conflicted gay identity. However, considering what we have learned about the political context of Whitman's revisions, and about the centrality of workers to his poetic project, the Civil War's textual afterlife in *Leaves* must also be understood as part of an abiding engagement on Whitman's part with the postwar conflicts between capital and labor. He returns again and again to the war's events in the 1870s and 1880s precisely

because the disunity and violence ostensibly foreclosed by the Union's victory kept returning. And the result is not simply – as has been suggested – a "ghostliness" or "heteroglossia" in and between *Leaves* and *Drum-Taps*, but a sustained poetic inquiry into modernization by way of the Civil War, an artistic examination of the future via the uncompleted past.[76]

For Whitman, the link between the labor struggles of the postbellum years and the Union's struggles during the Civil War was immediately and immanently a problem of poetic form.[77] This question of form is encapsulated by a line that Whitman adds to "By Blue Ontario's Shore" in 1871: "As a wheel turns on its axle, so I find my chants turning finally on the war" (*LG*, I: 211). Putting into play ideas of movement, positioning, and structural interaction, this figure provides an apt embodiment for Whitman's chronopolitical understanding of the Civil War. The "Union war" is not only central in the sense that a wheel (*Leaves of Grass*) requires an axle (the war) to revolve, but is also static and unmoving because an axle must be frozen in place. This interplay between mobility and immobility structures "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and, in fact, symbolizes a more general tension between precedence and transcendence in and between *Drum-Taps* and *Leaves of Grass*. Increasingly oriented toward the future's unborn but determined arrival, Whitman's new and altered poems also testify to the past's motley returns. Indeed, within Whitman's very efforts to effect stability through a progressive restructuring in the postwar *Leaves*, we find an instability – an intractable waywardness – on the level of form. At once yearning to leave the war behind while making it the spinal element in all his poetry, at once desiring to advance in pace with time's evolutionary telos while being continuously drawn to the past, Whitman makes his poems as aleatory and paradoxical as "this *Time & Land we swim in*." The axle around which everything is supposed to spin appears alternatively in his revisions as broken and perfectly fixed; while at other points in other poems, it threatens to enlarge and become the wheel itself. Despite its visual and conceptual neatness, Whitman's mechanical figure turns out to be radically unstable.

To a degree, Whitman himself was aware of the temporal tensions and structural instabilities engendered by his attempt, as M. Wynn Thomas words it, "to turn *Leaves of Grass* itself into a veteran's testimony, into a centenarian's song, as it were" (*The Lunar Light*, 254). When Whitman makes the impossible claim in 1891 that "my 'Leaves' could not possibly have emerged or been fashion'd or completed" from any event other than "the absolute triumph of the National Union arms," he does so by reading the past through the future and characterizing his antebellum poems as mere inchoate expressions: "although I had made a start before, only from the occurrence of the Secession

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76 Folsom, "Lucifer and Ethiopia," 75; Mancuso, *The Strange Sad War Revolving*, 291; Davis, *Whitman and the Romance of Medicine* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997); and Shivley, *Drum Beats: Walt Whitman's Civil War Boy Lovers* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1989). David Reynolds offers a contrasting reading of sexuality in *Drum-Taps*, emphasizing the volume's concessions to "the postbellum moral environment," in *Walt Whitman's America*, 461-3. Roy Morris, Jr. develops makes a similar argument in *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), claiming that the war that "claimed Lincoln" also took "away a fundamental part of the poet himself, the part that believed in the blissful love of comrades as a working model for the American republic" (229).

77 On Whitman's formal innovations in the wake of the war, see also Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 212-222, and Coviello, "Introduction" to Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War*, ed. Coviello (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), xxiii-xxv. Erkkila reads *Drum-Taps* as a volume of proto-modernist verse that represents the war through "lyric rather than epic terms" (212) and thereby challenges totalizing interpretations of the conflict, while Coviello draws attention to how the opaque syntax of Whitman's war poetry undermines the transparency and "oracular immediacy" that were so important to his prewar verse (xxv).

War, and what it show'd me as by flashes of lightning, with the emotional depths it sounded and arous'd (of course, I don't mean in my heart only, I saw it just as plainly in others, in millions) [. . .] only from the strong flare and provocation of that war's sights and scenes the final reasons-for-being of an autochthonic and passionate song definitely came forth" (*PP*, 661, 666). The counter-factual I offered earlier is thus, on certain levels, not a counter-factual at all. Beginning in 1867, *Leaves* is, in a sense, *Drum-Taps* writ large. The "barbaric yawp" of the antebellum bard merges – slowly but definitively, and almost against the rough notes of its own chants – with the "pulses of rage" and "currents convulsive" of America's war (*LG*, II: 543).

This pull between projection and retrospection creates a jaggedness within *Drum-Taps* as well as outside and beyond it. While poems such as "Long, too Long America," "This Day, O Soul" and "Turn O Libertad" frame the war as a necessary outgrowth of time's progress, other adjacent verses challenge such prophetic declarations. The main *Drum-Taps* cluster of 1871 commences with these four lines:

> *Aroused and angry,*
> *I thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war;*
> *But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd, and I resign'd myself,*
> *To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead.*
> (*LG*, III: 630)

Untitled, prefacing the cluster, and set apart both spatially and visually (it is the only text of Whitman's in which every line is italicized), this single stanza poem is as much a renunciation as a resignation. Refusing to celebrate the war's violence, he distances his book from his own strident battle chants. In *Leaves*' subsequent editions, he integrated these lines into "The Wound-Dresser," where they appear only in parentheses and are sutured through Whitman's ameliorative self:

> An old man bending I come among new faces,
> Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,
> Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love me,
> (Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,
> But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,
> To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead;)
> Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,
> Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? The other was equally brave;)
> Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth
> (*LG*, II: 479-80)

Drawn to the faces of the dead as well as to what the Union's victory represents, Whitman is torn between remembrance and anticipation. It is no accident that the above stanza, tempering his rejection of "relentless war," is first included in the edition of *Leaves* most replete with portraits (1876): Whitman, the nurse-poet with "hinged knees and steady hand," whose healing touch spreads across states and bodies, figures himself as the nation's own "wound-dresser." "My book and the war are one": in the "final substance" of his exceptional, regenerative person, Whitman subsumes the past's traumas (*LG*, III: 628). In so doing, he renounces any distance between himself and the nation's dialectical struggle – an attachment that derives, perhaps, from the fact that the war, according to Robert Leigh Davis, gave truth to a vision of "homosexual democracy" which Whitman hoped would never diminish or disappear (41).

A gap between the poet and the war, and between the book and the redeemed nation,

nonetheless persists in these supposed unities. Although buried by the "cleared field" of peace, the dead continue to populate *Leaves*' postwar clusters, from *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (1871) to *Sands at Seventy* (1888). These innumerable ghosts of Union soldiers, returning persistently to be "witnessed again," originate, of course, in *Drum-Taps*. In the "Hymn of Dead Soldiers" (1865), for instance, after commencing with a kind of prayer ("ONE breath, O my silent soul, / A perfum'd thought – no more I ask, for the sake of all / dead soldiers"), Whitman welcomes the apparitions of his former soldier-friends and lovers:

> But aside from [. . .] the crowd's hurrahs, and
> the land's congratulations,
> Admitting around me comrades close, unseen by
> the rest, and voiceless,
> I chant this chant of my silent soul, in the name of all
> dead soldiers.
> [. . .]
> Phantoms, welcome, divine and tender!
> Invisible to the rest, henceforth become my companions;
> Follow me ever! desert me not, while I live.
>
> Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living! sweet
> are the musical voices sounding!
> But sweet, ah sweet, are the dead, with their silent eyes.
> (*LG*, II: 511)

When he rewrites this poem in the following years, the claims of the dead only strengthen. In the 1871 text (now entitled "Ashes of Soldiers"), Whitman wishes to not simply "bathe [in] the memories of all dead soldiers" but utterly "*embalm* them" (*LG*, II: 512; my emphasis). The original, vaguely spiritual opening is likewise reworked into a far more haunting invocation:

> Ashes of soldiers South or North,
> As I muse retrospective murmuring a chant in thought,
> The war resumes, again to my sense your shapes,
> And again the advance of armies
>
> Noiseless as mists and vapors,
> From their graves in the trenches ascending, [. . .]
> From every point of compass out of the countless graves,
> In wafted clouds, in myriads large, or squads of twos or threes or single ones
> they come,
> And silently gather round me.
> (*LG*, II: 510)

Whitman is negotiating a conflict here between traumatic memory and projective desire. The "countless graves" of the Union soldiers reappear "again" and "again" in his mind precisely when these martyr-deaths are supposed to guarantee the past's erasure (as the ashes "fructify all with the last chemistry" [*LG*, II: 512]). If, in the wake of the nation's dialectical struggle, Whitman writes the tension between experience and expectation by developing a Hegelian philosophy of history, he is nonetheless quite conscious of the limitations of this move. While "the great expense of suffering

during the Civil War" is indeed, as Kathryne Lindberg claims, by and large "swept up into [*Leaves of Grass*] as a moment of [the] abstract struggle and dialectical opposition by which history progresses," this suffering retains a strange capacity to refuse its own sublation and thereby disrupt the telos that is supposedly guaranteed (244). The gaps between the past and the future are thus never entirely bridged within *Leaves*, in spite of Whitman's revisionary labors. The already completed, or the ostensibly rounded out, tend to reemerge over and over in visions and memories of the dead that weave throughout his postwar writings, and a pattern of continuous return comes to structure the entirety of his poetic volume.

To account for this retrospective drive, we could proceed from a few different interpretive viewpoints. To understand this lacuna between Whitman's philosophy of history and the fissures in his postwar poetics, one could follow the insights of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Fredric Jameson and argue that Whitman's rewriting and restructuring effect a symbolic resolution, and that the occasional failure of this resolution in *Leaves* (in texts such as "Ashes") derives from the impossibility of such a symbolic suture in the real world. Whitman cannot simply sing his way out of modernity's iron cage. Or, following the recent resurgence of formalist criticism in literary studies, one could construe the fractures and remainders in Whitman's progressive revisions as evidence of literary form's tendency to "bite back" against historicism and establish its own sphere of influence.[78] Whitman's revisionary practices nonetheless force us to qualify both of these interpretive impulses. If, after the war, *Leaves* is evermore geared toward the resolution of conflicts between capital and democracy, and between remembrance and expectation, that resolution is as fluid as these conflicts themselves. Hence the importance of Whitman's persistent characterization of his poetry as not verse but *music*, an art-form that, as Heine explains, is peculiarly attuned to the complexities of time and matter: "There is something strange, even wonderful, about music. It stands midway between thought and appearance – a twilight intermediary between spirit and matter – related to both, yet different. It is spirit – but in need of time's measurement; it is matter – that can disperse with space."[79] In his postwar prose and poetry, Whitman insists again and again on music's unique qualities, associating the fluidity of sound with the aesthetics and politics of the literary avant-garde ("to me," he goes so far to say, "sound leads

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78 See Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1971), and Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 17-102. Marjorie Levinson provides a useful overview of new formalism in "What is New Formalism?," *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007): 558-69. Some of the more influential and representative scholarly works of this movement (if it can be called such) include: Jonathan Loesberg, *A Return to Aesthetics: Autonomy, Indifference, and Postmodernism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005); the essays in *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2006); Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997); and Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002). The phrase about the text "biting back" comes from Ellen Rooney, "Form and Contentment," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000): 38.

79 Heinrich Heine, *The Poetry and Prose of Heinrich Heine*, trans. and ed. Fredric Ewen (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), 652. Whitman's political and aesthetic attachment to sound is also articulated in his 1876 preface to *Leaves*: "In certain parts in these flights, or attempting to depict or suggest them, I have not been afraid of the charge of obscurity, in either of my two volumes – because human thought, poetry or melody, must leave dim escapes and outlets – must possess a certain fluid, aerial character, akin to space itself, obscure to those of little or no imagination, but indispensable to the highest purposes. Poetic style, when address'd to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effect thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor" (*PP*, 1037).

o'er all the rest" [*LG*, III: 580]). Partly for this reason, Max Cavitch has recently drawn attention to the importance of the musical theory of "counterpoint" for Whitman, and demonstrated the structural affinity between *Leaves* and contrapuntal musical compositions that revel in acoustic conflict and divergence (244-5).

In his music before the war, Whitman tried to capture an ideal United States through synchronic arrest. But that dream of perfected simultaneity was exploded by the war's violence. After 1865, Whitman develops a dialectical method of poetic editing and attempts to stretch his music along a different time scale. And yet some of his revised poems also push beyond, and sometimes even against, the progressive patterns of these changes: apostrophes cover a chasm between present and future that never entirely disappears; the faces and voices of the deceased retain a powerful hold in spite of their absorption into history's evolution; and regardless of how frequently or vigorously Whitman disavows the war's persistence, it repeatedly reasserts itself in *Leaves*' missing words, scenes, and ellipses (the ghost limbs of his poetry).[80] In endeavoring to ensoul a nation evermore rounded down and emptied out, Whitman may sing the praises of the Civil War and the consolidation that follows it, but his wayward notes also launch forth different voices and preserve remnants that elude the sublative force of "Time." Rather than opting for either a new historicist or new formalist reading of this paradox, we would do best to think about Whitman's poems in terms of a continuous feedback loop between their politico-historical pressures and their formal reconstitutions. Whitman incessantly revises his poems during the postwar years in order to make sense of, and give form to, history's linearity, but these altered verses also bend and break these temporal lines, creating other senses of connection and other types of projection and remembrance.

In *Drum-Taps*, these alternative lines of temporal movement acquire a number of related forms. Although Hegelian dialectics structure poems such as "Shut not your Doors," "Weave in, My Hardly Life," and "Give me the Splendid Silent Sun," other non-teleological time frames surface throughout the volume, particularly in the poems about music. *Drum-Taps*, which in 1865 begins with a "prelude" and concludes with the word "songs," is utterly replete with chants and related sounds, from the Union army's "drum and fife" and Manhattan's "soft opera-music" to the bird's carol in "Lilacs" whose eulogy alone "tallies" the "voice of [Whitman's] spirit" (*LG*, II: 536). The significance of this underlying musicality is especially palpable in the "Song of the Banner at Daybreak." Towards the poem's outset, Whitman's imaginary bard describes his task as outstripping the capacities of mere words:

> Words! book-words! what are you?
> Words no more, for hearken and see,
> My song is there in the open air, and I must sing,

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80 One of these returns emerges in *Memoranda of the War* when Whitman, almost writing against the spirit of his own reconciliationist politics, discusses the "releas'd prisoners of War": "[They] are now coming up from the Southern prisons. I have seen a number of them. The sight is worse than any sight of battle-fields or any collections of wounded, even the bloodiest. There was, (as a sample,) one large boat load, of several hundreds [. . .] and out of the whole number only three individuals were able to walk from the boat. The rest were carried ashore and laid down in one place or another. Can those be men – those little livid-brown, ash-streak'd, monkey-looking dwarfs? – are they really not mummied, dwindled corpses? They lay there, most of them, quite still, but with a horrible look in their eyes and skinny lips, often with not enough flesh on the lips to cover their teeth. Probably no more appaling sight was ever seen on this earth. (There are deeds, crimes, that may be forgiven; but this is not among them. It steeps its perpetrators in blackest, escapeless, endless damnation. Over 50,000 have been compell'd to die the death of starvation – reader, did you ever try to realize what *starvation* actually is? – in those prisons – and in a land of plenty!" (50).

With the banner and pennant a-flapping.
(*LG,* II: 458)

Unlike "book-words," music corresponds to nature and – alone, it seems – is able to record otherwise unrecordable actions and emotions (the "uncaught, unwritten" as he puts it in "Proud Music of the Storm" [*LG*, III: 582]). Song is a supersensible language of the soul, a discourse able to capture that which – as he words it in "The Mystic Trumpeter" – is "chaotically surging" in this "fretting world" (*LG,* II: 642). It entails for Whitman a rather unique mode of experience, one able to connect spirit with matter without collapsing either. This renunciation of mere "Words!" in fact extends throughout *Drum-Taps*, as Whitman's war-time voice endeavors to acquire the same tendencies and properties as the Union's "terrible drums." The latter's melodious violence are the subject of "Beat! Beat! Drums!":

Beat! beat! drums! -- blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows – through the doors – burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet – no happiness must he have now with his
bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums – so shrill you bugles blow.
(*LG,* II: 486-7)

These drums and bugles possess a peculiar power, and even exert something like a revolutionary force, as they "scatter" congregations, turn people out of doors, and disrupt the nation's everyday labors and exalted institutions. Yet these "ruthless" instruments do not bring about the necessity of History in a Hegelian sense; the music they produce is far more undetermined than that. Indeed, their "fierceness" inheres largely in their ability to surprise. As such, these "shrill" bugles and drums encapsulate the role of music in the volume more generally: it tends to create a different rhythm for the war, an experience of the conflict oriented not toward any historical schema (liberal or otherwise) but, instead, towards that which is aleatory and unfixed. A certain historical open-endedness, in other words, is generated by Whitman's prizing of the acoustic.

This musical underside of Whitman's postwar poetics expresses, on the level of form, the tension between retrospection and anticipation that I noted earlier. It also bears quite directly not only on Whitman's understanding of the war as a chronopolitical event but also on the manner in which he thought he recorded this event. Consider the 1865 poem, "Did You Ask Dulcet Rhymes From Me?" (retitled "To a Certain Civilian" in 1871), in which Whitman explicitly ties music to the broader meaning of *Drum-Taps*, and to his larger poetic project:

Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?
Did you seek the civilian's peaceful and languishing rhymes?
Did you find what I sang erewhile so hard to follow?
What I was singing erewhile was not for you to follow, to understand – nor am
I now;
(I have been born of the same as the war was born,
The drum-corps' rattle is ever to me sweet music, I love well the martial dirge,
With slow wail and convulsive throb leading the officer's funeral;)
What to such as you anyhow such a poet as I? therefore leave my works,
And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with piano-tunes,

> For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me.
> (*LG*, II: 500)

This poem shows us a wartime Whitman far more intractable than most of his critics have recognized, a Whitman whose poetic chants enact a violent unsettling. These lines evoke a wayward music, a "rattle" that involves not some unquestioning endorsement but a transfer of the "martial dirge" into Whitman's own political aesthetics. As this militant musicality unfolds in *Drum-Taps*, it fosters a non-teleological medium of experience through which the dead are able to return time and time again and the conflict's events and memories come to acquire an inexorable, spiritual afterlife. This is decidedly not nostalgia, which evacuates the present of meaningful content (and is therefore the temporality *par excellence* of the marketplace), but a more generative form of remembrance that forces the past not only to return but also to extend and amplify, even into the future. Predicated on this more refractive, non-linear time frame, Whitman's war chants become fluid, untimely, and unfixed, and in so doing unfold at a certain remove from his own teleological revisions and fantasies of harmonious political reunion.

While this connection between time and music in *Drum-Taps* has gone largely unnoticed, the volume's broader temporal complexities have not. Michael Warner argues that the book develops overlapping "rhetorics of time" which, collectively, forge "an unusually tight [logic] of historicity." "One poem," Warner notes, "is [simply] called '1861'" while "several others address themselves to calendrical years, recreating and commenting upon historical frames of expectation and uncertainty [. . .] I call this a tight rhetoric of historicity because it is hard to think of analogues to this sustained evocation of experience mediated by a calendar." The thrust of Warner's reading is that the temporality constructed in *Drum-Taps* is decidedly non-standard and heterogeneous:

> it is not newspaper time that is recorded here, and the driving point of these titles is that the calendar itself has been rendered directionless and nonnumerically suggestive – a kind of anti-calendar. There are other temporalities that matter a great deal in the volume, such as the complex anticipated retrospection in 'The Dresser' ... or the running counterpoint of lunar time; or the antiquarian retrospect of 'The Centennarian's Story'; or the photographic freezing of those extremely short, imagistic poems that no one knows quite what to do with; 'A farm picture,' 'Cavalry crossing a ford [. . .] *Drum-Taps* [ultimately] does not exactly record history; events have been pushed to the margin along with the historical god who is usually thought to direct them. Its oddly looped narrative time is registered through a kind of trembling before history.[81]

Warner's analysis nicely highlights the political and formal importance of time in *Drum-Taps*, and his description of the volume's "oddly looped narrative time" helps elucidate the refractive impulse that I have been describing from a different angle. His reading, however, tends to misconstrue the politics attached to *Drum-Taps*' varied time frames. Because the volume promotes a vision of temporal multiplicity, Warner suggests, it is utterly opposed to the nation and its calendar. Such a reading, especially in the wake of the post-nationalist turn within Americanist criticism, is certainly tempting, but it overlooks the ways in which *Drum-Taps*' temporal heterogeneity gets reintegrated by Whitman back into his progressive, dialectical poetics. What I am arguing for, in other words, is a more complex sense of the volume's chronopolitics, one that frames *Drum-Taps* not as exclusively "for" or "against" the nation but as alternatively inside and outside of its time frames. At moments, *Drum-Taps*

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81 Michael Warner, "Civil War Religion and Whitman's *Drum-Taps*," in *Walt Whitman, Where the Future Becomes Present*, ed. Blake and Robertson, 84, 86.

reproduces the very temporal consciousness that buttressed the imperial expansion of the American State after the Civil War. This is the temporality bodied forth in poems like "Years of the Modern"/"Years of the Unperform'd," with its vision of America "advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage," and "Turn O Libertad," with its fantasy of an armed democracy "expanding, doubting no more, resolute, sweeping / the world." However, what is remarkable in *Drum-Taps* – not only on its own terms but also in relation to *Leaves of Grass* – is that it discloses the extent to which Whitman himself is troubled by what remains unintegrated by these ostensibly fixed teleological transformations. His postwar poetry sometimes reproduces, or attempts to corporealize, the temporal coordinates of American national consolidation, but in *Drum-Taps*' musical rhythms, attachments to the dead, and refractive temporalities we find powerful instances of escape and difference. Thus, to return once again to our counter-factual: what would be lost if *Drum-Taps* had subsumed *Leaves* are these generative, wayward time frames that *Drum-Taps*, precisely through its varied inclusion, is able to develop in the midst of *Leaves*' dialectical restructuring.

"TO FORMULATE THE MODERN": THE STRUCTURE OF *LEAVES* IN THE WAKE OF *DRUM-TAPS*

Such was the postwar fate of *Drum-Taps*. Born as an autonomous whole, then broken up, scattered, and, finally, partially regrouped, these war-poems constitute something like a fractured totality within *Leaves of Grass*. In the preceding pages, we have seen how *Drum-Taps* is assiduously rewritten in tandem with Whitman's development of a dialectical philosophy of history; and we have seen how, through these revisions, *Drum-Taps* continues to forge temporalities that resist this revisionary method. Yet what of *Leaves*, that book of books that eventually absorbed Whitman's "psalms of the dead" (*LG*, II: 555)? Because the story of *Drum-Taps* is inextricable from the story of *Leaves*, we must ask: To what extent is Whitman's protean volume itself a fractured totality? And how, during these same years, did *Leaves* bridge these gaps between anticipation and remembrance, and between the teleological guarantees of history and its present manifestations? This subsection addresses these questions through an analysis of *Leaves*' postwar structures. Its subject is how Whitman understood the chronopolitics of democracy in the age of the strike as an immanent problem of poetic form.

First, a recapitulation is in order. Before delving into the alternative temporalities forged in the postwar *Leaves*, we must unpack the Hegelian refrains in Whitman's music, the dialectics that guide his song. In 1855, that song begins, of course, with the untitled poem that he would eventually christen "Song of Myself." I want to draw attention to a point at the end of the text, where, after announcing and celebrating his sacrificial gift ("I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun [. . . and] bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love" [*LG*, I: 82-3]), Whitman concludes with two stanzas that promise regeneration and reencounter:

> 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
> (*LG*, I: 83)

Punctuated not with a period or exclamation mark but with an absence, this prophecy of felt simultaneity is followed by a large swath of white space and then, on the next page, another solicitation:

> Come closer to me,
> Push close my lovers and take the best I possess,
> Yield closer and closer and give me the best you possess.
>
> This is unfinished business with me . . . . how is it with you?
> I was chilled with the cold types and cylinder and wet paper
> Between us.
>
> I pass so poorly with paper and types . . . . I must pass
> With the contact of bodies and souls.

These stanzas flow together as if they were from the same poem. In guaranteeing renewed fellowship and then whispering an amative command ("Come closer to me / Push close my lovers"), these lines construct a fantasy of absolute, immediate connection between poet and reader. Such intimacy, Tenney Nathanson has argued, derives from the "imaginative urgency" of Whitman's textual presence, the "image of voice" crafted in *Leaves of Grass* that effectively fuses the body and the word (1-2, 7). Yet, lacking any concluding punctuation, the powerful word of address, "you," also extends between the pages, joining the varied, untitled poetic "leaves" of Whitman's volume. After the war, these connections disappear: Whitman tacks on a period to the final sentence of "Song of Myself" ("I stop somewhere waiting for you."), adds stanza and section numbers, annexes texts to different clusters, and fills up the blank intervals between poems – here and elsewhere replete with presence, substantiating Whitman's democratic ideal – with formal titles.[82] By 1882, in place of the adhesive absence and interconnection of 1855, the reader encounters something far more distanced and self-contained:

> A Song for Occupations
>
> I
>
> A song for occupations!
> In the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the
> Developments,
> And find the eternal meanings.
> (*LG*, I: 83)

Whitman retained some version of the opening lines – at one point even adding, as if out of frustration, a line calling out to the "American masses!" – until 1871. Thereafter, these less erotic, more teleological lines take their place. In its varying forms, the text thus shuttles between additions and reductions, supplements and deletions, which feed back upon one another.

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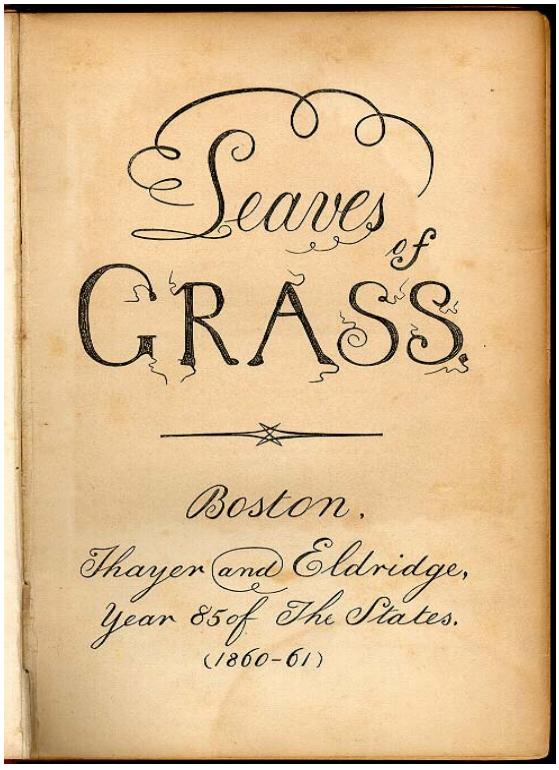
82 These alterations, it should be noted, do not all occur at once. The concluding period, for instance, is first added in 1856, and the stanza and section numbers after the Civil War. I am arguing, in other words, that these manifold changes *collectively* revise the relationship between poet and reader and, in so doing, provide a formal expression of Whitman's postwar politics.

Whitman's postbellum move away from corporeal proximity and synchronicity, exemplified in these lines, has frequently been attributed to a reduction in his creative powers, to a gradual embrace of politico-aesthetic conventionality, or to an attempt to maximize his popular appeal. The new lines introducing Whitman's poem are nonetheless no less ecstatic than the verse they replace: beginning with a climax that does not simply describe but celebrates its subject ("A song for occupations!"), and taking pleasure in a kind of penetration ("I find the / Developments, / And find the eternal meanings"), these revised lines involve a transfer rather than a repression of Whitman's erotic energies. If, as I argued in chapter one, the subject of liberal ideology shifted after the war from artisans and individuals to machines and collectivities, the form and content of Whitman's *Leaves* are, in certain respects, symptomatic of this change. His representations of intimacy and simultaneity, both felt and imagined, tend to be subsumed in the postwar editions of *Leaves of Grass* by a futural drive that not only fills out new poems (like "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" and the 1888 "America") but also finds its way into texts written before "the Union war" (*PP*, 1064).

While such modifications are of course local to "A Song for Occupations," they are also bound up with a deeper mutation in *Leaves of Grass*. In 1855, Whitman's book comprises an organic collection of poems – all untitled and unclustered – that hook into, amplify, and extend one another's lines and themes. In the initial editions, the book's own material presentation, from its exterior (green and yellow, like autumn) to its typeface (which twirls across the page, like natural outgrowths), mimics this sense of organic coextensiveness:



(Title page of the 1860 Thayer and Eldridge edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
Courtesy of the Walt Whitman Archive: http://www.whitmanarchive.org/)

With its poems, from "Song of Myself" to "States!" and "Salut au Monde!," continuously looping together and moving backwards and forwards in rhythm and theme, *Leaves of Grass* is an intensely cyclical production before the Civil War.[83] After the "streams of blood, full of volition, full / of joy,"

83 For a more general account of how the material book of *Leaves of Grass* alters over time, see Ed

however, this circularity is supplanted by linearity: stanza and section numbers organize the poems' progression; clusters forge narratives, both collective and self-contained, out of disparate poetic series; and in the revised poems, the reader is evermore distanced from the amative body and swept up, like the present itself, into time's teleological flow (*LG*, II: 458).

In the changes that Whitman makes to his volume from 1867 on through the 1880s and 1890s, a principle of arrangement and revision takes hold which rearticulates the futural logic of his postwar politics. The "whole Universe is absolute Law," he writes in *Notes Left Over*, and freedom itself but "the potent Law of Laws": the postwar *Leaves of Grass* register Whitman's attempts to coordinate his poetic lifework to this cosmography of limits (*PP*, 920). This formal drive adheres to the structural reason of dialectics, which consists, as Whitman argued in 1882, in the generation of unity out of antagonism:

> According to Hegel the whole earth [. . .] with its infinite variety, the past, the surroundings of to-day, or what may happen in the future, the contrarieties of material with spiritual, and of natural with artificial, are all, to the eye of the *ensemblist*, but necessary sides and unfoldings, different steps or links, in the endless process of Creative thought, which, amid numberless apparent failures and contradictions, is held together by central and never-broken unity – not contradictions or failures at all, but radiations of one consistent and eternal purpose; the whole mass of everything steadily, unerringly tending and flowing toward the permanent *utile* and *morale*, as rivers to oceans [. . . This is] the most thoroughly American point of view I know. In my opinion the above formulas of Hegel are an essential and crowning justification of New World democracy in the creative realms of time and space. There is that about them which only the vastness, the multiplicity, and the vitality of America would seem to comprehend, to give scope and illustration to, or to be fit for, or even originate. It is strange to me that they were born in Germany, or in the old world at all. (*PP*, 1097)[84]

To correct for this strangeness, Whitman translated this philosophy into a structural principle for his poetry. His first concerned attempt to reorganize his verse according to the "*utile* and *morale*" of time's consolidated unity comes, as we have seen, immediately after the war, yet this systematizing impulse also extends through the entirety of *Leaves of Grass*.

In the 1871 edition, Whitman achieves this progressive resequencing, in part, through the insertion of stanza and section numbers (considerably more numerous in here than in any other *Leaves*). "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" acquires, for the first time, numerical breaks that inject the poem

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Folsom, *Whitman Making Books/Books Making Whitman: A Catalog and Commentary* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2005).

84 The quote about Hegel comes from Whitman's essay "Carlyle from American Points of View" in *Specimen Days*, and the quote about the "Law of Laws" comes from his redefinition of liberty as a form of paradoxical constraint in *Notes Left Over*. In the latter, Whitman construes freedom as "activity and license under the law," explaining that "[s]trange as it may seem, we only attain to freedom by a knowledge of, and implicit obedience to, Law. Great – unspeakably great – is the Will! the free Soul of man! At its greatest, understanding and obeying the laws, it can then, and then only, maintain true liberty. For there is to the highest, that law as absolute as any – more absolute as any – the Law of Liberty. The shallow [. . .] consider liberty a release from all law, from every constraint. The wise see in it, on the contrary, the potent Law of Laws, namely, the fusion and combination of the conscious will, or partial individual law, with those universal, eternal, unconscious ones, which run through all Time, [and] pervade history" (*PP*, 1097).

with a processional movement absent in its 1856 version. The disintegration of time which allows Whitman to continuously "Closer yet [. . .] approach you" is thereby brought into tension with a segmented and accumulative poetic structure that makes both time and distance prevail despite Whitman's avowals. Similarly, "Song of Myself," which began as a dynamic collection of meditations, solicitations, and claims that unfold in concentric circles, is remade into a far more linear poem that is broken down into fifty-two sections. More internally ordered from 1867 on, Whitman's longest poem still attempts to animate the present and its antecedents – breathing life and motion into "laws and songs and behaviour" – but its structural arrangement now guides the poem along a progressive path (*LG*, I: 24). Instead of interweaving and circulating, Whitman's stanzas sequester themselves in semi-autonomous groupings about the communication of the soul (section 5), or music (section 18), or Northern and Southern harmony (section 16), or nature's infinities (section 31).

These numerical separations do not simply alter the rhythm of the poem. They also delve into the lines themselves, rerouting and reconstituting the text's meanings. For instance, section twelve, which depicts the active bodies of young workers – from a "butcher-boy" taking "off his killing clothes" to "[b]lacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests" – ends with this attestation:

> From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements,
> The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,
> Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so sure,
> They do not hasten, each man hits his place.
> (*LG*, I: 13)

Beginning with the first postwar edition in 1867, these lines are followed by a large block of white space and a section heading ("13"), which jointly preface the subsequent description:

> The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags
> underneath on its tied-over chain,
> The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he stands
> pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,
> His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens his hip-band,
> His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away
> from his forehead,
> The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his polish'd
> and perfect limbs.
> (*LG*, I: 13-14)

The limbs and features of this latter figure appear, on one level, to be inseparable from those of the butcher and blacksmiths. Yet the parallelism manifest in 1855 is disrupted by the section heading appended after the war. Despite the appeal of his "commanding" body, the black worker is set apart from the self-contained stanzas of section 12, now quarantined in a disparate section that is not about labor at all but, rather, about the poet's own spectacular universalism ("I believe in [. . .] wing'd purposes, / And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me" [*LG*, I: 14-15]). Whitman, who tended to consider black freedom as detached from the cause of "Unionism," here is grafting his racial philosophy, as well as the liberal conception of time with which it is fused, onto his methods of poetic revision and rearrangement. Corporeally present yet politically mute, the "dark proletariat" – as W.E.B. DuBois would later phrase it – is structurally excluded from the gravitational hold of free labor, that "great heat in the [nation's] fire" (16).

Whitman's attempt to rework the "[o]ne common indivisible destiny for All" into a form for

Leaves also results in a prodigious – and quite careful – reclustering of poems after the war (*LG*, III: 621). No longer a semi-organic, loosely organized mass of poems, *Leaves* is scattered in 1871 into seven discrete mini-clusters. These subsections, each removed from one another, perform an important balancing act in concert with the texts to which they are adjoined. "With Antecedents," for instance, finds the rejoinder to its questions ("Have I forgotten any part? any thing in the past?") in the aptly-titled cluster that immediately follows it, *The Answerer*. But Whitman's most powerful attempts to effect a structural equipoise inhere in his syntactic modifications. The inventories that fill out much of Whitman's antebellum poetry appear far less frequently in his post-1867 poems. These lists perturbed Emerson, who complained, "I expect him to make the songs of the nation, but he seems to be contented to make the inventories."[85] Yet Whitman's catalogs are hardly the empty obverse of the nation's chants: their heterogeneous images and excited bodies index a universal motility and eroticize the present's many movements. In "A Song for Occupations" (which begins, we recall, with the plea to "Come closer [. . .] my lovers"), Whitman makes democracy's "whole come back" through a spectacular juxtaposition of locations and labors:

> The usual routine . . . . the workshop, factory, yard, office, store or desk;
> The jaunt of hunting or fishing, or the life of haunting or fishing,
> Pasturelife, foddering, milking and herding, and all the personnel and usages;
> The plum-orchard, and apple-orchard . . . . gardenings . . seedlings, cuttings, flowers and vines,
> Grains and manures . . marl, clay, loam . . the subsoil plough . . the shovel and pick and rake and hoe . . irrigation and draining; [. . .]
> Manufactures . . commerce . . engineering . . the building of cities, and every trade carried on there . . and the implements of every trade,
> The anvil and tongs and hammer . . the axe and wedge . . the square and mitre and jointer and smoothingplane;
> The plumbob and trowel and level . . the wall-scaffold, and the work of walls and ceilings . . or any mason-work;
> The ship's compass . . the sailor's tarpaulin . . the stays and lanyards, and the ground-tackle for anchoring or mooring, [. . .]
> The ring on your finger . . the lady's wristlet . . the hammers of stonebreakers
> Or coppersmiths . . the druggist's vials and jars; [. . .]
> Every paper I write on or you write on . . and every word we write . . and every cross and twirl of the pen . . and the curious way we write what we think . . . . yet very faintly; [. . .]
> The pump, the piledriver, the great derrick . . the coalkiln and brickkiln,
> Ironworks or whiteleadworks . . the sugarhouse . . steam-saws, and the great mills and factories [. . .]
> In them the heft of the heaviest . . . . in them far more than you estimated, and far less also,
> In them, not yourself . . . . you and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,
> In them your themes and hints and provokers . . if not, the whole earth has no themes or hints or provokers, and never had.
> (*LG*, I: 91-2)

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85 Emerson, as quoted by Frederik Schyberg, *Walt Whitman*, trans. Evie Allison Allen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), 104.

To represent the present's varied contents, Whitman deploys an almost endless series of sentence fragments, only loosely connected, which collectively impart an organic sense of cohesiveness. After the war, every single one of these lines is expunged from the text, and they are replaced by a single assertion:

> Strange and hard that paradox true I give,
> Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.
> (*LG*, I: 93)

Whitman recuperates the content of the earlier passage in this enigmatic philosophy of balance. The profane and divine, like "the unseen soul" and "[o]bjects gross," are ostensibly combined, indissolubly, in the singular space of his Hegelian verse. And this revision is hardly isolated: from 1867 on, and particularly in 1871, we witness a staggering effort to erase, rewrite, or recombine these unstable lists and juxtapositions under the rubric of a progressive conception of time.

The inventories in Whitman's postwar poetry also tend to be either supplanted or outnumbered by apostrophes. The latter, of course, proliferate in the antebellum *Leaves* as a favored syntactic mode. Consider the last two stanzas of the 1860 poem "For You O Democracy," in which Whitman promises to "make the continent indissoluble" through universal attachment:

> I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and
> along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
> I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
> By the love of comrades,
> By the manly love of comrades.
>
> For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
> For you, for you I am trilling these songs.
> (*LG*, II: 375)

Written on the brink of disunion, less than one year before the bombardment of Fort Sumter, this poem performs a fantasy of adhesive simultaneity. The apostrophe in the final lines is addressed neither to some distant future that culminates the past (as in "Passage to India"), nor to some modern epoch severed from its antecedents (as in "Years of the Modern"), but to an imaginary present, at once flawless and irrevocable, in which cities are already "inseparable" and national solidarity is "plant[ed] [. . .] thick as trees." This temporality likewise buttresses the other apostrophes in the antebellum *Leaves,* which are almost always addressed to the reader or to contemporary America. Whitman's postwar apostrophes, in contrast, frequently address the future. In "Song of the Exposition" (1871), after praising the "inter-transportation of the world" – and, in so doing, conjuring up ideas of "iron rails" and "lines of steamships" that, we will see, also fascinate Melville and Douglass – Whitman offers this dedication:

> And thou America,
> Thy offspring towering e'er so high, yet higher Thee above all towering,
> With Victory on thy left, and at thy right hand Law;
> Thou Union holding all, fusing, absorbing, tolerating all,
> Thee, ever thee, I sing.
>
> Thou, also thou, a World,

> With all thy wide geographies, manifold, different, distant,
> Rounded by thee in one – one common orbic language,
> One common indivisible destiny for All.
> (*LG*, III: 621)

Shifting seamlessly from a perfected American present to an imminent global future, Whitman's syntax enables him to directly address something that does not yet exist: a "World" consolidated through "one common orbic language." This apostrophe is not entirely dissimilar from the kinds of performative address we encountered earlier in which Whitman connects immediately and almost beyond the text itself. But here, in the age of the strike and of "vast crops of [the] poor," when the conjunction of "Victory" and "Law" has produced not some "absorbing" union but only abiding conflict, he shifts this imaginary connection to the future, thereby closing the distance between the present and democracy's latent arrival. Such apostrophes, which proliferate in the postwar volumes, reconfigure the relation between poet and reader by making time itself the agent of transformation; and we, dislocated from the present into an infinite future, are absorbed – no less than the text's own sentences – into history's progressive drive.

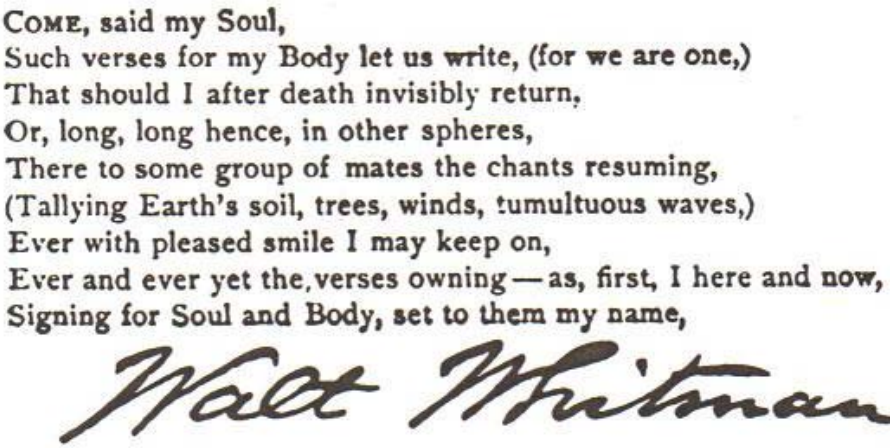
The enveloping effect of these apostrophes is also on display in that most strident poem of postwar unionism, "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" (1872):

> Brain of the New World, what a task is thine,
> To formulate the Modern – out of the peerless grandeur of the modern,
> Out of thyself, comprising science, to recast poems, churches, art, [. . .]
> By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the mighty past, the dead,
> To limn with absolute faith the mighty living present.
>
> And yet thou living present brain, heir of the dead, the Old World brain,
> Thou that lay folded like an unborn babe within its folds so long,
> Thou carefully prepared by it so long – haply thou but unfoldest it, only
> maturest it,
> It to eventuate in thee – the essence of the by-gone time contain'd in thee,
> Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, destined with reference to
> thee;
> Thou but the apples, long, long, long a-growing,
> The fruit of all the Old ripening to-day in thee.
> (*LG*, III: 636-7)

Whitman's address depicts the imminent as a living, breathing thing, covered in skin (a "babe") and endowed with a brain. These dual embodiments balance one another: if the newborn associates "the Modern" with fragility, the great "brain" provides it with intelligence and intention. Extending in each line, and often beginning with a direct address (a repeated "Thou"), Whitman's extended apostrophe corporealizes a historical order that most likely will never arrive. If he was afraid that democracy's to-come would be all body and no soul – a splendid but empty vessel – what we see here, and in his postwar syntax more generally, from the catalogs (often either condensed or partially expunged) to the apostrophes (addressed, with greater frequency, to that which will "eventuate" in the new), is an attempt to correct for this on the most local levels of *Leaves*' form.

Such changes in punctuation, syntax, and poetic structure, initiated in the 1867 and 71 editions, round out in the *Leaves* of 1876, 82, and 91. In the centennial edition, which Whitman composed around the same time that he penned the coda to "The Tramp and Strike Questions," he reclaims his

own regenerative capacity by disseminating his person throughout the text. Substantiating his earlier claim that "[b]y great bards only can series of peoples and States be fused into the compact organism of one nation" (*LG*, I: 197), Whitman appends an unprecedented number of portraits to *Leaves* and adds this personal inscription to the title page:


Come, said my Soul,
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)
That should I after death invisibly return,
Or, long, long hence, in other spheres,
There to some group of mates the chants resuming,
(Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,)
Ever with pleased smile I may keep on,
Ever and ever yet the verses owning — as, first, I here and now,
Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,
Walt Whitman

(*LG*, III: 683)

Whitman performs, in his person, the equipoise he desires for the nation: body and spirit evolve and act in concert with one another; and the proper release of democratic expression ("Tallying" all) enables the medium – whether poet or State – to become immortal. This sense of proportion and perpetuation is reinforced in *Two Rivulets*, the supplement that Whitman adds in 1876 which contains *Democratic Vistas*, *Centennial Songs*, "Passage to India," and *Memoranda of the War*. Literally incorporating into *Leaves* the statements about temporal consolidation and teleological advance that we examined in part one, Whitman renders poems like "Song of Myself" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" inextricable from his calls for a "programme of culture" for the working class and his pleas for "fervid comradeship" to "counterbalance [. . .] our materialistic and vulgar American democracy" (*PP*, 986, 1005). The urge to harmonize his poetry with democracy's future eventually leads Whitman, in 1882 and in the deathbed edition of 1891, to eliminate the *Leaves of Grass* subdivisions altogether. The chaos first unleashed during the "years of meteors" thus gets recontained within *Leaves*' own teleological restructuring, as everything is finally brought into and absorbed by the main volume. (Hence the impetus behind the counter-factual I posed earlier.)

What, then, are we to make of this massive poetic streamlining? As I argued in the previous chapter, there is a symptomatic component to this restructuring, insofar as Whitman's various amendments, revisions, and additions engage with the situated pressures of the postbellum political world and its ideologies of time. Another impulse, which we might term aesthetic or extra-symptomatic, nonetheless coheres through *Leaves*' dialectical reconstruction. The changes that Whitman makes to his poems' syntax and structure not only rearticulate an underlying philosophy of history but also, in their own internal waywardness, foster supplementary time frames that eclipse the progressive-Hegelian temporality that *Leaves* so powerfully develops. It is indicative that Whitman himself never considered his streamlining either complete or entirely successful. "The cumulus character of the book," he wrote in one of his final letters, "is a great factor – perhaps even the jaggedness, or what might be call'd so f'm the conventional & tidy principles of 'art' – probably is so anyhow" (*Selected Letters*, 293). Considering what we have discovered about his revisionary

practices, this insistence on *Leaves*' unevenness seems odd, but we should take a cue from Whitman and recognize that there is a political content in this attachment to inexact form.

Whitman's very struggle to reconstruct *Leaves* through a dialectical philosophy of history generates scales and experiences of time that stretch far beyond this dialectics. The postwar versions of "Salut Au Monde!," for instance, incorporate Whitman's newfound Hegelianism by refiguring the United States as the vanguard of progress, but this altered sense of historical movement also enables him to eliminate those instances of "organic compact" that marred his antebellum internationalism. The poem's prewar fascination with simultaneity, which merges "the Virginia plantation chorus of negroes" and "the strong baritone of the long-shoremen of Manhatta" with "the whale-crews of the south Pacific" and "the Turk smoking opium in Aleppo," gives way to a riper sense of *uneven* historical development and transnational becoming (*LG* I: 163, 171). A similar emergence of the non-dialectical occurs in "Song of the Universal." Much of this centennial poem is of course dedicated to the various wonders of "the modern" and its "[s]uccessive absolute fiats":

> In this broad earth of ours,
> Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
> Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
> Nestles the seed perfection [. . .]
> For it the mystic evolution,
> Not the right only justified, what we call evil also justified.
> (*LG,* III: 679-80)

Despite all the setbacks and failures and excesses of this modern world, a hidden "seed" of perfected democracy, Whitman insists, is safely "nestle[d]" away. What propels this evolutionary sense of history, however, is not a naive belief in amelioration but an anxious awareness of the imperfections of "progress." In this sense, "Song of the Universal" is of a piece with Whitman's 1881 poem, "Roaming in Thought (*After reading* HEGEL.)":

> Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is Good steadily
> hastening towards immortality,
> And the vast all that is call'd Evil I saw hastening to merge itself and become
> lost and dead.
> (*LG,* III: 685)

According to Lindberg, Hegel here but "names the inspiration or hope of a mystic unity beyond history" (245). Whitman's interest in Hegelian progression in both "Roaming in Thought" and "Song of the Universal" nonetheless has less to do with some extra-historical totality and more to do with evil's strange preponderance. The "vast all" that is evil and "the little that is Good" are not, for Whitman, equal forces, because evil's "measureless grossness" seems to be prevailing.

This is no purely metaphysical problem for Whitman, but a concrete matter of democracy's failings. The five years that separate "Song of the Universal" and "Roaming in Thought's" composition mark the birth of the modern labor movement and its violent suppression. In 1867, the Communist Club of New York became part of the First International, and by 1872 thirty sections of the International were secured throughout the United States, from San Francisco to Newark. In Whitman's Manhattan, in January of 1874, 7,000 unemployed workers – partly behest of the International – descended upon Tompkins Square to demand government restitution. Although the workers were beaten bloody by the police, sympathetic New Yorkers pelted the officers with "stones, sticks, and other missiles" in an attempt to free the arrested rioters. And just one year after Whitman described

democracy at Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition as "striding through the confusion, / By thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle," America's railroad workers mounted a series of massive strikes which cast doubt on the very existence of "the seed perfection" (*LG* III: 612).

In fact, the labor revolts of 1877 brought the United States closer than it has ever been to a workers' soviet. The strikers, in the words of one New York reporter, "commenced a rebellion" that suspended much of the commerce throughout the country. By shutting down the railroads, as *The Chicago Daily Tribune* lamented on July 21, this "general" strike is "stopping the shipment of the grain crop of the West," "disarranging business relations [throughout the states]," and "menacing the [entire] business world." In Chicago workers battled the Illinois National Guard and took over much of the city, and their insurrection ended only when the Secretary of War called in six companies of federal troops from Omaha. In Pittsburgh, when 2,000 militia arrived from Philadelphia to put down the strikers, the workers already controlled much of the city. As the *Tribune* recounted: the troops arrived "shortly after 4 o'clock, by which time an immense crowd had congregated at [twenty-eight street]. The hillside was literally black with people." As soon as the soldiers attempted to clear the area, "they were assailed by the crowd on the hillside, who sent a shower of stones with the force of meteorites upon the[m]." The militia fired upon the strikers, killing fourteen of them; and then the strikers – like their Parisian compatriots in 1848 and 1871 – took to street fighting, dispersing when attacked and then regrouping along different roads to attack the police. Soon, out of "sympathy for the strikers [. . .] one half of the Pittsburgh militia stacked their arms and deserted," leaving several parts of the city in the possession of the workers. "At this hour – 9 p.m.," in the words of the *Tribune*, "excitement is raging all over the city, which is virtually in the hands of an armed mob composed of laborers, and iron-workers, coal-miners, stevedores, and others who are in fully sympathy with the strikers." Although these worker revolts were each squelched by the State, they helped spawn a radical labor movement and, in so doing, shifted the fault lines of American political ideology. As Frances Parkman wrote one year later, "Two enemies, unknown before, have risen like spirits of darkness on our social and political horizon – an ignorant proletariat and a half-taught plutocracy."[86]

When Whitman returns to Hegel in the wake of these strikes, he does so not to construct a poetic vision not of temporal *harmony* but, instead, to account for *dis*harmony. This attention to the "vast [. . .] Evil" in industrial capitalism is, indicatively, already present in "Song of the Universal," which concludes by envisaging a perfected democracy – and then worries about its impossibility:

> Love like the light silently wrapping all,
> Nature's amelioration blessing all,
> The blossoms, fruits of ages, orchards divine and certain,
> Forms, objects, growths, humanities, to spiritual images ripening.
> Give me O God to sing that thought,
> Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith,
> In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold not from us,
> Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
> Health, peace, salvation universal.
>
> Is it a dream?

---

86 "Serious Railroad Strike," *New York Times*, July 18, 1877; "The Extension of the Railroad Strike," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1877; Ibid., "The Wrong Track"; "A Day of Fighting in Chicago," *New York Times*, July 27, 1877; Frances Parkman, "The Failure of Universal Suffrage," *North American Review* 127 (July-August 1878): 14. On the relation between the 1877 strike and future socialist politics, see David Burbank, *Reign of Rabble*, 250.

> Nay, but the lack of it the dream,
> And failing it life's lore and wealth a dream,
> And all the world a dream.
> (*LG*, III: 681-2)

With these lines, we are a long way from the visions of modernity giving birth to itself that we encountered in chapter one. Here a more ephemeral temporality, a chronopoetics of "the dream," reaches back to Shakespeare in the midst of proletarian upheaval and reimagines the America of the Gilded Age as an almost ghostly fantasy. The final, apprehensive lines recall Whitman's comments on democracy's pasts and futures in "The Tramp and Strike Question," which we examined at the outset: "The American Revolution of 1776 was simply a great strike, successful for its immediate object – but whether a real success judged by the scale of the centuries, and the long-striking balance of Time, yet remains to be settled [. . .] If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years – steadily, even if slowly, eating into them like a cancer of lungs or stomach – then our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure" (*PP*, 1088-9). These misgivings find poetic expression as well as chronopolitical form here at the conclusion of "Song of the Universal." In these lines, a political temporality – an unsteady time scale of hope and militant desire – erupts, and it is a temporality which instead of unfolding through an iron law of progression resembles a dream. Rather than advancing, democracy fleets. Rather than realizing itself in some vast *eclaircissement*, it vanishes into some unknown ether. And we are left with a moment of decidedly *un*dialectical historical experience, an instance of concrete anticipation marked by doubt and open-endedness.[87]

"NOT SONGS OF LOYALTY ALONE ARE THESE": WHITMAN AND THE POLITICS OF INSURRECTION

From "Song of the Universal" to *Drum-Taps* and beyond, these more unruly, less teleological temporalities do not simply survive or somehow elude Whitman's revisionary project. They are, on the contrary, the powerful residue of his overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, chronopolitical investments. To unpack these other temporalities, I want to focus on one cluster of poems in particular: the *Songs of Insurrection*. First included in *Leaves* in 1871, this explosive collection re-presents older, antebellum poems like "To a foil'd European Revolutionaire" and "France, the 18th year of These States" alongside other, newer compositions about rebellion and inheritance. Arranged in the aftermath of civil war, this cluster insists, in a surprisingly celebratory tone, on the necessity of continuous political agitation, and even reclaims insurrectionist violence as redemptive. It begins with the following four lines:

> Still though the one I sing,
> (One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to Nationality,
> I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection! O quenchless,
> Indispensable fire!)

---

87 I am borrowing the phrase "concrete anticipation" from Ernst Bloch's reconceptualization of Marxism in *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1986), Vol. 2, 619-24.

(*LG*, III: 632)

Whitman's dialectical understanding of "Nationality" allows him to make abiding political insurgency not only conceivable but laudatory: by sublating "contradictions," "Nationality" absorbs the most extreme divergences in action and desire. But what Whitman means by "revolt" is not agitation in the abstract. It is something deeper, more compensatory, and more historically situated in the Gilded Age, as he indicates in a note he added to the 1871 manuscript: "Not only are These States the born offspring of Revolt against mere overweening authority – but seeing ahead for Them in the future a long, long reign of Peace with all the growths corruptions and tyrannies & formalisms of Obedience, (accumulating, vast folds, strata, from the rankness of continued prosperity and the more and more insidious grip of capital) I feel to raise a note of caution (perhaps unneeded alarm) that the ideas of the following cluster will always be needed, that it may be worth while to keep well up, & vital, such ideas and verses as the following."[88] "I leave in him revolt": the democratic subject must retain her capacity for violence, he claims, because the tyranny of capital, "accumulating [. . .] from the rankness of continued prosperity," threatens the sovereignty of liberty.

As this note suggests, the *Songs of Insurrection* construe freedom not as some metaphysical heritage but, instead, as a living practice of rebellion. As Whitman well knew, this conception of freedom as *praxis* was all the more needed, and at the same time all the more controversial, as industrial production displaced the mercantilist economy he had previously celebrated in the antebellum years. As "things now exist in the States," he soon wrote, "what is more terrible, more alarming, than the total want of any [. . .] fusion and mutuality of love, belief, and rapport of interest, between the comparatively few successful rich, and the great masses of the unsuccessful, the poor? As a mixed political and social question, is not this full of dark significance?" However, rather than resolving the problem of antagonism through a poetics of love, as he had in 1860 (with *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*), Whitman in 1871 embraces a vision of violent agitation. Here are the introductory stanzas from the cluster's second poem, a revised version of "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire":

> Courage! my brother or my sister!
> Keep on – Liberty is to be subserv'd whatever occurs;
> That is nothing that is quell'd by one or two failures, or any number of failures,
> Or by the indifference or ingratitude of the people, or by any unfaithfulness,
> Or the show of the tushes of power, soldiers, cannon, penal statutes.
> Revolt! and still revolt! revolt!
>
> What we believe in waits latent forever through all the continents,
> Invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and
> composed, knows no discouragement,
> Waiting patiently, waiting its time.
>
> (Not songs of loyalty alone are these,
> But songs of insurrection also;
> For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel, the
> world over,
> And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind

88 *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts*, ed. Clifton Joseph Furness (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1928), 229.

him,
And stakes his life, to be lost at any moment.)
(*LG*, I: 249-50)

Already by the sixth line's repeated insurrectionary command (which he first added in 1871), we realize that we are far removed from the cosmic assimilation of "Song of Myself," "Passage to India" and "Lilacs," as well as from the conciliatory voice of Whitman's nurse-poet in "The Wound Dresser" and "Vigil Strange I Kept One Night." This is a poem not about love, or the perfection of the body, or the nation's organic compacts, but about the afterlives of freedom's struggles. There is certainly a strong Hegelian impulse here. Whitman's celebration of loss and failure derives in part from his faith in the dialectic: nothing – not "any number of failures," or the most repressive of "penal statutes" – can obstruct liberty because this eventual emancipation is the telos of history itself. In the poem's transition from 1856 to 1871, it makes an analogous move away from a "planetary" poetics – as we might term it, following Lawrence Buell and Wai Chee Dimock – in favor of a decidedly more Eurocentric model of freedom's history, encapsulated in the title-change (from "Liberty Poem for Asia, Africa, America, Australia, Cuba, and the Archipelagoes of the Sea" to "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire").[89] While Whitman still asserts that freedom "waits latent forever through all the continents," now, in the wake of Hegel's influence, he focuses far more exclusively on the mass struggles in contemporary France, Italy, and England. A "jaggedness" between this dialectical reconstruction of the poem and the time frames that it actually advances nonetheless manifests when this poem is revised and reincorporated. Indeed, in spite of Whitman's additions and amendments, and in spite of his infusion of a Eurocentric telos into the poem, this powerful "song of insurrection" constructs an entirely different temporality, a historical sensibility that inheres neither in dialectical harmony nor in a synchronism that distends throughout time and space. The time frame of "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire" is profoundly, and generatively, mixed: fusing agitation with deferral, and resistance with pragmatic "waiting," it draws from the past in order to reimagine the present and the future as things that can be radically remade. This unruly temporality is especially palpable in the third stanza, which – bounded by parentheses (which often function as a kind of confessional mode for Whitman, as a space for whispers and admissions) – identifies *Leaves* with the "leaving behind" of "routine" and, by extension, with the act of revolution itself.

It is this chronopoetic militancy, I would suggest, more than some latent Hegelianism that allows Whitman, like the revolutionaries he attempts to speak for, to embrace deferral:

Then courage! European revolter! revoltress!
For, till all ceases, neither must you cease.

I do not know what you are for, (I do not know what
I am for myself, nor what anything is for,)
But I will search carefully for it even in being foil'd,
In defeat, poverty, misconception, imprisonment – for
they too are great.

Revolt! and the bullet for tyrants!
Did we think victory great?
So it is – But now it seems to me, when it cannot be

89 See, respectively, Dimock, "Introduction: Planet and America, Set and Subset," 1-16, and Buell, "Ecoglobalist Affects," 227-248.

help'd, that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great.
(*LG,* I: 251)

The process of "foiling" upon which the poem hinges seems to posit a dialectical unity: revolutionary failures entail the eventual success of coming revolutions because history's progress is inexorable. Yet to the degree that there is a telos at work in the poem, it resides less in some historical *Geist* than in the recurring act of "revolt." Historical time, in other words, is marked by overcoming because of an inner freedom drive that continuously returns. In heralding "Revolt! and the bullet for tyrants!," Whitman thus not only announces a political allegiance but articulates a principle of temporal change, a non-Hegelian schema of freedom-from-below which, in turn, is reiterated in the subsequent poem, "France, the 18th Year of These States":

A GREAT year and place;
A harsh discordant, natal scream out-sounding,
to touch the mother's heart closer than any
yet.

I walk'd the shores of my Eastern
Sea,
Heard over the waves the little
voice,
Saw the divine infant, where she woke, mournfully
wailing, amid the roar of cannon, curses, shouts,
crash of falling buildings;

Was not so sick from the blood in the gutters running
– nor from the single corpses, nor those in
heaps,
nor those borne away in the tumbrils;
Was not so desperate at the battues of death – was
not so shock'd at the repeated fusillades of the
guns

Pale, silent, stern, what could I say to that
long-accrued retribution?
Could I wish humanity
different?
Could I wish the people made of wood and
stone?
Or that there be no justice in destiny or time?
(*LG,* II: 421-2)

Although less celebratory and ecstatic than "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," "France, the 18th Year of These States" offers a similar embrace of violence as a vehicle of politico-historical transformation: France's innumerable "battues of death," "repeated fusillades of the guns," and pent-up "retribution" are the tragic but indispensable preconditions of freedom, that "divine infant" whose modern wail speeds across the ocean. This attachment to France and its revolutions, as I will posit in

the coming chapters, is one of the principal things that unites each of these wayward poets. From *Battle-Pieces* to *Clarel* and Douglass's lectures about 1848, the French Revolution emerges as a crucial chronopolitical index, an epochal break whose meaning is tied to the limits and potentials of modernity. What interests me about Whitman's particular retrospection on France here is the way that it develops a poetics of revolutionary time that in some respects eludes his own flexible, postwar liberalism. The freedom drive that erupts throughout *Songs of Insurrection* and acquires its most concrete historical shape in "France, the 18th Year of These States" is, according to Whitman, the underlying force that guarantees "justice [. . .] in time." It does so not by fulfilling some fixed purposed but instead – we might say, borrowing from Walter Benjamin – by "blast[ing] open the continuum of history" ("On the Concept of History," 396). Unleashed by the revolution of 1793, this freedom drive is autonomous, open-ended, and irrepressible. As such, it bears little to no structural resemblance either to the fictions of synchronic harmony that fill out the antebellum *Leaves* or to the visions of dialectical fruition that populate much of his postbellum poetry.

Resurgent "amid the roar of cannon, curses, shouts, / [and] crash of falling buildings," this other, revolutionary temporality carves out a time apart in *Leaves of Grass*. And this inner temporal difference is directly related to the *Songs*' French connection, insofar as the French Revolution presents a unique innovation upon chronopolitical experience from which Whitman draws. As Antonio Negri argues in *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, although "the discovery of sociality is the fundamental qualification of the French Revolution and its distinctive character, with respect to the revolutions that had preceded it, [. . .] this sociality is configured, and, so to speak, constituted, by the collective temporality" that it inaugurated. With the French Revolution, it was "as if history had revealed a new substratum, an ontological level on which productive humanity anticipated the concrete becoming, forcing it or being blocked by it. Constituent power, with the French Revolution, becomes historical strength – ontologically stable, historically versatile. As such it is recognized by all – even by the reactionaries, and by the revolutionaries *a fortiori*. Indeed, this fundamental transformation takes place in the obscure awareness that time and productivity are dimensions of only one substance, labor."[90] In other words, through the French Revolution, the sociality of time is rendered visible, and time becomes – for the first time in European history – something that can be collectively acted upon and remade. Whitman, I would like to suggest, stages a poetic inquiry into revolutionary temporality that anticipates Negri's insights by revealing this temporality to be non-dialectical and available to political refashioning. When, in his *Songs of Insurrection*, he invokes liberty's "natal scream out-sounding" and the beauty of "defeat, poverty, misconception, imprisonment," and when he embraces a violence that "rise[s] at last, murdering and ecstatic [. . .] demanding full arrears of vengeance," he is forging a poetics out of this politicized temporality. And what flows from this poetics is a latent but powerful time frame within *Leaves of Grass* that is fundamentally and radically opposed to liberalism in all of its motley forms.

This revolutionary time culminates in the cluster's two concluding poems. The first, "Walt Whitman's Caution," turns his politico-historical vision back from France to the New World:

> To The States, or any one of them, or any city of The
> States, *Resist much, obey little*;
> Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved;
> Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth,
> ever afterward resumes its liberty.
> (*LG*, II: 416)

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90 Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999), 231-2.

This remarkable little poem, constructed as an apostrophe, has often been interpreted by critics as a conservative reminder of state autonomy in the midst of federalism's Reconstruction resurgence. Considered strictly in terms of its immediate context in the postwar North, the caution to the states to "*Resist much, obey little*" could easily be construed to entail a particular *kind* of resistance (that is, to the Civil War amendments and to black civil rights more generally). The *Songs of Insurrection* are nonetheless far more transnational than Whitman's critics have tended to acknowledge. These songs construct a time scale of political imagining that, in effect, yokes the revolutions of Europe to an abiding insurrectionist legacy in the United States. Read as a cluster, they are about the global emergence of freedom-via-rebellion and, thus, are of a piece of "Respondez!" and "Salut au Monde!" This idea that "the hemispheres are counterparts" (as Melville words it in *Clarel*) bears directly on how we should interpret *Leaves* and its chronopolitics, since this transnational, revolutionary time frame cannot be integrated into a poetics of liberal simultaneity or into a dialectical historical schema. To the degree that a liberal subject survives here, it does so principally in the final chant ("To a Certain Cantatrice"), but even in these lines we are in wayward poetic territory:

> HERE, take this gift!
> I was reserving it for some hero, speaker, or general,
> One who should serve the good old cause, the great idea, the progress and
> freedom of the race,
> Some brave confronter of despots, some daring rebel;
> But I see that what I was reserving belongs to you just as much as to any.
> (*LG,* II: 415)

This concluding poem collects all the events and experiences of the preceding poems and bestows them as a revolutionary "gift." This is a peculiar chronopolitical inheritance, an almost self-sufficient legacy that stretches back to 1776, to 1793, and to 1848 while continuing deep into the Gilded Age. When Whitman first composed this poem in 1860, it was a conciliatory and almost desperate chant, a song whose "gift" promised a shared sense of national historical experience precisely when this common sensibility was least plausible. Now rewritten and redeployed in the midst of organized labor's violent birth, "To a Certain Cantatrice" acquires a new meaning. In 1871, its voice – linking into a tradition of transnational rebellion – is at once more full-throated and more partisan. Joining the rights of labor with a right to violence, it is closer to the politics of the Central Labor Union and the radicals of the American reform tradition than it is to the chastened liberals of the postwar North. As Victoria Woodhull writes just one year prior to the *Songs*' formal inclusion, "The people should [. . .] reserve to themselves the SACRED RIGHT OF REBELLION! It is a fact which should not be lost sight of that not one of the rights of labor (so-called) has been accorded by the legislation of the past, without a prolonged struggle to secure it. . . . Possibly, probably, other means besides violent ones to arrest the course of legislative injustice, may be found practicable. But the right to resort to violence, all other means failing, never, never should be abandoned." Matt Cohen may very well be right about Whitman's anxieties about writing – or, more accurately, about *not* writing – a Bible for America's working class. But these *Songs of Insurrection*, I would argue, were the closest that he got to writing a chant to and for America's motley workers.[91] It, like *Moby-Dick* before it, is a siren-song – a lament as well as a call-to-arms – for the modern world's industrial Nantucketers.

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91 *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, November 12, 1870; Matt Cohen, "'To reach the workmen direct': Horace Traubel and the Work of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*," in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*, 299-320.

The 1871 *Insurrection* cluster thus extends Whitman's promise, first announced in his pre-*Leaves* notebooks, to "not descend among professors and capitalists." "I will instead," he proclaimed, "turn the ends of my trousers around my boots, and my cuffs back from my wrists, and go with drivers and boatmen and men that catch fish or work in the field. [For] I know they are sublime." These S*ongs of Insurrection*, of course, eventually bore the same fate as *Leaves*' other poems: it was broken up and scattered. Within ten years, Whitman consigned "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire" to *Autumn Rivulets*; "France, the 18th year of These States" to *Birds of Passage*; "Europe, the 72d and 73d years of These States" to *By the Roadside*; "To a Certain Cantatrice" and "Walt Whitman's Caution" (afterwards rechristened "To the States") to *Inscriptions*; and, finally, he removed the concluding poem, "After an Interval" – which venerates the "conjunction" of Saturn and Mars, of harvest and war – altogether. One could interpret this scattering in terms of Whitman's complicity and attribute the cluster's fracturing to the revisionary impact of Whitman's postwar, dialectical liberalism. Perhaps for Whitman these songs were *too* insurrectionary. After the strikes of 1877, maybe the full significance of these songs entailed something that Whitman either did not or could not face. There is certainly a kernel of truth in this reading. Nonetheless, critics are often far too attached to wholeness, and far too suspicious – both politically and aesthetically – of things that are fractured and split. The separateness of the *Songs of Insurrection* has consequently vexed critics, and led them to interpret it mainly as a failed, incomplete, or compensatory cluster.[92] This prevailing reading overlooks or at least risks foreclosing the very real possibility that Whitman scattered these poems precisely in order to *maximize* their effects. When these poems are spread out, the concluding poem's revolutionary "gift," bequeathing of the power of rebellion, is thereby extended to the entirety of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's regrouping and subsequent diffusion of these *Songs* may therefore be best understood as an attempt to inject the *whole* of his book with an insurrectionary spirit, an attempt that originates neither in an abstract faith in freedom's necessity nor in a liberal conception of history but, rather, is born out of a chronopolitical commitment to revolution.

Constructed as a whole and then dispersed to spread their power, these *Songs of Insurrection* link into Whitman's more general tendency – which originated in his unceasing politico-libidinal attachment to inclusiveness – to fixate on the outside, the forgotten, and the ostensibly extraneous. My contention is that this impulse is no less significant to *Leaves*' chronopolitics: his poetic recording of history's evolutions also registers, and tries to come to terms with, that which *exceeds* his own philosophy of history. Particularly in *Drum-Taps* and the *Songs of Insurrection*, Whitman's wayward poetry asserts a difference, a chronopolitical disparity, from within the space of its own form. And the result is a temporal and formal "jaggedness" that allows political transformation itself to be reimagined.

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92 Mancuso, for instance, locates the *Songs*' origin in Whitman's misgivings about Radical Reconstruction. "In effect," he writes, Whitman "was attempting to imagine his way out of the struggles of power, contemporaneously in the battle between state sovereignty and federalism over interracial voting rights [. . .] [W]ithin the syntax of his Reconstruction poems, Whitman enacted a model of the poet as the legislator of a kind of social solidarity America had not yet realized. Hence in 1871 Whitman accented the federalization of America, represented in the pastiche of mainly earlier 'Insurrection' poems" (*The Strange Sad War Revolving*, 91).

CHAPTER THREE

A Wayward Art: *Battle-Pieces* and Melville's Poetic Turn

Moved by the war's "compress[ed] centuries of native passion," Walt Whitman construed the present as an epochal transition and reimagined the future as the realm of democratic possibility (*Memoranda*, 4). But Herman Melville had, in his own way, arrived there first, proclaiming the birth of a new temporal order long before any cannons bombarded Fort Sumter. Meditating in 1850 on what the recent revolutionary struggles might portend for modern liberty, Melville wrote in *White-Jacket* that the "Past is dead, and has no resurrection." The influence of previous events and generations – which, as that other famous chronicler of 1848 remarked, have hitherto weighed "like a nightmare on the brain of the living" – is now over. In its place, "the Future," comprising "both hope and fruition," is "endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation." In a judgment of time's progressive movement redolent of Whitman's most confident postwar declarations, Melville's narrator alleges that history "is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free. Those who are solely governed by the Past stand like Lot's wife, crystallized in the act of looking backward, and forever incapable of looking before."[93]

The distance between this future-oriented vision and the representations of time that Melville fashioned after the Civil War is considerable. In *Battle-Pieces* (1866), Melville's poetic record of America's descent into "Nature's dark side," time emerges not, as in Whitman's later poetry, as a progressive schema punctuated by instants of evolutionary transformation, but as a tragic accumulation (*BP*, 7). The Civil War is neither a departure from previous historical development nor a simple culmination of past events but, rather, as Melville words it in the poem "Misgivings," a "tempest bursting from the waste of Time" (*BP*, 8). There is no "Bible of the Free" because history is a collection of ruins:

> The generations are inured to pains,
> And strong Necessity
> Surges, and heaps Time's strand with wrecks.
> ("The Conflict of Convictions," *BP*, 9)

Whitman's teleological conception of history finds its obverse in Melville's depiction of time as a string of calamities. Like Benjamin's angel of history, for whom the past's chains of events appear as "one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage," Melville perceives time as the unfolding of an inner traumatic kernel. But for Melville there is no promise of messianic deliverance, no storm of progress "blowing from Paradise" ("On the Concept of History," 392). The future in Melville's postwar poetry manifests instead as both a recurrence and a depletion:

> And what is stable? Find one boon
> That is not lackey to the moon
> Of fate. The flood weaves out – the ebb
> Weaves back; the incessant shuttle shifts

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93 Herman Melville, *White-Jacket; or The World in a Man-of-War* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 505; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1990), 15.

And flies, and wears and tears the web.[94]

The to-come is not a Bible but an abyss. And we moderns, latter-day wives of Lot, crystallize now in the act of looking forward.

Melville was long fascinated with the complex afterlives of past events. Replete with psychic wounds that refuse healing, genealogical bonds that incapacitate rather than liberate, and actions that create their own seemingly endless cycles of reactions, his writings could collectively be read as an immense and fevered literary examination of inheritance and its paradoxes. The terms and direction of this fascination, however, differ in the antebellum years. Before the nation's "congregated Fall," Melville's fiction sustains, consistently and quite spectacularly, a tension between eternity and rupture, or more specifically between Providential continuity and worldly discontinuity ("A Canticle," *BP*, 138). This is a tension, as Babbalanja and the narrator of *Mardi* (1849) put it, between time's divinely sanctioned uniformity ("duration is not of the future, but of the past; and eternity is eternal, because it has been") and the material experience of incessant revolution ("the very mountains melt; and all revolve: – systems and asteroids; the sun wheels through the zodiac, and the zodiak is a revolution. Ah gods! In all this universal stir, am *I* to prove one stable thing?").[95]

For each of these wayward poets, and for the United States more generally, the Civil War was more than a death-struggle over slavery and the grounds of legal authority. It was more than a conflict between divergent modes of production; more than the death of over a half-million soldiers, and fifty thousand civilians; more, even, than the emancipation of a people. The Civil War was indeed all of these things but, precisely *because* of the collective effect of its massive changes, it also constituted a metaphysical revolution. It severed the "mystic cords of memory" that Lincoln had identified in his first inaugural address as the requisite psychic links of democratic citizenship, and it reordered, on a deep and structural level, Americans' sense of time and historical connection. As Thomas Settle, Jr., a former slave owner from North Carolina, claimed in the late-1860s, the nation's time scales had been upended: "The old crust of ideas" has "broken up in a thousand fragments [. . .And] one month [of the

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94 Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, ed. Walter E. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), 2.4.156-7.

95 Herman Melville, *Mardi; and a Voyage Thither* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1998), 238. In Melville's antebellum romances, these temporalities coalesce most forcefully, and most paradoxically, in the character of Ahab, who, like *Clarel*'s Ungar, is stricken by an "intolerant fire." Ahab constitutes both a remnant of the past and a trace of the emergent. This fire-worshiper, commander of "manufactured men," and despotic organizer of an almost industrial worker-collectivity embodies a historical tendency toward mechanization and "iron law" that is both tragic and inexorable. His soul issues in large part from a historical epoch that, although still in its infancy in 1851, would eventually submerge the world of whaling and all it contained. Yet in his disdain for profit and aversion to Starbuckian pragmatism, in his zeal to navigate the earth without a quadrant, and in the very form of his Shakespearean speech, this living portent of the still-to-come is also a relic already destined – as if from birth – for obsolescence. His is a "strange fatality" because it is inscribed, as indelibly as Queequeg's tattoos, by the past and future at once: situated between Providence and its obverse, Ahab's soul is as torn by its own temporality as it is by his riddled "sultanism of the brain." *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, Vol. 6 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Hayford, Parker, and Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1988). On Ahab's relation to the emergent, see also C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 2001), and Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002), 63-88.

war] flings a greater flood of light upon the world than fifty years." The war dissolved the established bonds between remembrance and expectation, and thereby brought about a kind of cognitive remapping. By disabling many of the notions about time and nation that had hitherto dominated in the North, America's "real parturition years" undermined beliefs in the country's historical exceptionalism and Providential assurance. As Louis Menand notes, "[t]hose beliefs had not prevented the country from going to war; they had not prepared it for the astonishing violence the war unleashed; they seemed absurdly obsolete in the new, postwar world. The Civil War swept away the slave civilization of the South, but it swept away almost the whole intellectual culture of the North along with it" (x).[96]

In chapters one and two I explored the effects of this overturning on Whitman's poetry and chronopolitics. I argued that whereas Whitman's antebellum poetry takes the pulse of the present by recording its rhythms and promises, his postbellum verse refigures the future as the exclusive space of liberated experience and, in so doing, articulates (and rethinks) a broader shift within liberal ideology. This chapter takes as its subject a different realignment, and literary engagement with, the "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" emergent after the war. It attempts to capture a mode of historical consciousness emphatically outside the liberalism that I discussed earlier. Unleashed by the ontological and epistemological upheaval in the North, this other mode of temporal experience and historical conceptualization still contains railroads, and artisans, and dreams of liberation, but it conceives of these things in radically different ways. Whitman attempted to make beautiful a postwar world in which time was increasingly uniform and schematic. He took the heaps and fragments of a temporal order based paradoxically, and because of that all the more powerfully, on perpetual innovation and obsolescence, and he made them sing. Melville has no psalms for such a world. He is far more interested in revealing the emptiness of an era in which time has been deprived of its potentiality. His is a prophecy of deformed portents, a poetic art fashioned out of modernity's ugliness.

Through the Civil War, I will argue, Melville's understanding of historical change undergoes significant revision. In writing the war, Melville discovers time's negativity: its tendency to discharge over and over, as if from inside itself, and generate continuity out of discontinuity. The effects of this discovery, we shall see, are at once political and aesthetic, bearing on issues of temporal perception, the political valences of poetic form, and the shape of one of nineteenth-century America's most complex literary careers.

AESTHETICS AND POLITICS AFTER THE WAR: MELVILLE'S POETIC TURN

Melville's poetic career has proven to be quite the loose fish. Ever since Raymond Weaver, in the first biography of the author (1921), described the period after 1857 as one of "whisper[s]," "recoil," and "sedulous isolation," scholars have debated how and why a writer could pen nine novels in eleven years and then turn away from prose fiction. Let us begin with the facts: upon completing the *Piazza Tales* (1856) and *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Melville plunged himself into verse, studying the poetry of Dante, Friedrich Schiller, Heinrich Heine, John Milton, Matthew Arnold, and John Keats, among others. He began experimenting with his own poems, producing a slim volume in 1860 that did not find a publisher; and then, in 1866, one year after the fall of Richmond, published his first book of verse, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War.*

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96 Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," in *The Rebellion Record*, ed. Frank Moore, Vol. 1 (New York: Putnam, 1864), 39; Thomas Settle, Jr. in the *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Standard*, April 3, 1867.

For many, this is a familiar narrative. Yet the manner in which the story has been framed has tended to undermine rather than illuminate the political and aesthetic valences of Melville's embrace of verse. Literary critics, by and large, have interpreted this metamorphosis of novelist into poet as the result of a tragic capitulation to outside forces. Whether this capitulation is construed as a reconciliation with the power of the state (Michael Paul Rogin); as a Lincoln-like embrace of consent-via-repression (Anne Norton); as a retreat away from fiction into more solipsistic literary forms (Nina Baym); as a deepened attachment to his own Democratic politics that ultimately enables him "to make peace with his pen" (Stanton Garner); as a more general renunciation of democracy as a political system (Carolyn Karcher); or as the effect of an "inner civil war" that causes him to abandon political radicalism and sympathize with the defeated Southerners (Daniel Aaron), the underlying assertion of most accounts of Melville's middle and late career is that he responds to the war by way of abandonment, complicity, or reversal, and that his poetry is the outgrowth of this collapse.[97]

Prevailing scholarly narratives portray Melville's postwar regression as both political and artistic. Politically, Melville ostensibly renounces his antebellum predilections for subversion and egalitarianism and adopts what historian David Blight terms a "reconciliationist" vision that posits the priority of national unity over civil rights and the authority of the state over the sway of self. Melville becomes a Captain Vere-like worshiper of form and law, a Parsi whose sun is constituted power. "Melville's response to the Civil War," as Carolyn Karcher puts it, "falls short of the extraordinary prescience, insight, and versatility he had shown in dealing with slavery and race in his antebellum fiction. . . We are forced to conclude that the powerful egalitarian convictions that Melville had dramatized with greater acumen than any other writer of his time were not rooted deeply enough in his psyche to withstand the shock of a war that brought his deepest personal conflicts into play" (*Shadow Over the Promised Land*, 276-7). Artistically, Melville's poetic turn is often depicted not as a turn at all but as a retreat, either from public scrutiny, from the novel's allures, or from the desire for popular success. Baym's assertion, for instance, that in the lyric Melville "found the mode that permitted him to attend only to his own voice, without obligation to serve either the eternal verities or the populace" testifies to the long afterlife of Robert Penn Warren's claim that Melville's poetic career stems directly from the experience of "constant failure."[98]

This charge about Melville's postwar withdrawal has been answered, to some degree, by an emerging critical revival of Melville's poetry. Lawrence Buell, Deak Nabers, and Robin Grey, among others, have disclosed many of the ways in which the content of Melville's poetry comprises the very opposite of a retreat: Buell contends that Melville constructs a "globalist" poetics in *Clarel* which, by de-nationalizing rhetoric and discourse about divinity and politics, subjects the seemingly immune

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97 Raymond M. Weaver, *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 348, 350; Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 257-287; Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas*, 278-292; Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA* 94.5 (October 1979): 921; Stanton Garner, *The Civil War World of Herman Melville* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1993), 43; Carolyn L. Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980), 258-308; and Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War*, 88-9. An especially compelling version of this story is offered by Karcher in "The Moderate and the Radical: Melville and Child on the Civil War and Reconstruction," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 45 (1999): 187-257.

98 Baym, "Melville's Quarrel," 921; Warren, "Introduction" to *The Essential Melville* (New York: Ecco Press, 1987), 11. On the distinctions between radical, reconciliationist, and lost cause interpretations of the war, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 98-140.

Gilded Age U.S. to history's inexorable laws; Grey has demonstrated that Melville's historical and literary allusiveness in *Battle-Pieces* derives not from an attempt to escape into history's arcane recesses but from a rediscovery of Milton's poetic representations of civil strife and an abiding fascination with the legacies of violent struggle; and as Nabers has brilliantly shown, that volume's most perplexing semantic ambiguities are inextricable from the legal paradoxes engendered by the war and Reconstruction. Recently, other critics such as Rosanna Warren, Helen Vendler, Samuel Otter and Elizabeth Renker have also elucidated the radical formal complexity and innovativeness which makes Melville's poetry, from its reversal of lyric temporality to its entanglements of epistemology and desire, at once weirdly enthralling and unique.[99]

This critical revival, however, has so far had less to say about Melville's initial shift from prose to poetry. The two most influential (and to a great extent, mutually exclusive) arguments about this transition come from William Spengemann and Hershel Parker. Spengemann has posited that, contrary to the standard critical narratives, Melville was a poet from the very beginning and only took up prose fiction in order to stretch or test the capacities of his verse. Melville, he insists, was "a lifelong poet, who wrote some fiction early on but, finding the form inimical to his literary needs, [. . .] gave it up the minute necessity and opportunity concurred and spent the rest of his life in thrall to his sovereign muse." Parker, meanwhile, in a meticulous account of Melville's reading and writing habits, has claimed that he turned to poetry not at the inception of his literary career but in the early- to mid-1850s, and that this transformation was the direct result of Melville's own, autonomous artistic and intellectual development. Melville, he notes, "was a practicing poet (1857 or 1858-1891) for three times as long as he was a professional, publishing writer of prose (1846-57). Poetry was not just a sideline for [him]: it was what he wrote for a third of a century."[100] Both of these accounts admirably refuse the false story of withdrawal, but they also tend to downplay the influence of politics and history on Melville's writing. Indeed, Spengemann, by simply reversing the story of collapse, tends to figure Melville's fiction as a series of transient or perhaps even derivative experiments, while Parker's revised chronology presents Melville as a detached literary genius, a "nonpartisan" removed from the world who becomes a poet almost entirely on his own accord.

In this chapter, I pose an alternative interpretation of Melville's poetic turn. There are reasons why Melville does not take up journalism, or historical writing, or some even looser form of prose fiction, but poetry in particular. These reasons, I contend, have to do with the distinct properties of literary – and, especially, lyric – verse: its intense, structural dependence on repetition; its tendency to shuttle between the general and the particular, sometimes within the space of a single line; and, perhaps

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99 See Lawrence Buell, "Melville and the Question of Decolonization," *American Literature* 64.2 (June 1992): 215-237, and "Melville the Poet," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 135-156; Deak Nabers, *Victory of Law*, 19-47; Robin Grey, "Annotations on Civil War: Melville's *Battle-Pieces* and Milton's War in Heaven," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 4.1 and 2 (March and October 2002): 51-70; Rosanna Warren, "Dark Knowledge: Melville's Poems of the Civil War," *Raritan* 19.1 (1999): 100-121; Helen Vendler, "Melville and the Lyric of History," *Southern Review* 35.3 (Summer 1999): 579-594; Samuel Otter, "How *Clarel* Works," in *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley (London: Blackwell, 2006), 467-481; and Elizabeth Renker, *Strike through the Mask: Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), 101-121.

100 William Spengemann, "Melville the Poet," *American Literary History* 11.4 (Winter 1999): 569-609 (the claim that Melville was a "lifelong poet" appears on 573); Hershel Parker, *Melville: The Making of the Poet* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2008), 6-7, 9 (on Melville as a "nonpartisan" see especially 111-123). See also Parker's "Historical Note" in *Published Poems*, 331-517.

most importantly, its ability to generate aesthetic experiences which elude, repel, or undo the pressures of the material world. Melville understood poetry, first and foremost, as a mode and medium of worldly engagement. As such, we should grasp the birth of his poetic career not as a withdrawal but as a politico-aesthetic realignment – and as a profoundly situated one at that. One of the most glaring shortcomings of Spengemann's and Parker's counter-narratives is that neither one acknowledges the degree to which the Civil War reshaped Melville's career, despite the fact that his first book of published poems is not about imaginary islands or sailors in the Pacific but about America's descent into "Nature's dark side," that "conflict of convictions" which brought about unprecedented national bloodletting (*BP*, 7 and 8). The fact that Melville's inaugural public verses are *war* lyrics is indispensable to our understanding of his shift from prose fiction.

Accordingly, I argue that Melville's sense of verse – what he considers it to be, and why he thinks it is so important – is best accessed through the poems of *Battle-Pieces.* It is in the very form, content, and arrangement of his war lyrics – from the grim, prefatory poem, "The Portent," to pieces such as "The House-Top" and "The Frenzy in the Wake" – that Melville's understanding of verse is most fully illuminated. What we discover in the structures and meanings of *Battle-Pieces* is nothing less than an immanent account of Melville's poetic turn, an inside narrative about how Melville's adoption of verse originates in his experience and understanding of the Civil War as a historical event. In the pages that follow, I reframe Melville's career and sense of aesthetics through a reading of his war-poems. Moving from the volume's opening verses ("The Portent," "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions") to its more explicitly situated pieces (such as "The House-Top," "The Frenzy in the Wake," and "The Apparition," as well as the nautical sequence that includes "Dupont's Round Fight" and "The Temeraire"), I examine how, by resisting efforts to construe the war in terms of either progress or providence, Melville is able to construct a powerfully sinuous poetics, one that fuses the politics of time to the form and function of verse. Indeed, in these unruly poems we will find that Melville's "poetics of difficulty" – to use Elizabeth Renker's apt phrase – is in fact what is *most* political about his postbellum art, since it shifts the terms and mode of his literary engagement with the world.[101] His poetic realignment is thus, I maintain, not a reaction against publicity but a politico-artistic response to the temporal destabilization of the war itself.[102] In the wake of disunion, Melville

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101 Elizabeth Renker, "Melville's Poetic Singe," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 2.2 (October 2000): 13.

102 To be sure, Melville's antebellum fiction was already poetic on a variety of levels. Poetry shapes *Mardi* both thematically (in the character of Yoomy) and structurally, as the novel's chapters expand out upon one another as so many lyric-like variations (replicating the narrative's own movement from island to island). *White-Jacket*'s critique of modern disciplinary practices depends, in terms of its address, on a ethico-poetic distinction between "the public" and "the people" ("[L]et us hate the one and leave to the other," pleads Jack Chase, reclaiming Lemsford's Virgil-like *Songs of the Sirens* from the critics [549]). And, as E.L. Doctorow has argued, *Moby-Dick*, as far as its compositional process is concerned, is an essentially lyrical artwork. Ishmael's narrative undermines its own linearity by ceaselessly reintroducing and refocusing the story's extra-narrative components: "Melville's irrepressible urge to make the most of everything suggests the mind of a poet. The significations, the meaningful enlargements he makes of tools, coins, colors, existent facts are the work of a lyric poet, a maker of metaphorical meanings, for whom unembellished linear narrative is but a pale joy." Even the novel's more properly linear narrative moments, Doctorow points out, are themselves subjected to a relentless lyrical reworking. *Moby-Dick* can thus "be read as a series of ideas for poems. It is a procession of ideational events. Melville's excesses are not mere pedagogical interruptions of the narrative; nor are they there to provide authority for the tale. They burst from the book as outward flarings or star births, as a kind of cosmology, finally, to imply a multiplicity of universes, one inside

takes up the lyric in order to account for and reimagine time's coercive reiterations, and *Battle-Pieces*, in all of its beautiful instability, is the record of this transformation.

"AND STORMS ARE FORMED BEHIND THE STORM WE FEEL": *BATTLE-PIECES* AND THE SHAPE OF HISTORY

Nine years before writing about the "boom-chain burst" of fratricidal violence, Melville constructed a model of divine chronometrics in *Pierre* (1852), in which the Emersonian lecturer and philosopher, Plotinus Plinlimmon, attempts to get "water out of stone" by hearing a voice in God's "profound Silence." That voice preaches equivalence through contradiction and proclaims that "this world's seeming incompatibility with God, absolutely results from its meridian correspondence with him." In his belabored effort to concoct a philosophical system out of the veiled synchronization of heaven and earth, Plinlimmon poses a fascinating question that (although he immediately refutes it) lingers suggestively in the text. The very existence of prophets, messiahs, and martyrs, he momentarily admits, would seem to confirm a *dis*junction between the worldly and the divine: if Providence is harmonious, "why then does God now and then send a heavenly chronometer (as a meteoric stone) into the world, uselessly as it would seem, to give the lie to all the world's time-keepers?"[103]

The answer would not arrive – striking the earth, as it were, in the form of a very different "meteoric stone" – until 1859, when John Brown raided Harper's Ferry and smuggled guerrilla warfare into the American South. *Battle-Pieces* commences with this chronometer's dead body:

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another, endlessly and each one of which could have its novel as the sea has this one." If Melville opts almost exclusively for poetry following the war, it is because this cosmological plurality has been reduced or emptied out. For Melville, the postwar world of iron ships and the Iron Dome, of utilitarianism, failed Reconstruction and Gilded Age profiteering, is a world marked less by endless, spontaneous star bursts than it is by a single, tragic explosion that reoccurs without end. It is a world suited not for the novel, which for Melville unchained social and intellectual possibilities, but instead for an anti-epic verse that engages directly with the metaphysics of repetition and depletion. "Composing *Moby-Dick*: What Might Have Happened," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 5.1 (March 2003): 12.

103 Herman Melville, *Pierre: or, the Ambiguities*, Vol. 7 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Hayford, Parker, and Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1999), 211-213. Plinlimmon has been the subject of a great deal of critical attention, and has been interpreted in a variety of ways: as a representative of the jeremiad tradition; as a satirical figure whose pamphlet recalls Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729); as a "lurking force associated with the space of the page"; as an embodiment of absolute "evil"; as a figure for Pierre's own Narcissistic drive; and as evidence of Melville's fascination with Karl Friedrich Gauss's conception of "interval time" and other contemporaneous scientific models for measuring space. See, respectively, Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 28-30; Brian Higgins, "Plinlimmon and the Pamphlet Again," *Studies in the Novel* 4 (Spring 1972): 27-38; Elizabeth Renker, *Strike Through the Mask*, 35-9; Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, The Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 207-209; Priscilla Wald, "Hearing Voices in Melville's *Pierre*," *boundary 2* 17.1 (Spring 1990): 117-120; and Brian J. Ricca, "'Strange, Imperious Instantaneousness': Mysteries of Space/Time in *Pierre; or the Ambiguities*," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 8.2 (June 2006): 3-16.

Hanging from the beam,
Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
Shenandoah!
The cut is on the crown
(Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
(Weird John Brown),
The meteor of the war.
(*BP*, 5)

Melville's Brown is the most ambiguous of human augurs, presented by way of artistic disavowal (his mien and affect, like Shenandoah's future, exceed representation) and depicted as the very embodiment of the the future, both poetically (prefacing the volume) and historically (initiating a chronology of the war and foreshadowing its violence). Melville titled this poem "The Portent" in part because "Weird John Brown," whose symbolic instability is reinforced by his purely parenthetical presence, propels the reader's historical vision forward to Virginia's coming battles and, more generally, to the nation's own psychic traumas ("the stabs shall heal no more"). Writing not in the "white heat generated by immediacy," as Hennig Cohen puts it, "but rather [in] the cool calculation which the passage of time makes possible," Melville is crafting, out of these italicized words that literally lean forward, a reconstructed history that projects as much as it recalls.[104] Melville's Brown also portends a future that has in a sense already occurred. The "future veils its face" not simply because this abolitionist's martyrdom has disabled the models of happy synthesis offered by those like Plinlimmon, but because the future can be read only in its antecedents. And this is the thrust of Melville's retelling of the war's events: violence's pasts do not expire; they instead create patterns of change that extend through the present and beyond.

Battle-Pieces consequently pivots upon an idea of historical transformation that incessantly turns back – to the Crusades, to the Bible's soldiers and battlefields, and to ancient Roman coups. This temporal movement goes by different names in *Battle-Pieces*. In "Lee in the Capitol" it is "Fate" that drives the North and the South to arms (*BP*, 163). Melville's infamous "Supplement" uses "Destiny" as a kind of master code to comprehend the South's sins and make sense of the war's occurrence ("to treat of human actions is to deal wholly with second causes" because the *prima causa* of events is time's movement [*BP*, 185]). What unites these formulations is history's reiterative nature.[105] "Misgivings (1860)," which presents the disunited states as the unstable issue of "the world's fairest

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104 Cohen, "Introduction" to *The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1963), 15.

105 Helen Vendler, in "Melville and the Lyric of History," makes the perceptive claim that "Melville's gaze is not upward, like Dickinson's, nor directed in a democratic horizontal, like Whitman's; it is pitched downward under the sea, or to the fiery hell at the core of the earth" (580). Part of this "downward" gaze, I am arguing, is temporal: to glimpse that which lies beneath, Melville turns, like Klee's angel, back to history.

hope" joined with "man's foulest crime," ends its second stanza with these metaphors of convulsion:

> With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
> And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
> The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.
> (*BP*, 7)

In these architectural and nautical figures Melville not only portrays a deeply structural disturbance, wherein the Constitution is threatened in the same manner as a building with faltering rafters or a ship with an unsteady keel, but also suggests that the present's vision is decidedly circumscribed. "And storms are formed behind the storm we feel" implies that other storms are coming but also indicates, as the footnote suggests, that weather, like history, has a pattern: "The gloomy lull of the early part of the winter of 1860-1, seeming big with final disaster to our institutions, affected some minds that believed them to constitute one of the great hopes of mankind, much as the eclipse which came over the promise of the first French Revolution affected kindred natures, throwing them for the time into doubts and misgivings universal" (*BP*, 173). On the basis of comments like this, some critics have argued that Melville distrusted all "violent popular uprisings" and never saw a revolution that he truly liked.[106] Yet Melville's "Misgivings" footnote is, like the vast majority of the poems that make up *Battle-Pieces*, concerned with the limitations of perspective: the phrase "some minds that believed" divulges the comment's fragmented and partial nature. Moreover, the underlying thrust of the footnote, and of the poem as well, is that the American Civil War somehow correlates with the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution. Whether the implication is that the coming war may imperil America's democratic institutions in the way that the Reign of Terror liquidated France's aristocracy, or alternatively that the South's secession involves a belated counter-revolution, a warped reiteration of the Founding, the point is that Melville is actively searching history for codes and patterns. And as Melville well knew – and would again reflect on in *Clarel* – the French Revolution was but a string of connected revolts: there is no 1789 without 1848 and 1871, and vice versa. Blanqui doubles Robespierre. Thiers resurrects, and re-embodies, Barras. Melville neither fears nor hates revolution itself, but he is horrified by its cyclicality.

Melville returns to France again, this time via New York, in "The House-Top: A Night Piece." Situated midway in the volume and set during the 1863 draft riots that rocked Manhattan for close to a week, the poem is the imagined soliloquy of an upper-class observer – Garner has identified him, more specifically, as a member of the city's conservative Urban League Club – who, while standing on his rooftop and removed from the fray, waxes philosophic as "The Town is taken by its rats":

> All is hushed near by.
> Yet fitfully from far breaks the mixed surf
> Of muffled sound, the Atheist roar of riot.
> Yonder, where parching Sirius set in drought,
> Balefully glares red Arson – there – and there
> The Town is taken by its rats – ship-rats
> And rats of the wharves. All civil charms
> And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe –
> Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
> Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,

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106 Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), 97-101.

> And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature.[107]
> (*BP*, 64)

Holding forth in the more traditional meter of iambic pentameter, the poem's lyric speaker is shocked by the sight and sound of the city's working-class multitude. Refusing to be drafted into a war that in mid-1863 seemed unwinnable and from which the rich were exempt (paying a three hundred dollar fee freed one from service), beginning on 13 July these rioters looted stores, burned homes, attacked police, cracked heads against lampposts, and lynched random African Americans in the streets, eventually killing nineteen people. Eric Foner notes that it was "the largest civil insurrection in American history apart from the South's rebellion itself" (32).[108] Like the riots, though, the poem does not simply end with the masses' uprising. "Hail to the low dull rumble" of armed repression, the speaker proclaims:

> Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll
> Of black artillery; he comes, though late;
> In code corroborating Calvin's creed
> And cynic tyrannies of honest kings;
> He comes, nor parlies; and the Town, redeemed,
> Gives thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heeds
> The grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied,
> Which holds that Man is naturally good,
> And – more – is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged.

Paul's conception of man ("Nature's Roman, never to be scourged") is, for Melville's genteel witness, disconfirmed by the necessity of constituted violence. One of the more remarkable things about the poem, and about this stanza in particular, is what it leaves unsaid: it mentions none of the carnage of

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107 Stanton Garner, *The Civil War World of Herman Melville*, 253-6. This insistence on a distance between the lyric speaker and Melville himself has nonetheless been shared by few of *Battle-Pieces*' critics, most of whom neglect the opacity of Melville's verse and read the poem as a transparent expression of Melville's politics. See, for example, Richard Fogle, "Melville and the Civil War," *Tulane Studies in English* 9 (1959): 74; Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 266-7; Edward H. Rosenberry, *Melville* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 140-1; and Andrew Delbanco, *Herman Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 272. David Devries and Hugh Egan argue against this collapsing of Melville's identity into that of the speaker in their essay, "'Entangled Rhyme': A Dialogic Reading of Melville's *Battle-Pieces*," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 9.3 (October 2007): 17-33. Devries and Egan contend that *Battle-Pieces* contains a "polyphony of voices" and develops a "heteroglossic lyrical style," but they tend to overemphasize the role of multiplicity and instability when it comes to the poems' concerns with history. Over the course of the poem, the "solitary speaker" of "The House-Top," they write, "loses a private identity, along with a specific temporal and geographical location, and becomes lost in a web of increasingly paradoxical allusions" (28). My point is quite the opposite: that the poem's allusions and sense of location are at once conceptually coherent, historically situated, and formally important.

108 On the 1863 draft riots, which were especially massive in New York City but also sprang up in other parts of the U.S., see Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas*, 253-5; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-72* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1981), 101-13; and Barnet Schecter, *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America* (New York: Walker and Co., 2007).

that week, not the rioters' destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum and the city's docks, not their roasting of men over slow fires, not the federal troops' use of bayonets and howitzers to kill somewhere between two hundred and one thousand New Yorkers, not even the clandestine disappearing of the rioters' bodies afterwards. "The House-Top" instead abstracts the events of the uprising via allusion and figuration. Edmund Wilson's claim in *Patriotic Gore* that *Battle-Pieces* is little more than "versified journalism" is nowhere more spectacularly inappropriate than in relation to this poem (479).

Melville explains his allusive representation of the riot in his footnote, which transports the reader from nineteenth-century New York to fourteenth-century France: "'I do not write the horrible and inconceivable atrocities committed,' says Froissart, in alluding to the remarkable sedition in France during his time. The like may be hinted of some proceedings of the draft-rioters" (*BP*, 175). *Froissart's Chronicle*, which Melville references here, narrates the principal battles in and between England and France from 1322 to 1400. Of particular interest is the chapter about the 1357 peasant rebellion (or "Jacquerie") outside of Paris from which this quote is drawn. Contrary to the dictates of the natural order, Froissart explains, numerous peasants, discontent with their lot, began banding together and destroying the property of the rich:

> Wherever they went their numbers grew . . . And those evil men, who had come together without leaders or arms, pillaged and burned everything and violated and killed all the ladies and girls without mercy, like mad dogs. Their barbarous acts were worse than anything that ever took place between Christians and Saracens. Never did men commit such vile deeds. They were such that no living creature ought to see, or even imagine or think of, and the men who committed the most were admired and had the highest places among them. I could never bring myself to write down the horrible and shameful things which they did to the ladies. But, among other brutal excesses, they killed a knight, put him on a spit, and turned him at the fire and roasted him before the lady and her children. After about a dozen of them had violated the lady, they tried to force her and the children to eat the knight's flesh before putting them cruelly to death.[109]

Melville, who sustained a lifelong fascination with barbarism and flesh-eating, was likely drawn immediately to such a description of Western cannibalism.[110] Froissart's account puts an entirely different twist on the claim in "The House-Top" that, in the draft riots, and perhaps in periods of great upheaval more generally (like the Civil War itself), society's "civil charms" dissolve "like a dream." Solidity's uncertainty – that which renders it but a "crust" – flows from historical patterns of disintegration and collapse. Lynching free blacks and dock workers in mid-nineteenth-century Manhattan thus becomes, in a way, inseparable from – because it repeats, in another time and another form – a failed peasant revolution in mid-fourteenth-century France. But the scope of historical reiteration does not end for Melville with the dissolution of boundaries between inside and outside, between civilization and its other. Like Melville's upper-class observer, Froissart concludes not with rebellion but with its Draconian suppression:

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109 Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (New York: Penguin, 1978), 151-2.

110 On Melville and cannibalism include, see Caleb Crain, "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels," *American Literature* 66.1 (March 1994): 25-53; Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 19-23 and 181-5; Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), 9-20; and Geoffrey Sanborn, *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998).

> When the gentry [. . .] saw their houses destroyed and their friends killed, they [. . .] began to kill those evil men and to cut them to pieces without mercy. Sometimes they hanged them on the trees under which they found them. The King of Navarre on a single day slew of them more than three thousand [. . .] But by then they had increased so fast that all taken together, they easily amounted to a hundred thousand men. When they were asked why they did these things, they replied that [. . .] [t]hey thought that by such means they could destroy all the nobles and gentry in the world, so that there would be no more of them. (152-3)

Each attempt to reappropriate the commons, Melville realizes, provokes a corresponding and more violent reaction from the propertied class. History's principle is supersession. The gentry may now wield rifles, but modern rebellions, like their medieval antecedents, bring "the midnight roll" of "black artillery" just the same.

Critics of *Battle-Pieces* often interpret the volume's sense of history as a technique for evading the present. Traces of William Dean Howell's 1866 contention that Melville's poems dislocate the reader "until you are lost to every sense of time or place" linger in some otherwise rigorous contemporary accounts that read Melville's historical poetics as an outgrowth of disillusionment or as a compensatory ideology.[111] What such interpretations omit is the degree to which Melville's conception of historical repetition provides *Battle-Pieces* with a philosophical understanding of temporal development that broadens and deepens the volume's reconstructive chronology of the war. It resituates the Civil War within a layered but uneven time frame wherein cyclical change, rebellion, and reprisal persistently and traumatically succeed one another. In "The Frenzy in the Wake," the second poem of a diptych about Sherman's march, the lament of Melville's Southern observer –

> With burning woods our skies are brass,
> The pillars of dust are seen;
> The live-long day their cavalry pass—
> No crossing the road between.
> We were sore deceived – an awful host!
> They move like a roaring wind.
> Have we gamed and lost? But even despair

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111 William Dean Howells, review in the *Atlantic Monthly*, 19 February, 1867, 252-3; reprinted in *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 526-8. For contemporary readings of Melville's historical poetics, see, for example, Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land*, 260-3; Deak Nabers, *Victory of Law*, 32-5; Helen Vendler, "Melville and the Lyric of History," 587-8; and Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990), 171-90. For Karcher, Melville's historical references pose the question of "whether the civil strife that has cruelly divided brother from brother really has been a war between Right and Wrong, or only another senseless medieval feud, like that of York and Lancaster, Guelph and Ghibelline" (262) while, for Vendler, they effectively sweep "the American conflict [. . .] into Melville's panoptic view of the perennial eruption of human aggression" (587). According to Nabers, historical teleology enables Melville, throughout *Battle-Pieces* and in the "Supplement," to temporarily settle and reinterpret the ambiguities generated by the law's paradoxes. And Timothy Sweet, for whom *Battle-Pieces* is the aesthetic expression of a "crisis of representation," argues that Melville's historical allusions displace "the actual violence" of the war "into a very obscure past" (171, 189). My interest, it should be clear, is instead in Melville's representations of history as a sequence of complex repetitions.

Shall never our hate rescind.

– finds its historical analogue, tellingly, in the Roman Civil War. "Plutarch," writes Melville, "relates that in a military council held by Pompey and the chiefs of that party which stood for the Commonwealth, it was decided that under no plea should any city be sacked that was subject to the people of Rome. There was this difference, however, between the Roman civil conflict and the American one. The war of Pompey and Caesar divided the Roman people promiscuously; that of the North and South ran a frontier line between what for the time were distinct communities or nations" (*BP*, 98, 177). Sherman's scorched earth campaign, which turned churches and courthouses into "pillars of dust" and covered the skies with ash (imagery that also haunts *Clarel*), thus becomes a more brutal repetition of Julius Caesar's subjugation of Pompey. The historical linkage joins Roman and American applications of violence to the aleatory grounds of legal authority, and it supports Edgar Dryden's perceptive claim that *Battle-Pieces* tends to comprehend the Civil War as "an example of a conflict, periodically reenacted, [. . .] in the long sequence of events that are the history of the Western world. Hence reading the signs and omens of the present is a matter of identifying patterns of recurrence that reveal the coercive force of history."[112]

Melville's comparison, nonetheless, also posits an important internal difference between the two scenes of devastation: because of its more totalizing regional divisions, the American struggle allows for even greater bloodshed. The kind of historical repetition that Melville exposes here is not a simple reiteration of events. The war is "part of a long [temporal] sequence," but it is also more than that. History in *Battle-Pieces* has nothing to do with mere resemblances, parallels, or easily exchangeable events. Rather, Melville is fascinated, both aesthetically and politically, with the temporality of a kind of repetition that manifests in echoes, rebirths, and reflections. Melville's historical imaginary hinges on an understanding of "complex repetition," which does not replicate something evenly but instead, to borrow a phrase from Gilles Deleuze, repeats "an 'unrepeatable'": it does not "add a second and third time to the first, but carr[ies] the first time to the 'nth' power."[113] *Battle-Pieces* forges a chain of historical connection out of disparate events and forces – thereby bonding Unionists, Secessionists, New York rioters, and federal troops to medieval knights, rebellious peasants, and Roman generals. But this chain's links are also strangely set apart, even traumatically severed, since time's events are for Melville not wholly congruous instants but related moments of undoing in a vast historical cycle.

Melville represents this cycle through a number of related figures: storms and gravestones, sharks and gorges, volcanoes, abysses, and shadows. Howells was not entirely off the mark when he

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112 Edgar Dryden, *Monumental Melville: The Formation of a Literary Career* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 77

113 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 1. Deleuze's notion of "complex repetition" revises Nietzsche's theory of the "eternal return," according to which the world "lacks the power of [. . .] renewal" and, consequently, is marked not by "development" but by recurrence. *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, ed. Oscar Levy, (London: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 15: 430-2. Amending this idea that disorder and reiteration are linked, Deleuze argues that complex repetition is always internally differentiated, and that this is precisely what renders it transgressive: "It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favor of a more profound and more artistic reality" (3). I would add that, in Melville's aesthetics in particular, this inner severing also distinguishes his poetic representations of historical change not only from premodern and classical notions of temporal cyclicality, such as Aristotle's schema of political transformation, but also from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American Enlightenment models of history, which tend to imagine time along a common historical plane.

described Melville's poems as disturbingly dream-like. *Battle-Pieces* is indeed less a book of battles than of requiems, erased monuments, and imagined memories. Melville's privileged metaphors, however, are also rigorously historical not despite but *because of* their intense abstraction. They impart senses of historical continuity and then, as if spinning against themselves, short-circuit that continuity by pointing out the partiality of perspective. Consider Melville's reading of history's ebbs and flows in "The Conflict of Convictions (1860-1)":

> The Ancient of Days forever is young,
> Forever the scheme of Nature thrives
> I know a wind in purpose strong –
> It spins *against* the way it drives.
> What if the gulfs their slimed foundations bare?
> So deep must the stones be hurled
> Whereon the throes of ages rear
> The final empire and the happier world.
> (*BP,* 10)

Temporal progress, these lines suggest, inheres in a relentless development: "Nature" preserves an ancient order of things even in the laying bare of foundations. Melville is insisting here on the potentially baptismal effect of America's struggle. History spins "*against* the way it drives" because destiny works like the cross winds: the "final empire" of "Progress and Humanity" is constantly evolving out of affliction (*BP,* "Supplement," 188). Shot through with the promise of inevitable advancement, these lines then confront, and are undermined by, those of another, far less sincere – and far less hopeful – lyric speaker:

> *(The poor old Past,*
> *The Future's slave,*
> *She drudged through pain and crime*
> *To bring about the blissful Prime,*
> *Then – perished.* There's *a grave!)*

In a manner not entirely unlike Whitman, Melville endows time with body and flesh. If for the poet of "the body and the soul," however, corporealizing time concretizes history's telos, for Melville it subjects the very idea of teleological progress to brutal satire: history is rendered a murdered bondsman and the future his cruel master. Melville's humor rarely gets much darker. And in the pairing of these two stanzas, Melville's aprogressive philosophy of history finds its place within a line of critique that runs throughout Melville's writing, from *Typee* on through "Benito Cereno" and "The House-Top": that because experience is always circumscribed beyond our knowledge and beyond our will, perspective is necessarily partial and one's understanding of others, and even of oneself, is inescapably situated.

Melville's most potent metaphor for representing sudden historical change, volcanic eruption, embodies this linking of historical experience and "dark knowledge." Thinking about insurrection and historical process through the figure of the volcano was prevalent in antebellum literary and political discourse, particularly within abolitionist circles, as William Gleason has shown. From the "volcanic actors" who turn the sky "blood-red" in John Greenleaf Whittier's 1837 poem about Toussaint L'Ouverture to the insights into rebellion offered by Frederick Douglass in his 1857 poem "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," the volcano proved a crucial vehicle for reflecting on the relations between racial violence, temporal experience, and the nature of perception. During his study of *The Rebellion Record,* from which he gathered much of his knowledge about the war's events, Melville may have also come

across Amanda T. Jones's "The Prophecy of the Dead":

> We thought the volcano of war
> Would belch out its flames in the East
> We knew where the winds were ajar
> With the quarrel of soldier and priest:
> We shuddered – though far –
> To think how the vultures might feast.

Jones's poem, like Melville's war lyrics, simultaneously yokes perceptions of the war's fatedness to theological doubts ("Waits no Ararat's head? / Is no ark guided there by our God?") and questions the supposed boundary between Eastern history and Western development.[114]

Yet Melville's volcanoes, and the related figures for historical connection and disruption to which they are connected, do far more than symbolize collapse, however predetermined or unexpected. The volcanoes in *Battle-Pieces* are ciphers for prophecy as well as history. Marking with their explosions the transition between accumulation and expenditure, they testify to an abiding interest of Melville's in geological science and its politico-theological implications. In *Mardi*, we recall, the tyrannical King Media finds his claims to dynastic power undermined by a tale narrated by Babbalanja about the islands' subterranean origins:

> "The coral wall which circumscribes the isles . . . [i]n the first times . . . was charged with vapors nebulous, boiling over fires volcanic. Age by age, the fluid thickened . . . [and] [t]hen, the vast volcano burst; rent the whole mass; upthrew the ancient rocks; which now in divers [sic] mountain tops tell tales of what existed ere Mardi was completely fashioned. Hence many fossils on the hills, whose kith and kin still lurk beneath the vales. Thus Nature works, at random warring, chaos a crater, and this world a shell." (417)

Like lyric poems, the "fires volcanic" that give birth to things "sing determination into suspension" and expose, in geology's deep time, the aleatory nature of development. But craters are also crusts, and the world's fragility guarantees future eruptions, as Melville declares in the "Supplement": "Wherefore in a clear sky do we still turn our eyes toward the South, as the Neapolitan, months after the eruption, turns his toward Vesuvius? Do we dread lest the repose may be deceptive? In the recent convulsion has the crater but shifted? Let us revere that sacred uncertainty which forever impends over men and nations" (*BP*, 185). For Melville, who has seen what such eruptions do to laws and to bodies, historical open-endedness is a consecrated fact: temporal experience, like perception itself, is unavoidably circumscribed and shaped by precisely that which inscribes history with potentiality. This world is a shell: one can crack it open through armed rebellion, literary insurrection, or diving into the metaphysical deep and surfacing – as he once wrote in reference to Emerson – "with blood-shot eyes," but humanity's Neapolitan condition remains tragically intact.[115]

Melville's representations of history's echoes and rebirths do not end in retrospection. *Battle-Pieces* not only records the war but also projects and mourns the emergent. In graves and ships it

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114 John Greenleaf Whittier, "Toussaint L'Ouverture" (1837), in *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764-1865*, ed. Marcus Wood (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 506; Amanda T. Jones, "The Prophecy of the Dead," *The Rebellion Record*, 1: 74-5.

115 Robert Kaufman, "Lyric's Constellation, Poetry's Radical Privilege," *Modernist Cultures* 1.2 (Winter 2005): 212; Melville, letter to Evert Duyckinck, 3 March, 1849, in *Correspondence*, 121.

discerns the ascent of mass production and collective labor. Out of the augurs of epitaphs and ironclads, this dream poetry envisions the construction of machines and skyscrapers, and the other gifts of industry, from the rounding out of belief and expression to the desacrialization of time. In *Moby-Dick,* Melville had already glimpsed the coming of industrial capitalism. As C.L.R. James argued at the outset of the atomic age, the Promethean fires of "The Try-Works," which "invert" and "deaden" everything they illuminate, are the same fires of "the Ruhr, of Pittsburg, of the Black Country in England [. . .] of mass bombers, [and] of cities in flames, of Hiroshima, and Nagasaki" (45). In *Mardi*, *White-Jacket,* and "The Tartarus of Maids" Melville also depicted, with stunning accuracy, the conflicts between workers and capitalists that would eventually explode, from Martinsburg to St. Louis and Haymarket Square, in the 1870s and 80s and after. By the time he commenced writing *Battle-Pieces*, however, the beauty that once made possible Ishmael's joyful description of collective desire in the "Squeeze of the Hand" chapter ("Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy!" [416]), the same beauty that also enabled White-Jacket to declare with "a voice that helps to shape eternity" that "my volitions stir the orbits of the furthest suns," had by and large vanished from the earth (321). The Civil War's massive destruction – the scorched earth, unnumbered graves, and depleted families – and, more crucially, the method of that destruction – the exceptional calculation and "deadlier lore" of mass-killing, and the cold "geometric beauty" of modern planning and production – led Melville to represent a world of phantoms, because that was the only world left (*BP*, 42, 20).

Battle-Pieces is consequently shot through with visions of loss: empty churches; dead sons and fathers; depleted beliefs; old ships sunk in the deep. Melville, who would occasionally wake up at night in the countryside feeling as though he were still tossing at sea, tends, naturally, to represent this loss as a nautical event.[116] In a series of maritime poems that includes "Dupont's Round Fight," "The Stone Fleet," "In the Turret," "The Temeraire," and "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," Melville meditates on the Civil War's sea battles and, through these battles' latencies, on the process of historical transformation. In "The Stone Fleet" an "old sailor" laments the sinking of ancient whalers, now "serv[ing] the Obsolete" in Port Royal:

> To scuttle them – a pirate deed –
> Sack them, and dismast;
> They sunk so slow, they died so hard,
> But gurgling dropped at last.
> Their ghosts in gales repeat
> *Woe's us, Stone Fleet*!
> (*BP*, 22)

The age of wood, Melville realizes, is giving birth to an age of iron and steel. In each stanza, the sinking of these wooden ships, all drowning like sailors tossed overboard, is repeated in a concluding couplet, returning like the voices of the dead to haunt the present. These deceased ships find a counterpart in the decommissioned man-of-war of "The Temeraire." Once "[b]uilt of a thousand trees," Horatio Nelson's vessel is now but a relic:

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116 "I have a sort of sea-feeling here in the country," he wrote to Evert Duyckinck in 1850, "now that the ground is all covered with snow. I look out of my window in the morning when I rise as I would out of a port-hole of a ship in the Atlantic. My room seems a ship's cabin; & at nights when I wake up & hear the wind shrieking, I almost fancy there is too much sail on the house, & I had better go on the roof & rig in the chimney" (*Correspondence*, 173).

Trafalgar is over now,
The quarter-deck undone;
The carved and castled navies fire
Their evening-gun.
O, Titan Temeraire,
Your stern-lights fade away;
Your bulwarks to the years must yield,
And heart-of-oak decay.

But Trafalgar is over now,
The quarter-deck undone;
The carved and castled navies fire
Their evening-gun.
O, Titan Temeraire,
Your stern-lights fade away;
Your bulwarks to the years must yield,
And heart-of-oak decay.
(*BP*, 41-2)

Melville's depictions of "decay" in these poems, as Timothy Sweet has demonstrated, challenge the representational claims of pastoral organicism. The Civil War not only breaches "Nature's dark side" but also threatens, by unleashing mechanized production, to undo nature altogether (*BP*, 7). Melville is less interested here in simply mourning the pre-industrial world of wood than he is in bringing it into striking, and at times unnerving, juxtaposition with that which replaces it. Nelson's superannuated warship, for instance, is hauled back to shore by its nautical obverse, a decidedly inglorious iron tugboat:

A pigmy steam-tug tows you,
Gigantic, to the shore –
Dismantled of your guns and spars,
And sweeping wings of war.
The rivets clinch the iron-clads,
Men learn a deadlier lore;
But Fame has nailed your battle-flags –
Your ghost it sails before:
O, the navies old and oaken,
O, the Temeraire no more!
(*BP*, 42-3)

With its labored repetition of single rhyme (the *b*-lines' "shore," "war," "lore," "before," "more") and unusually regular meter (a reiterated three-beat), the poem's very form attempts to seize onto something that is either fleeting or already gone. The historical transition upon which the poem turns is partially illuminated in Melville's footnote: "The *Temeraire*, that storied ship of the old English fleet, and the subject of the well-known painting by Turner, commends itself to the mind seeking for some one craft to stand for the poetic ideal of those great historic wooden warships, whose gradual displacement is lamented by none more than by regularly educated navy officers, and of all nations" (*BP*, 174). The oil painting to which Melville is referring, William Turner's *The Fighting "Temeraire" Tugged to Her Last Berth to be Broken Up* (1838), likewise contrasts the retiring "Titan" with a "pigmy

steam-tug":

Turner's painting associates the anachronistic man-of-war with the setting sun both spatially (by centering the point-of-view between the two objects) and chromatically (the sun and the ship abound in yellows, whites and oranges whereas the iron tugboat, though illuminated by the light, seems trapped in its own blackness). Like Turner, Melville is interested in the *Temeraire*'s symbolic capacity as a "poetic ideal," but for Melville the "displacement" this scene announces is both broader and narrower than the one Turner identifies. The temporal anamorphosis of Melville's poem, through which an episode in England in 1838 is woven into the historical fabric of the American Civil War, reinforces an internal differentiation within Melville's repetition of Turner's scene. The statement "But Trafalgar is over now" not only declares the termination of a single past event but also announces, as the poem's subtitle implies, the death of an epoch: "*(Supposed to have been suggested to an Englishman of the old order by the fight of the Monitor and Merrimac.)*" The "displacement" encapsulated by the *Temeraire*'s retirement is restaged and intensified in the 1862 battle between Northern and Southern ironclads, those "grim" agents of mechanism and industry. Yet as Melville's other representations of temporal change reveal, this instance of historical supersession – the birth of iron out of the womb of wood – is at once synchronic and diachronic: the solidity of the world of *Temeraires* has been broken up by the world of *Merrimacs* and *Monitors*, but the latter will also in due time obsolesce.

The sense of history decoded in *Battle-Pieces* continuously doubles obsolescence with emergence, thereby opening up the present into an unanticipated future precisely when the past reoccurs. In the volume's maritime lyrics, the destruction of antiquated ships becomes part of a deeper transformation in the means and methods of destruction itself. "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" construes the encounter between ironclads, and the Civil War that occasions it, as both augur and instance of a widespread displacement of "passion" by "crank, / Pivot, and screw, / And calculations of caloric":

Hail to victory without the gaud

Of glory; zeal that needs no fans
Of banners; plain mechanic power
Plied cogently in War now placed –
Where War belongs –
Among the trades and artisans.
(*BP*, 44)

The phrase "plain mechanic power" wonderfully names, at once, the motive force of mechanized warfare, the catalyst of sailors' metamorphosis into all-too-modern laborers (now "but operatives" of an abstract industrial force), and the instrumental logic of capitalist production. Materializing out of the future with all the untimeliness of a meteor, this emergent "power" promises a novel solidity for the world. It is a solidity, of course, only of the profane in which everything, including solidity itself, eventually dissolves.

This dialectical stability, whose Vulcan fires are also inescapably Promethean, finds a concrete image in the Iron Dome. In "The Conflict of Convictions," Melville's lyric speaker associates the U.S. Capitol building's new metallic top with the expiration of democracy's founding principles:

Power unanointed may come –
Dominion (unsought by the free)
And the Iron Dome,
Stronger for stress and strain,
Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;
But the Founders' dream shall flee.
(*BP*, 10)

Critics have argued that this dome represents the nation's postwar reorientation toward imperial governance and perhaps Melville's own reconciliation with centralized state power. Rogin reads the dome as the most potent figure for Melville's postbellum sacrifice of the self to the state ("the victory of LAW" over the individual), and Norton even suggests that this iron product of imposed "Dominion" signifies the end of Melville's subversiveness, the termination of "his darkness and his blasphemy." Made of the same stuff as bombs and bullets, this dome clearly identifies the state with militarism, an association reinforced in "An Uninscribed Monument" when the speaker descries, above the dead bodies "of the multitude," the domes of depleted armaments ("iron cones and spheres of death"), and in "The Martyr," when after Abraham Lincoln's death "the People in their weeping / Bare the iron hand" (*BP*, 130, 104). Yet this symbol's resonances extend beyond interlinking the state with imperial desire and consolidated legal power. The "LAW" that the North's "victory" ensures is as much economic as juridical: it is the law of labor power's theft and conversion. The Capitol building's own "Iron Dome" is a telling example of this law's extension. Modeled on Rome's Pantheon and forged out of over eight million pounds of ironwork, this colossal top was the product not of some massive volunteer venture but of a lucrative private contract between the federal government and the New York foundry of Janes, Fowler, Kirtland and Company. Extracting a profit out of every pound of iron, this corporation was shipping loads of metal to Washington, D.C., in 1863 just as Manhattan's rioting white workers and immigrants, no longer "subjected to a better sway / Than sway of self," unsettled the city. Its materials conveyed through the same streets where men were lynched and buildings set ablaze, this iron symbol of union and perfection entered the world – as Marx writes of money – "with a congenital blood-stain."[117] The dome's threat to "the Founders' dream" is thus nascent as well as historical: it not only

117 Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 278-9; Norton, *Alternative Americas*, 280; Karl Marx, *Capital: A*

reaches back into the past by extinguishing George Washington's dream of a wooden representation of national harmony but also reaches forward by linking historical patterns of rebellion and repression to the coming age of "plain mechanic power."

HARPS AND TEMPESTS: FORM AND THE UNTIMELY IN *BATTLE-PIECES*

In *Battle-Pieces*, Melville thinks through the war's chronopolitics not simply by revealing the antiteleological nature of the nation's struggle but by inscribing conflict into the very structure of his poems. He hints at the importance of such formal antagonism in the volume's preface, where he describes his poetics as the by-product of "variance" and conflict. "Yielding instinctively," he writes, recalling the process of composition, "to feelings not inspired from any one source exclusively, [. . .] I seem, in most of these verses, to have but placed a harp in a window, and noted the contrasted airs which wayward winds have played upon the strings" (*BP*, 3). Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Aeolian harp, to which Melville implicitly refers, draws "tranquility" and aesthetic transcendence out of nature's "desultory breezes." It "tremble[s] into thought," Coleridge writes, as "one intellectual breeze," "[p]lastic and vast," caresses the strings. Melville's harp is nonetheless a far cry from Coleridge's romantic instrument:

> List the harp in the window wailing
> Stirred by fitful gales from sea:
> Shrieking up in mad crescendo—
> Dying down in plaintive key!
>
> Listen: less a strain ideal
> Than Ariel's rendering of the Real
> [. . .]
> Well the harp of Ariel wails
> Thoughts that tongue can tell no word of!

This is a harp made after John Brown's raid and the slaughter at Shiloh; a harp whose score is tragic illumination ("What like a bullet can undeceive!") and whose strings are never quite able to produce harmony because the contrasted airs are now either too strong or too various.[118]

Critique of Political Economy, trans. Ben Fowkes, 3 vols., (New York: Random House/New Left Review, 1977), 1: 925-6.

118 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp" in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (New York: Penguin, 1997), 87-8; Herman Melville, "The Aeolian Harp At the *Surf Inn*," from *John Marr and Other Sailors with Some Sea-Pieces*, in *Published Poems*, 226-7. The aeolian harp was a favorite of several Romantic poets and radical political thinkers. Referring back etymologically to the Greek god of wind, this instrument was fashioned either from an open box or from a house window, over which strings were stretched which could be played by the wind. Shelley – whose verse Melville studied carefully – invokes the figure (and its "dissonant strings") in "Mutability" (1816) in order to construct a lyric of and about impermanence. On the American side of the Atlantic, this instrument acquires a powerful political charge in Thoureau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). In "that vibrating cord high in the air over the shores of earth," Thoreau writes, I heard

Continuously eschewing perfected rhyme and disrupting their own metric patterns, Melville's lyrics re-present on the level of form the temporal tension between history's echoes and the future's arrival that animates *Battle-Pieces* as a whole. Consider the stanza noted earlier from "Conflict of Convictions" where Melville describes history's negative eschatology:

> But God his former mind retains,
> Confirms his old decree;
> The generations are inured to pains,
> And strong Necessity
> Surges, and heaps Time's strand with wrecks.

The stanza begins liltingly, moving from iambic tetrameter to trimeter, but time's violence then interrupts and propels the poem forward: the third line (tetrameter with a halting pyrrhic in the middle) is followed by two lines that mimic their own imagined action ("surging" through the verse) not only in their enjambment ("Necessity / Surges") but also by accelerating the rhythm with a spondee (in "Time's strand"). Time's cataclysmic process thereby "wrecks" the poem's own structure. Form and content, here and elsewhere throughout *Battle-Pieces*, reconstitute one another – a principle reiterated in "Dupont's Round Fight":

> In time and measure perfect moves
> All Art whose aim is sure;
> Evolving rhyme and stars divine
> Have rules, and they endure
>
> Nor less the Fleet that warred for Right,
> And, warring so, prevailed,
> In geometric beauty curved,
> And in an orbit sailed.

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different "news than the journals ever print. It told of things worthy to hear, and worthy of the electric fluid to carry the news of, not of the price of cotton and flour, but it hinted at the price of the world itself, of things [which transcend money]." In a similar vein, Marx refers to the aeolian harp in the notebooks of his doctoral dissertation, in which he laments that philosophy has "sealed itself off to form a consummate, total world." The "totality of the world in general," he argues, "is divided within itself, and this division is carried to the extreme, for spiritual existence has been freed, has been enriched to universality, the heart-beat has become in itself the differentiation in the concrete form which is the whole organism. The division of the world is total only when its aspects are totalities. The world confronting a philosophy total in itself is [. . .] a world torn apart. [P]hilosophy's activity therefore also appears [. . .] contradictory," as "its [. . .] universality" buckles after it flourishes, collapsing after it blossoms. "But one must not let oneself be misled by this storm which follows a great philosophy, a world philosophy. Ordinary harps play under any fingers, Aeolian harps only when struck by the storm." Although we have no evidence that Melville ever read either Marx or Thoreau's pre-*Walden* work, it is clear that at this time there was a shared transatlantic interest in the aeolian harp as a figure for thinking about the volatile relations between art, freedom, and historical change. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 88; Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. William Howarth (New York: Random House/Modern Library, 1981), 366-7; Marx, "Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy" (1839), book 6, in *Collected Works, Vol. 1: Karl Marx: 1835-43* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 491.

The rebel at Port Royal felt
    The Unity overawe,
And rued the spell. A type was here,
    And victory of LAW.
(*BP*, 20)

Aesthetic production and historical process are coupled here through the gravitational hold of form: Admiral Dupont's blockade of South Carolina's Port Royal, achieved through the meticulous "geometric" arrangement of ironclads around the bay, enthrones a "type" that is simultaneously artistic (entailing formal precision), legal (the henceforth unassailable "Unity" of federal legal authority), and economic (the industrial production that made this blockade possible). Industry's crystallization, the poem suggests, will exert on the artistic realm a similar pressure for rounded "time and measure" as it does in law and economics: in the age of mass production, "All Art whose aim is sure" will obey the same rhythms and rules as factories. The poem substantiates this prophecy in its own unusually near-perfect meter. The iron regularity ostensibly guaranteed by industry's "spell" does not extend, though, to the poem's rhymes, which tend to be either twisted into internal ("rhyme" / "divine") or off-rhymes ("felt" / "prevailed") or absent altogether. Such off-kilter rhyming confused and troubled contemporary reviewers when the volume was published in 1866. "His poetry runs into the epileptic," decried one reviewer, "[and] [h]is rhymes are fearful." Commentators – who generally appreciated the political "Supplement" far more than the actual poetry – focused almost obsessively, and rightly so, on Melville's "uncouth" versification. "There is something wayward in his mind," a reviewer for *New York's Round Table* ventured, "which drives him to commit many sins in authorship. The poetry that is in him is like the world in its chaotic period." What these critics miss is the reason behind Melville's "epileptic" form: it stages on the level of poetic structure a subtle undoing of instrumental rationality. Constructed through a "deviance intensified with a sort of maniacal deliberation," Melville's lyrics announce the birth of industrialism's logic – a birth that is also inescapably a *re*birth, restaging premodern displacements and repressions – and then undermine that very logic in the poems' wayward form.[119]

Instrumental reason, or "utilitarianism" in Melville's lexicon, levels that which is striated and homogenizes that which is differentiated by reorganizing people and processes according to use and calculation. Its expropriation extends to time itself, reshaping the manner in which past, present and future are imagined and indwelled through the law of measured utility. In the age of the ironclad, under the sway of capitalist instrumentality, time "sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature" and becomes reified. As Georg Lukács would put it generations later, after the maturation of industrialism's "LAW," time "freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space."[120] Instrumentality is a soulless repetition, and its theft and transformation of time – and in particular of *aesthetic* time, of those immeasurable moments of writerly creation and readerly reflection, disorientation, and surprise – is precisely what Melville's poems attempt to prophesize and circumvent.

Replete with "fearful" rhymes and striated metric patterns, the lyrics of *Battle-Pieces* regularly and concertedly undermine instrumentality's claims on poetic art. Let's look, for instance, at the

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119 *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*, 513-15, 519; Edward W. Said, "Introduction to *Moby-Dick*," in *Reflections on Exile: and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 370.

120 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1988), 90.

concluding stanza of "A Utilitarian View":

> War shall yet be, and to the end;
> But war-paint shows the streaks of weather;
> War yet shall be, but warriors
> Are now but operatives; War's made
> Less grand than peace,
> And a singe runs through lace and feather.
> (*BP*, 45)

This "message from the Fates" heard in the "clangor of [. . .] blacksmiths' fray" illumines the repeating shape of history (44). Violence, like a self-willed Lazarus, continuously resurrects itself, punctuating history's trajectory: time's becoming is the reemergence of injury. These lines nonetheless qualify their own assertions: the word "but" twice interrupts the stanza's claims of persistence, suggesting that time constitutes something more than simple cyclicality. Difference asserts itself, as if from the inside, against such hypostasized repetition: "War yet shall be, but warriors / Are now but operatives." Instrumentality's ascent, and the resulting diminution of time and labor, transfigures war by altering the mode and manner, if not the underlying nature, of killing – now exacted with the aid of mathematics and manufactories. This complex sense of historical recurrence at the same time materializes in the poem's meter: the lines that insist on history's reiterative shape repeat themselves in double spondees ("War shall yet be"; "War yet shall be") but are immediately followed, and slowed, by qualifying anapests. The promise of repetition is confirmed but then upset internally. Repetition and regularity, the very province of instrumentality, cannot take a firm hold, either in the meter or in the rhyme (which, again, bends itself through absences and slants) in this poem whose subject is precisely the *rise* of instrumental power. While the poem enunciates the future's arrival via utilitarian thought and production, its formal structure interrupts – and, in so doing, dis-figures – the tragic extension of "plain mechanic power" into the aesthetic sphere, that space where alone "do we feel ourselves snatched outside [of] time."[121]

This technique of immanent disruption re-presents, in the structure of the lyric, the negative teleology and differentiated repetition that Melville, in the wake of war, discerned in history's development. *Battle-Pieces* figures the present chiefly as a disjunctive instance, a vital moment in history's anti-evolution, by situating it between the persisting ebb and flow of past events (from the revolt of medieval French peasants to the civil strife of ancient Rome) and the future, which ushers in the unexpected (whether in the form of untimely upheaval or in the altering modes of repression). This is an exceedingly unorthodox type of lyric temporality, one in which insight does not "extend from the present" (as Susan Stewart defines the lyric's temporal bearing) but, instead, collapses in it. Indeed, Melville's peculiar poems reinforce one of the crucial insights of the recent revival in lyric studies: contrary to what critics have long thought, the lyric does not necessarily inhere in the unfettered expression of some subjectivity; it can also treat its subject from elliptical, displaced, and outside positions.[122] In *Battle-Pieces*, this dislocated viewpoint is overwhelmingly temporal. By occupying an

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121 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Continuum, 1990), 103.

122 I am thinking in particular of recent work by Susan Stewart, Virginia Jackson, Yopie Prins, Sharon Cameron, and Robert Kaufman. See Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 40-57, 242-253, and 293-326 (the claim about lyric poetry "extend[ing] from the present" is on 198); Jackson and Prins, "Lyrical Studies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27.2 (Fall 1999): 521-530; Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005); Cameron, *Lyric Time:*

aesthetic space that is at once inside and outside of history, these war lyrics are able to both reproduce time's destructive patterns and, in their own poetic structures, reconstitute and reimagine them.

This temporal poetics is especially cogent in "The Apparition (A Retrospect)," a poem based in part on the 1864 Battle of the Crater, where Northern miners placed dynamite beneath Confederate troops.[123] Here is the text in its explosive entirety:

> Convulsions came; and, where the field
> Long slept in pastoral green,
> A goblin-mountain was upheaved
> (Sure the scared sense was all deceived),
> Marl-glen and slag-ravine.
>
> The unreserved of Ill was there,
> The clinkers in her last retreat;
> But, ere the eye could take it in,
> Or mind could comprehension win,
> It sunk! – and at our feet.
>
> So, then, Solidity's a crust –
> The core of fire below;
> All may go well for many a year,
> But who can think without a fear
> Of horrors that happen so?
> (*BP*, 116)

William Shurr rightly calls this poem "the most concise statement of Melville's philosophy to be found anywhere in his writings."[124] But "The Apparition" is also more than this. Its philosophy, focused on the relationship between time and knowledge, is also a philosophy of history. The poem's brutal implication is that a true chronometer would measure not progression but regression, and would point with disillusioned hands toward the manifold "convulsions" that constitute the modern world. The poem's drama and philosophy also powerfully refocus and amplify themselves in its form since, in each of these stanzas, or mounds of verse, the poem's own structural "Solidity" is exploded. Metrically, each stanza attempts to contain a trimetric line (beginning with "A goblin-mountain was upheaved") within its tetrameter, but this containment never succeeds: the trimeter keeps returning as an irrepressible metrical "core." In its rhyme scheme the poem thus seems to deploy or repeat the ballad form, but with a difference: the typical quatrain and *abcb* rhyme pattern are disrupted, in each stanza,

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Dickinson and the Limits of Genre (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979); and Kaufman, "Lyric's Constellation, Poetry's Radical Privilege." Jackson and Prins's contention that lyric poetry frequently adopts "outside position[s] on subjectivity" by "get[ting] off the subject" and going "around it" is especially germane to my reading of Melville's reinscription of lyric temporality, as is Cameron's assertion that, in Emily Dickinson's fascicles, a series of "heteroglossic situation[s]" unfold that transgress the lyric's generic bounds. On the latter, see *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 24, 28.

123 David Cody elucidates this context in "'So, then, Solidity's a Crust': Melville's 'The Apparition' and the Explosion of the Petersburg Mine," *Melville Society Extracts* 78 (September 1989): 4-8.

124 William Shurr, *The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1972), 42.

by an extra, uncontainable c-line. Establishing a link between psychic and temporal instability (by joining, collectively, deception and "comprehension" to the guarantee of historical disorder), these c-lines offer an excess that the poem cannot assimilate and which obliges, at the verse's end, not a "statement" at all but a pained question: "But who can think without a fear / Of horrors that happen so?" Oscillating between pressure and release, the poem rearticulates in its form the philosophy of history so powerfully enunciated in the poem's content, reiterating in rhyme and meter the idea that the present is a succession of convulsions and time itself a long chain of cataclysms.

In "The Apparition," as in *Battle-Pieces* more generally, Melville writes – elliptically, and in fragments, yet altogether militantly – against the grain of progressive and providential interpretations of the war. Enunciated most powerfully on the level of form, Melville's conception of temporal change, in which history incessantly repeats itself via disruption (or really, *e*ruption), in a sense rearticulates what Marx had evocatively asserted just eight years earlier, that in capitalist modernity "all fixed, fast-frozen relations" are "swept away" and "[a]ll that is solid melts into air."[125] If for Marx this perpetual upheaval ensures an awakening of consciousness, for Melville it promises only more intense convulsions because the metaphysics that underlie the theology and politics of assured salvation have become untenable. In this age of operatives and instrumentality, solidity is pure surface: this is Melville's radical insight. Yet what he does with this knowledge is perhaps more remarkable: he uses it to transform his entire artistic project, shuttling from the relative boundlessness of the novel to the generative boundedness of the lyric. Fixated on time's regressions and returns, Melville decides to give up his condor's quill in favor of a pen capable of more explosive precision. In considering the cracks and fissures in Melville's verse, we would do well to remember the "Candles" chapter in *Moby-Dick*, where Queequeg's tattoos glow blue during an electric storm: beneath the gaps in Melville's poems there is not emptiness but fire – which continuously reignites.

125 Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm (London: Verso, 1998), 38-9.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The Hemispheres are Counterparts": History and Repetition in *Clarel*

In *Battle-Pieces*, time's arrivals and reversals are bound up with the unsettling quandary of God's "ominous silence over all," as Melville words it in "The Conflict of Convictions." This almost Gnostic blasphemy sets these lyrics apart from the majority of Northern poems published during and after the war, which, like Harriet Beecher Stowe's "The Holy War," tended to identify America's historical development in general, and the Union's imminent victory in particular, with the unassailable reason of Providence:

> So shall the spotless King with whom ye ride,
> Make vile disorder from the earth to cease;
> And Time's triumphant songs at last shall hail
> The victory of a true and righteous peace.
> (*The Rebellion Record*, I: 89-90)

In *Battle-Pieces*, in contrast, Providence surfaces only in far darker invocations, like the one offered at the end of "Lee in the Capitol":

> Brave though the Soldier, grave his plea –
> Catching the light in the future's skies,
> Instinct disowns each darkening prophecy:
> Faith in America never dies;
> Heaven shall the end ordained fulfill,
> We march with Providence cheery still.
> (*BP*, 237)

Punctuating the Southern general's jeremiad, these lines contain their own "darkening prophecy." Melville is painfully aware that all of the "contrasted airs" that play on his battle-harp, from the whispers of the dead in *Verses Inscriptive and Memorial* to the destructive gales stirred by history's repetitions, are inextricable from vexing questions about the nature of God and his relation to a world littered with countless Shilohs. The poisonous knowledge extracted from the fruit of *Battle-Pieces* is the realization that time is a "theological scandal": history's accursed tendency to "Surge" and repeatedly pile cataclysm upon cataclysm cuts down any theology based on an idea of Providence.[126] In both its fragments and its structural totality, *Battle-Pieces* is this scandal writ large: the iron warships, the reborn rebellions, and the bodies and voices of the unremembered testify not to a fissure between history's tragic events and Providential reason, but instead, and all the more terrifyingly, to a malevolent bond between them.

Writing *Battle-Pieces* neither expunged time's scandal from Melville's mind nor exorcised the

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126 Antonio Negri defines time as a "theological scandal" in *Time for Revolution*, 30. My reading of Melville is also informed by Henri Lefebvre's discussion of modern time as a theological problem in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (New York: Continuum, 2004). Noting that "[u]p until the modern era, space was generously attributed to the human race, and time to the Lord," Lefebvre argues that this scandal was the result of the Enlightenment's unprecedented secularization of temporal experience.

demons awakened in him by the war. If there is any truth to Lawrence Thompson's assertion that during the composition of *Moby-Dick* Melville went from loving God to hating him, there may be a more cryptic, related truth in Melville's response to the war's horrors and meanings. Rather than retreating from this abandoned world, Melville plunged himself more deeply into it. His interest in – or, really, his monomaniacal obsession with – the interrelations of time, theology, and conflict intensified rather than sublimated. That haunting fascination with time's paradoxes which Hawthorne memorably described in an 1857 letter was brought to a climax:

> Melville has not been well, of late [. . .] and his writings, for a long while past, have indicated a morbid state of mind [. . .] [W]e took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills (sheltering ourselves from the high, cool wind) and smoked a cigar. Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists – and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before – in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.[127]

Focused all the more implacably on vast metaphysical "deserts," Melville's postbellum art soon pushed this restless oscillation to its apex.

In the wake of *Moby-Dick*, Melville proclaimed, "Leviathan is not the biggest fish – I have heard of Krakens." Through the Civil War, Melville's understanding of "Providence and futurity" shifted and his dis-ease in the present redoubled, but he still had his Kraken to write – and to slay. During the decade following *Battle-Pieces*' publication he labored relentlessly – often working, with fevered precision, in the twilight hours after his days as an operative at the Customs House – to wrestle down and apprehend this other monster of the deep. The result is *Clarel: A Poem and a Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), a massive four-part epic that spills over into more than 18,000 lines and 150 cantos. Written by a man, in Elizabeth Melville's words, "possessed by a demon of restlessness," *Clarel* narrates a young divinity student's spiritual and physical voyage through the Holy Land with a motley group of pilgrims, "mixed men of various nations" and "envoys from all Adam's race." Implicitly as much of "an Anacharsis Clootz deputation" as the *Pequod*'s sailors, this crew includes a disillusioned revolutionary cut off from his native Europe and "Stung" by "Experience with her sharper touch" (Mortmain); a Hegelian geologist who preaches the gospel of modern science (Margoth); a liberal reformer and advocate of "the intersympathy of creeds" (Derwent); an American pioneer now displaced and roaming abroad (Rolfe); a stern Arab guide (Djalea); a trauma-stricken veteran of the Confederate army, now "islanded in [his own] thought" (Ungar); a descendant of American Puritans and convert to Jewish Zionism (Nathan); a poet whose attachment to all things beautiful is rivaled only by his fealty to the past (Vine); and a refugee from the Mexican revolution and its "[t]oo proletarian [. . .] *Progress*" (Don Hannibal).[128]

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127 Lawrence Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel with God* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952); Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Russell and Russell, 1941), 432-3.

128 Herman Melville, letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 1851, *Correspondence*, 213; Elizabeth Shaw Melville, letter from May 26, 1873, *Family Correspondence of Herman Melville, 1830-1904*, ed. Victor Hugo Palsits (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929), 29; Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 132;

Narratively structured through these pilgrims' collective trek and their ensuing dialogues (which touch on everything from Catholic ritual to communist revolution, regularly fusing the theological with the political), *Clarel* is a story of broken returns: speeches and arguments that continuously reappear but rarely terminate; spiritual pilgrimages, both individual and aggregate, that end not in enlightened rebirth but in loss (spurring so many variations of the question: "is He fled?"); and, for the eponymous character, a passage through the Old World wilderness, beginning in Jerusalem and ending in Bethlehem (the site of the Old Law's ostensible renovation), that concludes with the death of his betrothed rather than reunion and marriage (1.5.37). This artwork, which in terms of sheer time and labor consumed more of Melville's career than any other, is about circles that never complete themselves and returns that never quite occur. It is an epic, in other words, about repetition's incompletion, and it extends this logic of the broken cycle to exert pressure on the present. What if, *Clarel* asks, today is but a flawed reproduction of the past? – the final form of a repetition that has deteriorated or exhausted itself? What if the world's modernization, from the postwar U.S. to the Third French Empire and throughout "this terraqueous globe," is shaped by historical patterns that lead not to enlightenment but to darkness, and not to progressive liberation but to a greater, because all the more unconscious, subjection?

This staunchly un-Whitmanian poem is based roughly on Melville's own trip through the Holy Land and the Middle East in 1856-7. He traveled to the womb of history in order to get "hold of a definite belief," but encountered only that which he sought to escape: racial friction; religious skepticism; urban life and its discontents; and the raw, destructive force of history. In Galata he saw the poor's "rotten & wicked looking houses," so "gloomy & grimy [it] seem[ed] as if a suicide hung from every rafter within." He drank the water of the Dead Sea, which instead of inducing spiritual visions forced a realization of the unremitting "bitterness of life." And he glimpsed towers, solid and transcendent in prior epochs, now "nibbled away" by "Time" and resembling "so much spoiled pastry at which the mice have been at work." The ground itself, in Alexandria, spoke to him of upheaval's inexorable law: the roads "[s]eem[ed] macadamed with the pulverized ruins of [a] thousand cities. Every shovel full of earth dug over. The [very] soil, deep loam, looks historical." Modern science, he concluded, has "robbed us of the bloom"; now that "the great curse of modern travel – skepticism" is inescapable, "[n]o country will more quickly dissipate romantic expectations than Palestine – particularly Jerusalem."[129]

Like Clarel's pilgrimage, however, Melville's trip was a voyage forwards as well as backwards in time. In the rubble of empire, he discerned the emergent. In the fissures of mute tombs and relics, he found harrowing American futures. What struck Melville most forcefully about Constantinople, for instance, was that metropolis's portentous modernity. Replete with "filthy streets" and plagued by "crowds, crowds, crowds," this bustling city had more in common with New York and Boston than anything mentioned in the Bible. "Confusion of the streets" reigns, he noted in his journal, and "no [one is] leading [any]one [else]. No clue. [Everyone] [h]opelessly lost" (Ibid., 63). This trip continued to haunt – and inspire – him for decades.[130] In *Clarel*, Melville resurrects his Holy Land voyage in

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Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, 1.41.49-50; 2.4.60-1.

129 Herman Melville, *Journals* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1989), 61, 83, 89, 77.

130 The timing of *Clarel*'s composition bears on this argument. Hershel Parker suggests that Melville began thinking about writing *Clarel* almost immediately following his return home, which would make the poem the result of almost twenty years of artistic labor. Considering the shared thematic and formal concerns in *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* – which, I argue, develop via a common (which is not to say entirely identical) chronopolitics – it is more likely, however, that even if the *idea* of *Clarel* existed in embryo in the late 1850s, he did not commence writing it until during or after the

order to reexamine the constellation of time, belief, and politics through the dark prism of his own history. And as this reflection expands out, in canto after canto, and through splintered cycles of thought and expression, it develops into an immense poetic meditation on time itself. In the aftermath of fratricidal violence throughout the West, from Gettysburg to Paris and everywhere inbetween, Melville turns his prophetic vision to the East to search out the future in the past's remnants and excesses. It is this singular "return," at once anthropological and diagnostic, shuttling between history's remainders and the unborn, that shapes this somber, hulking text.

After the war, precisely when Whitman is extolling America's imminent progress and Frederick Douglass is expounding the war's affirmation of universal enfranchisement, Melville seemingly leaves the American soil behind. The poems characters, each alienated from their origins, partake in this shift. The Americans (Clarel, Rolfe and Nathan) have cast themselves out of their native country; Margoth, in embracing the atheism of modern science, repudiates his Jewishness in a manner similar to Spinoza, that "[s]inless recluse of Amsterdam"; and numerous others, such as Mortmain (who hails from Sweden but became a French revolutionary) and Ungar (who, doubly cursed, descends from a forgotten race and, in earlier years, served in the army of a nation that no longer exists) suffer from multiple inner schisms and separations (2.22.118). No one is "at home" in *Clarel*, either physically or spiritually, and this misalignment – a nearly universal dislocation, since every character is out-of-place and out-of-time – both propels the poem's narrative forward and structures its philosophical scaffolding.

Clarel's seeming dislocation from an immediate American context has led a number of critics to read the poem as a symptom of Melville's postwar withdrawal. This withdrawal has been framed as a bold embrace of artistic obscurity, as an acceptance of democracy's limits and recognition of its evils, as a retreat into psychic pain and solipsism, and as a political reversal. Vincent Kenny reads the poem as a final personal testimony to Melville's sense of defeat and, in a similar vein, Clark Davis argues that *Clarel* signals Melville's artistic renunciation of the very province of history. More politically-minded critics, such as Carolyn Karcher, have contended that "*Clarel*, in effect, writes the epitaph of Melville's democratic faith," and Daniel Aaron suggests that Ungar symbolizes Melville's transfer of political sympathy and personal identification with slaves to "the unforgiving and unyielding ex-Confederates." In *Subversive Genealogy*, Michael Paul Rogin stops short of *Clarel* almost altogether, claiming that with the small exception of some context lurking in the "background," a vast majority "of the discussion among the travelers takes place in a spiritual realm tangential to our concerns." C.L.R. James is not far behind in his dismissal, writing that in this "very long and very tiresome" poem, Melville "had completely lost what distinguished him in the great years – the sense of society as a whole."[131] In fact, one the most remarkable things about *Clarel* criticism is the degree to which, despite having frequently been split between analyses of the poem's theology (Stan Goldman, Peter Norberg, Vincent Kenny, Stanley Brodwin) and examinations of its politics (Carolyn Karcher, Larry Reynolds, Lawrence Buell, Daniel Aaron), scholarship of almost every stripe has read the poem as the fruit of collapse or disaffection. More recently critics such as Hilton Obenzinger, William Potter, and

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composition of *Battle-Pieces*. Walter Bezanson posits that textual and situational evidence suggest a start date in the late-1860s; and, as the concluding sections of this chapter make clear, the poem also pivots quite fundamentally on distinctly *post*-Civil War historical developments, both in the U.S. and abroad. See Parker, *Melville: the Making of the Poet*; and Bezanson, "Introduction" to *Clarel*, xxxiii.

131 Vincent Kenny, *Herman Melville's* Clarel*: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1973); Clark Davis, *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1995), 125-6; Carolyn Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land*, 287; Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War*, 89; Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 282; C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, 113.

Dennis Berthold have gone a long way in combining nuanced analysis of the poem's political investments with careful study of its theological problematics, while more formally-minded scholars like Edgar Dryden and Samuel Otter have drawn attention to the centrality of the poem's form to its references and meanings. This chapter seeks to contribute to this critical resurgence by disclosing the link between the poem's chronopolitics, which reimagine time and democracy through the prism of postwar conflicts between capital and labor, and the poem's peculiar, knotted verse.[132]

Clarel's animating questions, which are continuously re-posed throughout the text's four parts, focus on the overlap of politics, time, and belief. The poem's myriad speeches, dialogues, and asides may emphasize any one of these elements more than the others, but *Clarel*'s is an essentially triadic poetic discourse that constantly fuses epistemological anxieties with chronopolitical concerns. Consider Rolfe's meditation while on the road to Mar Saba:

> "New things elate so thrust their birth
> Up through dejection of the old,
> As through dead sheaths [. . .]
> The reserves of time seem marching up.
> But, nay: what novel thing may be,
> No germ being new? By Fate's decree
> Have not earth's vitals heaved in change
> Repeated?"
> (1.34.38-50)

The subject of Rolfe's questions is both specified and obscured. The "New things" could very well refer to contemporary technological innovations, to political changes and revolutions, or to emerging religious beliefs that challenge the Bible's ontological authority. Rolfe frames this modernizing force, regardless of its actual content, as a surface phenomenon: "The reserves of time *seem* marching up" but some invisible power – termed "Fate" but all the more enigmatic in this designation – is guiding history's repetitions. The ambiguity here proves generative as Rolfe's questions, due to their semantic openness, eventually spill out into an inquiry about time itself that echoes the poem's own underlying sense of crisis: "Prone, prone are era, man and nation / To slide into a degradation?" (2.8.39-40). Invoking the idea of a negative eschatology in a manner redolent of *Battle-Pieces*, the query is manifestly theological, but it is also at the same time decidedly political. The notion of an inexorable "slide into [. . .] degradation" not only undermines the promise of political innovation *tout court* but also challenges the transformative capacity of political action more generally. Rolfe's proposition also mediates these two levels of inquiry through a third, epistemological register, insofar as these lines – framed as a question, and bounded by quotation marks – immediately pose the problem of access. The anxiety recorded in Rolfe's query issues precisely from the disconcerting fact that there is no way to *know* whether history is anything other than a process of violent decay. Isolatoes without light, we are

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132 Some of the more important studies in this burgeoning *Clarel* revival include: Dennis Berthold, *American Risorgimento: Herman Melville and the Cultural Politics of Italy* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2009); Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), 63-160; William Potter, *Melville's* Clarel *and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 2004); Edgar Dryden, *Monumental Melville*, 101-148; and Samuel Otter, "How *Clarel* Works," in *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley (London: Blackwell, 2006), 467-481. An older but still quite incisive discussion of form in *Clarel* can be found in Bryan C. Short's essay, "Form as Vision in Herman Melville's *Clarel*," *American Literature* 50.4 (January 1979): 553-569.

left in the darkness.

When one of Melville's reviewers, shortly after the poem's publication in 1876, wrote that "this poem might properly have been called, 'Clarel, or the Ambiguities," he was not far from the truth.[133] Melville's longest text ties together, in a novel fashion, the practical and conceptual problems of ambiguity with the theological politics emergent in a revolutionized, modern world. It is this that Melville's anonymous reviewer missed: by bonding the phenomena of unbelief and uncertainty to political desire and temporal experience, *Clarel* constructs, in its philosophical verse, a distinct chrono-theo-politics. And the spirit, if not the letter, of the latter is clear: there is no ambiguity without revolution; no God without mass graves; and each attempt to "realize the unreal" – whether via politics or religious practice, with bullets or with ritual – must confront the materiality of tragedy, and of absence (1.27.71).

Clarel is a poetic inquiry into modernity whose form and politics are immediately and inescapably temporal. It thus anticipates, in some respects, one of Ernst Bloch's trenchant insights into contemporaneous experiences of time. The "demonic clockwork" of the modern age, Bloch writes, has "snatched up, reduced, and appropriated" modes of living and believing to such an extent that time has now become "not only strange" but downright "uncanny." This "merciless driving wheel" has reshaped, to a radical degree, the ways that we love, work, remember, and dream, as well as how we perceive actions and understand the present. Certain art-forms have consequently been superseded: "Writing that is nothing but a reading score, however great and truly classical [. . .] has become inappropriate to the rubble heaps, thoroughly intolerable in the face of rampant terror [. . . An] expiration of (a certain mode of) aesthetics [is signaled] by the scream that rushes darkly through the golden harp [. . .] For, especially, when the contours of things are glimmering with such intensity, the totality of what comes to pass in a given time is precisely that which can be found only by trial and error, by interruption, as something intrinsically experimental." Melville construed this "demonic clockwork" as essentially divine in origin; hence the reason why, as he put it in a letter to Hawthorne, the masses "fear God, and at bottom dislike Him": "because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch." God is an absent chronometer, an abstract brain plagued, as much as the Pauline heart, by the "mystery of iniquity."[134] Melville knew that the only thing more terrifying than experiencing the discontinuous – suffering, that is, through those traumas, both occasional and quotidian, that give birth to new lives and new identities out of the broken bonds of memory and anticipation – was realizing that discontinuity is designed precisely to endure, and to repeat.[135] This

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133 The New York *International Review*, January 4, 1877, 107-8, in *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*, 540-1.

134 Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays*, trans. Andrew Joron (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 503-4; Melville's *Correspondence* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1993), 192.

135 This idea is perhaps best represented by the scored reed of Melville's Chola widow in "The Encantadas" (1854). This makeshift calendar marks the time that has passed (and returned) after she was raped and exiled to an island: "Hunilla leaned upon a reed [. . .] Long ground between the sea and land, upper and nether stone, the unvarnished substance was filed bare, and wore another polish now, [. . .] the polish of its agony. Circular lines at intervals cut all round this surface, divided it into six panels of unequal length. In the first were scored the days, each tenth one marked by a longer and deeper notch; the second was scored for the number of sea-fowl eggs for sustenance, picked out from the rocky nests; the third, how many fish had been caught from the shore; the fourth, how many small tortoises found inland; the fifth, how many days of sun; the sixth, of clouds [. . .] Long night of busy numbering, misery's mathematics, to weary her too-wakeful soul to sleep; yet sleep for that was none." *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860*, Vol. 9 of the Northwestern-Newberry Editions, ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and

chapter is about this endurance. Its argument is that the cantos of *Clarel* constitute so many formal experiments in interruption. Moving from West to East and back again, from Jerusalem to Rome and Paris and beyond, they disrupt, linger in, and cut through the negative temporal progress that Melville, in writing the war, grasped as at once tragic and inexorable.

"AND PANGS SUSPEND THE BIRTH": THE CENTENNIAL AND *CLAREL*'S "SLUMBEROUS COMBUSTIBLES"

There is a promise for Melville in surpassing limits, a pleasure in breaking into the outside. "Life is a long Dardanelles," he wrote in an 1852 letter, "the shores of which are bright with flowers which we want to pluck, but the bank is too high; and so we float on & on, hoping to come to a landing-place at last – but swoop! we launch into the great sea! Yet the geographers say, even then we must not despair, because across the great sea, however desolate and vacant it may look, lie all [of] Persia and the delicious lands roundabout Damascus."[136] This envisioning of the East as *the* site of liberated escape and fated fulfillment, which *Clarel* both deploys and discounts, became especially popular in the ideological environment of the postwar U.S., when many upper- and middle-class Americans averted their eyes from the legacies of fratricidal violence by turning to the Middle East for travel, for study, and for business. The incorporation of this non-Western outside into American ideology – an incorporation that, later in the century, would prove crucial to more overtly dispossessive ideologies of American imperialism – resulted in large measure from the postwar sense of universal merger and combination that I described in chapter one.[137] This consolidation of temporal consciousness also originated, however, in an experiential loss, because apprehending the historical world as evermore harmonized also depends, paradoxically, on a certain collapse of possibility, or "time-space compression." The latter, according to geographer David Harvey, entails "processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world seems to collapse inwards upon us." In other words, capitalist development engenders a felt unevenness or dislocation in subjects' consciousness. If the Civil War comprised something like a nexus event for this kind of temporal collapse, the processes of capitalist accumulation that both occasioned and followed it brought about even more transformative

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Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1987), 157.

136 Herman Melville, 1850 letter to Sophia Hawthorne, in *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Marrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), 147.

137 Indeed, although the imperialist turn in U.S. foreign policy did not fully emerge until the end of the nineteenth century – culminating in the annexation of Puerto Rico and in other colonial ventures throughout the Pacific and the Caribbean – later forms of imperialist ideology depended quite crucially on these earlier, more experimental variants in the 1860s and 1870s that were centered on ideas of "the East." See Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), 1-61. In *American Palestine*, Obenzinger discusses the ways in which Melville, like Mark Twain and other Gilded Age authors, was writing in relation to a "providential" discourse about the West's limits and the emerging ideology of colonial expansion. See especially pages 84-113 and 138-60. On *Clarel* and "manifest destiny," also see Potter, *Melville's* Clarel *and the Intersympathy of Creeds*, 25-37, and Buell, "Melville and the Question of Decolonization."

experiences of imbalance and disruption.[138] Enlargement *is* diminution, and misalignment. The sense of historical unboundedness to which Whitman is so profoundly – even erotically – attached after the war also yields a depletion and constriction of temporal experience, and it is this other side of modernization that Melville, in *Clarel*, seeks to disinter by revealing its origins, limits, and possibilities.

Time-space compression was, of course, not directly apprehended as a collapse but recoded, both during and after the war, as the lived experience of freedom. This recoding – to use Deleuze and Guattari's term for the linking and inscripting of desires along a common plane – of narrowed historical consciousness as the inhabitation of liberated political subjectivity reached a peculiar, fevered climax in many of the texts and speeches celebrating the nation's 1876 Centennial.[139] Richard Storrs, the former editor of the *New York Independent*, published an article that summer entitled "The Rise of Constitutional Liberty" in which he interpreted the late war as the most compelling proof of the American state's eternal solidity. "It seemed," he recalled, "as if the last fatal Apocalypse had come, to drench the land with plague and flood, and wrap it in a fiery gloom [. . . But now] [t]he very portions of the people which then sought its overthrow are now again its applauding adherents – the great and reconciling force, the tranquilizing irenarch, being the freedom which it leaves in their hands." The agent of this "freedom," he concluded, was the law, whose "centripetal and centrifugal forces are [perfectly] balanced from the lakes to the gulf, [. . .] almost as in the astronomy of the heavens." Both Whittier and Bryant, in their Centennial poems, likewise figured the war as part of a historical period that has decidedly passed. Pivoting on an imagined act of historical erasure, Bryant's ode invokes a "new-beginning age" that will assuredly "Write in a fairer, whiter page / The record" of a "happier reign." Melville was skeptical toward such fantasies of recuperation, but a far more popular poet of the day, Bayard Taylor (with whom Melville had traveled on the lecture circuit), endorsed them wholeheartedly. Taylor's "National Ode" (1876) depicts the Centennial as the culmination of America's historical perfection and deems the specter of domestic strife permanently exorcised:

> For the menace is dead that defied her,
> The doubt is dead that denied her,

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138 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Blackwell, 1989), 240. Foner summarizes this crucial shift in the national economy: "Accelerating the emergence of an American industrial bourgeoisie, the war tied the fortunes of this class to the Republican party and the national state [. . .] To mobilize the financial resources of the Union, the government created a national paper currency, an enormous national debt, and a national banking system [. . .] To help compensate for the drain of men into the army, a federal bureau was established to encourage immigration under labor contracts [. . .] And to further consolidate the Union, Congress lavished enormous grants of public land and government bonds upon internal improvements, most notably the transcontinental railroad, which, when completed in 1869, expanded the national market, facilitated the penetration of capital into the West, and heralded the final doom of the Plains Indians" (*Reconstruction*, 21). On the transformation of the U.S. economy after the Civil War, see Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 38-100; Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); and Richard Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990). To clarify: what I am claiming here is that capitalism's deterritorialization extends into the experience of history and that, in the post-Civil War United States, this is the condition of possibility for Melville's poetic experiments.

139 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *.Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 152-3.

And she stands acknowledged, and strong, and free!

For Taylor, the present marks the terminus of both anti-democratic doubt and of history's determining influence:

Here may thy solemn challenge end,
All-proving Past, and each discordance die
Of doubtful augury,
Or in one choral with the Present blend,
And that half-heard, sweet harmony
Of something nobler that our sons may see!

This image of harmonious freedom wherein the future, emancipated through America's evolutionary fruition, becomes a posthistorical epoch depends, like many other Centennialist productions, on a temporal imaginary that is simultaneously global in scope and exceptionalist in orientation. Taylor's poem begins, tellingly, with this apostrophe: "Sun of the stately Day / Let Asia into the shadow drift." Writing one hundred years after the Declaration of Independence, Taylor represents the United States' rise to dominance as an event as natural and necessary as the movement of the Sun.[140]

That power shifts from East to West is a nearly universal component of this Centennial discourse, in large measure because it offers a way to think about the legacies of empire while insisting on the United States' disconnection from those legacies. This sense of American difference finds an eloquent voice in Charles Francis Adams's 1876 essay on liberty, published in the Fourth of July issue of the *New York Tribune.* "What are the imperishable monuments [of the East] constructed so long ago," Adams asks, "but memorials of an obsolete antiquity, to be gazed at by the wandering traveler as examples never to be copied. If once devoted to special forms of Divine worship, the faith that animated the structures has not simply lost its vitality but has been buried in oblivion." America's exemption from history's events, Adams claims – in a remark that recalls Melville's own characterization of the Confederacy as a conspiracy for erecting a colossal "Anglo-American empire" – has to do with its special racial constitution: "Whilst the African represents the past, and the Indian clings only to the present, it is left to the European and his congener in America persistently to follow in the future the object of the advancement of mankind." Centered on a geopolitics not far removed from either Whitman's "Passage to India" (in which the East's mythic past but justifies the glorious American present) or Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden," Adams's essay proclaims that the world can and will be made anew and that the vehicle of its rebirth will a vast empire for white liberty.[141]

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140 Richard Storrs, "The Rise of Constitutional Liberty," *New York Tribune*, July 4, 1876, 12-30; William Cullen Bryant, "Centennial Ode," 63; Bayard Taylor, "The National Ode: *Delivered at Philadelphia, July 4, 1876*," 61-3.

141 Charles Francis Adams, "The Progress of Liberty," *New York Tribune*, July 4, 1876, 30-7. To be sure, this pro-Centennialist response was not homogeneous. A number of disfranchised political groups in fact used the celebration to voice political grievances. John Francis Bray, an economist and labor unionist, wrote "A New Declaration of Independence" in which he asserted that "[f]rom time immemorial, under all forms of government, civilized society has been divided into two great classes, one of which created all wealth, while the other appropriated and enjoyed it, under kingly, aristocratic, and other fraudulent assumptions of 'divine rights' and usages." Bray claimed that a vast "industrial re-organization, based on the universal consolidation and co-operation of Labor" was needed "to put an end to class strifes, and . . . conflicts" (*We, the Other People*, 97). Similar, alternative declarations

Centennial discourse was rooted in end-of-Reconstruction discourse and, as such, its impassioned discussions of historical precedents and epochal breaks were also at the same time discussions of race and nation.[142] Interested more in striated continuities than in pure breaks, *Clarel* engages quite directly with the fears, presumptions, and desires mobilized by these overlapping discourses. Rather than simply using or replicating the ideologies of God and nation dominant in the postwar U.S., however, Melville's poem employs the method he perfected in his early fiction of simultaneously inhabiting and disrupting the ideological stances and commitments in which the text is interested.[143] The sublime visions of global freedom offered by the likes of Taylor and Adams are thereby proffered (chiefly by Derwent), then undone (prominently by the poem's monomaniacs, but also on occasion by Rolfe or Vine). At the moment when other authors are writing about the termination of difference and antagonism, Melville, in this most "un-Centennial production," foretells the continuation of social discord and defines democracy as but an "eternal hacking" (Buell, "Melville the Poet," 141). *Clarel*'s most radical engagement with Centennialist and end-of-Reconstruction politics emerges in the text's repeated privileging of the force and form of historical repetition over the idea of absolute temporal rupture:

> [Now] what is stable? Find one boon
> That is not lackey to the moon
> Of fate. The flood weaves out – the ebb
> Weaves back; the incessant shuttle shifts
> And flies, and wears and tears the web.
> (2.4.93-97)

Solidity, we discover once again, is transitory, and contingency is written into the origin of the world. In the first edition this outburst read: "the flood ebbs out – the ebb / Floods back." In the months leading up to the Centennial, Melville added "weaving" to describe the movement of history: time

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were offered by the National Independent Political Union, which protested against the backsliding of the Republicans and demanded "FULL AND EQUAL JUSTICE BEFORE THE LAW" for African Americans, and the National Woman Suffrage Association, which improvised on Jefferson's catalogs of royal abuses by listing the ways in which "[t]he history of our country the past hundred years has been a series of assumptions and usurpations of power over woman, in direct opposition to the principles of just government" (93, 107-8). *Clarel* shares with these documents a sense of separateness – even militant distance – from the Centennial celebrations. Yet Melville's poem also explores and questions the roots of such militancy; it is, essentially, a poetic declaration of *de*pendence, a rhymed inquiry into the unconscious reliances that make the modern world. On the varieties of political reactions to the Centennial, see also chapter one of Robert Rydell's *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). Gary Nash provides a more local account of these Centennial celebrations in *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 260-313.

142 I am arguing, more specifically, that one can read in the Centennial texts the political and racial ideologies that would culminate, during the following year, in the formal rise of what Theodore W. Allen calls "white reconstruction." See Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 2002), 139-158.

143 My understanding of how Melville engages with ideology owes much to Samuel Otter's reading of the "intimate excess" and "verbal doubleness" in Melville's novels. See *Melville's Anatomies*, especially 3-8 and 256-61.

oscillates, threading back and forth, continuously restaging the past in the present, the future, and beyond. Few images better represent Melville's conception of history's complex repetition than this web that is torn apart in the act of its creation.

This idea of crafted destruction is what makes the transition from *Battle-Pieces* to *Clarel* possible. In the years following Gettysburg and Appomattox, as the ebb "weaves back" and new forms of subjection replace the old, Melville realizes that belief is war by other means. Writing in 1864, Wendell Phillips recalled that only a few years prior "[w]e imagined that the age of bullets was over; that the age of ideas had come." Melville's insight is that these ages are one and the same. *Clarel*, a text ostensibly about the vicissitudes of religious knowledge, is thus shot through with representations of violence and disunity, which range from anonymous bandits in Jericho who now occupy the Crusaders' Tower to Clarel's own transformation, near the poem's end, into a shocked foot-soldier (stunned "like a man / Shot through the heart" after the "pistol-like" interruption of his consciousness from the outside [4.30.70-79].) In one of the poem's most powerful testaments to the permanence of discord and injury, this fossilized scene presents itself on "Judah's main ridge":

> Two human skeletons inlaced
> In grapple as alive they fell,
> Or so disposed in overthrow,
> As to suggest encounter so.
> A ticklish rim, an imminent pass
> For quarrel; and blood-feud, alas.
> (3.1.82-87)

The war was in Melville's blood, for better or worse, and it inflected almost every flourish of his pen. *Clarel* and *Battle-Pieces* in fact comprise a poetic diptych. Comprehensible only when read together, they expose one another's assumptions, intentions, and boundaries, yielding an artistic experience at once whole and fractured. This, not coincidentally, is also the image of history that these books jointly project: that of a warped unity between Providential reason and – as Adorno wrote the wake of Auschwitz and Buchenwald – "the discontinuous, splintered moments and phases of history."[144]

Melville, who thought of himself as akin to an oracle, saw the same signs as Adams, Taylor, and Whittier, but whereas America's happier prophets read comity and peace in democracy's augurs, Melville discerned antipathy and violence. This deep distrust of benevolent ruptures and pure epochal breaks – which are crucial to religious messianism and radical politics alike – surfaces throughout

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144 Wendell Phillips in *The Rebellion Record*, I: 126; Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1997), 320. The full quote from Adorno is worth reproducing, since it articulates a sense of history's hidden discontinuities that Melville had, at least on some level, anticipated: "Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history – the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the total menace which organized mankind poses to organized men, in the epitome of discontinuity. It is the horror that verifies Hegel and stands him on his head [. . .] [T]he One and All that keeps rolling on to this day – with occasional breathing spells – would [. . .] be the absolute of suffering. History is the unity of continuity and discontinuity. Society stays alive, not despite antagonism, but by means of it."

Clarel but particularly in certain nodal points; that is, in cantos (like “A Monument” and the Mar Saba palm tree sequence in book two) that concatenate, recombine, and re-present the poem's animating problematics. In one of these (“Man and Bird”), there is a pivotal scene in which Derwent, the poem's liberal reformer, stumbles upon this writing on the wall in a grotto, which he can read but not understand:

> “Dim, dim to me,”
> Said Derwent; “ay, obscurely traced;
> And much is rubbed off or defaced.
> But here now, this is pretty clear:
> '*I, Self, I am the enemy*
> *Of all. From me deliver me,*
> *O Lord*!' – Poor man! – But here, dim here:
> '*There is a hell over which mere hell*
> *Serves – for – a – heaven*.' – Oh, terrible!
> Profound pit that must be! – What's here
> Half faded: '. . . *teen . . six,*
> *The hundred summers run,*
> *Except it be in cicatrix*
> *The aloe – flowers – none*.' –
> Ah, Nostrodamus; prophecy
> Is so explicit. – But this, see.
> Much blurred again: '. . . *testimony,*
> . . . . . *grown fat and gray,*
> *The lion down, and – full of honey,*
> *The bears shall rummage – him – in – Ma*y.'”
> (3.27.124-143)

Bursting with ellipses, dashes, gaps, and pauses, this is a prophecy of fragments. Despite Derwent's confusion, though, we can discern in it three interlinking parts. The first, preceding the reformer's first exclamation (“Oh, terrible!”) reiterates Satan's “my self am Hell” speech in book four of *Paradise Lost*: “And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threatening to devour me opens wide / To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.” However, Melville's obscured prophet – unidentified and alone, comforted by no fellow demons – is cursed not by the consequences of some failed deicide but, seemingly, by his own isolation and psychic state. The second fragment, “Half-faded,” speaks of degeneration: it identifies the American state at its Centennial (one “hundred summers run” in “[eigh]teen [seventy-]six”) but then, against the grain of celebratory poems and speeches, undermines any association with rebirth by introducing flowers that have not bloomed. In his postwar poem “The American Aloe on Exhibition,” Melville alludes to the undeveloped flora of this distinctly American plant, writing in the inscription that it “is but a floral superstition, as everybody knows, that this plant flowers only once in a century. When in any instance the flowering is for decades delayed beyond the normal period [. . .] it is owing to something retarding in the environment or soil.” There is something rotten in the United States of 1876, something corrosive and inexorable, and it derives from past trauma. A “cicatrix” forms over a wound that never truly heals; it is a scar – a reminder, and remainder, of violence. This meditation on trauma's afterlives is then refocused in the prophecy's third and final fragment, “Much blurred again.” Melville's reference here is Samson, the long-locked patriarch of *Judges* and slaughterer of Philistines whose victory over the lion is alluded to in the penultimate line. This elliptical fragment not only renders the Biblical narrative more brutal by inserting bears who will

"rummage" the lion's carcass in search of honey (an image that discloses nature's raw antagonism as well as the lasting effects of Samson's violent act) but also returns us to Milton by way of *Samson Agonistes*, Milton's post-Restoration drama about the Philistines' semi-enslavement of the Jewish hero. Made to "labor as in a common workhouse" in Gaza, and despite having grown blind, "fat and gray," Samson rebels against his supposed fate by destroying the city temple and, in the process, kills countless Philistine civilians. In his own copy of *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, which he reread during and after the war, Melville marked the following soliloquy:

> Suffices that to me strength is my bane,
> And proves the source of all my miseries;
> So many, and so huge, that each apart
> Would ask a life to wail.[145]

Although Melville was likely drawn to the Ishmaelism of Milton's Samson, he was also probably fascinated by the drama's political valences in his own historical conjuncture. *Samson Agonistes* tells the story of power's excesses and misapplication. Its example, its lesson, is that of a great force that misuses its sublime capacities in the season of expected fulfillment. "Strength is my bane": in Samson's tragic curse, through which the victor is undone by his own superlative might, the United States' postwar condition finds a surprisingly apt and discommoding embodiment.

Collectively and individually, these interlocking fragments pose radical questions about the nature of God and the transformative power of democracy. The isolato trapped in a cave, the nation scarred by its own past, and the patriarch expending his strength in a final act of terrorism all offer anti-Centennial representations that sever the democratic state from an innocent present and reinsert it into violence's pasts and futures. In so doing, Melville's elliptical prophecies undermine not only the kinds of romantic nationalism associated with or inspired by the Centennial but also the failures of memory that made this nationalism conceptually possible and ideologically effective. Melville's augur reading takes aim at this ideology's historical erasures and sense of anticipatory openness, both of which are on display, for example, in Whitman's 1875 note to his *Memoranda of the War*: "Already as I write this, a new, maturing generation has swept in, obliterating with oceanic currents the worst reminiscences of the War; and the passage of time has heal'd over at least its deepest scars. Already, the events of 1861-5, and the seasons that immediately preceded, as well as those that closely follow'd them, have lost their direct personal impression, and the living heat and excitement of their own time, and are being marshall'd for casting, or getting ready to be cast, into the cold and bloodless electrotype plates of History" (65). In *Battle-Pieces*, Melville created a lyric poetry that represented, in novel ways, the influence of past events beyond their instantiation and in spite of the bloodlessness of public memory. *Clarel* radicalizes the oppositional poetics of this earlier volume. It shifts from mechanized guns to broken relics, and from oceans to deserts, but its animating impulse remains the same: to interrupt the negative constitution of time that Melville had first glimpsed in the spilling of soldiers' blood.

Like *Battle-Pieces*, *Clarel* is simultaneously allured and repelled by the juxtaposition of conflict and historical transformation. However, Melville's epic locates the archetype for change not in

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145 John Milton, "Paradise Lost," in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957), 279; Herman Melville, "The American Aloe on Exhibition," *Selected Poems*, ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Penguin, 2006), 286; John Milton, "Samson Agonistes," *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, 550; Robin Grey and Douglas Robillard, "Melville's Milton: A Transcription of Melville's Marginalia in his Copy of *The Poetical Works of John Milton*," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 4.1 and 2 (March and October 2002): 117-204.

ironclads or sunken ships, but in the earth itself. The temporal vision powerfully articulated in "The Apparition" – wherein we all become clinkers in the darkness – is redirected through *Clarel*'s political geology in such a way that even moments of ostensible portraiture segue into considerations of the soil:

> From Omar's bloom
> Came birds which lit, nor dreamed of harm,
> On neighboring stones. His visage calm
> Seemed not the one which late showed play
> Of passion's throe; but here divine
> No peace; ignition in the mine
> Announced is by the rush, the roar:
> These end; yet may the coal burn on –
> Still slumberous burn beneath the floor
> Of pastures where the sheep lie down.
> (4.32.34-44)

In this remarkable passage from "Passion Week," the narrator reads the sculptured head of a tomb but finds his hermeneutic stretching, and searching, into mines and fires. Pain lurks underneath this "visage calm" in the same way that the most pastoral of scenes ("pastures where the sheep lie down") is threatened by what lies beneath (a "slumberous burn"). In the earth's movements, Melville finds a metaphor for both the psychic realities of suffering and the predicament of modern belief (since it is, significantly, Christ's flock on the pasture, threatened by the rise of science and – as we will see – by proletarian rebellion). Melville revisits the connection between lived discontinuity and the earth's instability in the two stanzas that begin the "In Confidence" canto in book three:

> Towers twain crown Saba's mountain height;
> And one, with larger outlook bold,
> Monks frequent climb or day or night
> To peer for Arabs. In the breeze
> So the ship's lifted topmen hold
> Watch on the blue and silver seas,
> To guard against the slim Malay,
> That perilous imp whose slender prow
> Great hulls have rued – as in ill hour
> The whale the sword-fish's lank assay.
>
> Upon that pile, to catch the dawn,
> Alert next day see Derwent stand
> With Clarel. All the mountain-land
> Disclosed through Kedron far withdrawn,
> Cloven and shattered, hushed and banned,
> Seemed poised as in a chaos true,
> Or throe-lock of transitional earth
> When old forms are annulled, and new
> Rebel, and pangs suspend the birth.
> (3.21.1-19)

In the first stanza, varied conflicts between Monks and Arabs, between Sailors and Malays, and

between the whale and the swordfish find their analogue in the split form of “Saba's mountain” and its two “Towers.” “Cloven and shattered,” the earth incarnates human conflict, redoubling history in its “hushed and cloven” stone. This geologic imaginary testifies to Melville’s enduring fascination with scientific theories about the earth and, especially, with the demythologization of earthly time spurred by the discoveries of scientists like Louis Agassiz and Charles Lyell. Melville’s geologic representations are also, as Bruce Harvey has argued, bound up with the mid-century debates between Neptunists and Vulcanists, the former arguing “that land forms emerged slowly from precipitated rock layers in the oceans” while the latter “maintained that the key molding process came from convulsive igneous flows, the volatility of the earth's crust, and slow erosion.” Yet as the concluding three lines of the stanzas above suggest, the earth is not simply a receptacle or empty form. Its “transitional” motive power makes it a paradigmatic instance of historical transformation. It is “the earth in which the find is made that testifies to the primary history of the nineteenth century,” and Melville, using modern geology to rethink the structure of time, constructs a poetics of discontinuity that springs directly from the earth's own convulsions.[146]

Clarel's Vulcanist poetics climax in part four (“Bethlehem”), after the pilgrims discover a dale that is divided north and south between two shepherds. The whole of this scene – its subtlety, its texture, its volatility – deserves explication because it is central to the poem’s chronopolitical investments and formal commitments. It begins when Don Hannibal, a “reformado reformed,” condemns democracy and, in response, Derwent – speaking as though the Good Gray Poet had found another’s voice – offers his own vision of democracy’s teleological advance:

> “Through all methinks I see
> The object clear: belief revised,
> Men liberated – equalized
> In happiness [. . .]
> Howbeit, true reform goes on
> By Nature; doing, never done.
> Mark the advance: creeds drop the hate;
> Events still liberalize the state.”
> (4.20.28-31, 64-7)

God's gentle influence, Derwent contends, ensures a steady and unceasing progression in human affairs that harmonizes religious belief and corrects political error. The nation-state itself is a kind of organic outgrowth of nature, since both evolve at a common rate. Ungar replies by turning to Derwent's land of birth and locating the dangerous potentials in England's politico-economic development, asking, “How many Hughs of Lincoln, say, / Does Mammon in his mills, to-day, / Crook, if he do not crucify?” (4.9.33-35). The capitalist factories traversing the English landscape are filled, Ungar suggests, with so many suffering innocents (“Hugh of Lincoln” was a medieval child-martyr). The former Confederate officer then concedes the chronopolitical axiom of postwar liberalism and nationalist ideology (i.e., that everything is concatenating and developing into centers), but re-presents this process as violent and uneven:

> “There's one development; 'tis seen
> In masters whom not low ye rate:
> What lack, in some outgivings late,

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146 Bruce A. Harvey, “Science and the Earth,” *A Companion to Herman Melville*, 73-5; and Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 88.

Of the old Christian style toward men –
I do not mean the wicked ones,
But Pauperism's unhappy sons
In cloud so blackly ominous,
Grimy in Mammon's English pen –
Collaterals of his overplus."
(4.21.83-91)

What Ungar is lamenting, in his peculiar vernacular, are the dual tendencies of overproduction and proletarianization. The "one development" is the law of accumulation itself; it is the creation of a class of new "masters" who produce an "overplus" of "Pauperism's unhappy sons." Or, as Marx puts it, following Mandeville's insight that "in a free nation, where slaves are not allowed of, the surest wealth consists in a multitude of laborious poor": the "accumulation of capital is [. . .the] multiplication of the proletariat," and this "rivets the worker to capital more firmly than the wedges of Hephaestus held Prometheus to the rock. It makes an accumulation of misery a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth."[147]

As this debate proceeds, positions both proliferate and divide. Rolfe answers Ungar by suggesting that America can become a different kind of Prometheus, a self-liberated Titan:

"There's Circumstance – there's Time; and these
Are charged with store of latencies
Still working in to modify [. . .]
Those waste-weirds which the New World yields
To inland freshets – the free vents
Supplied to turbid elements;
The vast reserves – the untried fields;
These long shall keep off and delay
The class-war, rich-and-poor-man fray
Of history. From that alone
Can serious trouble spring."
(4.21.80-83, 91-98)

The first lines reject the very idea of historical tendentiality. Rolfe then acknowledges the reality and dynamism of class warfare (the "rich-and-poor-man fray / Of history") but questions its applicability to the United States. Drawing from a rich vein of liberal thought, extending from Crèvecoeur on through Whitman and Louis Hartz, which grasps the U.S. as feudalism's opposite, he conjectures that America's distinct spatial freedom, and particularly the "vast reserves" and "untried fields" of the open west, will shield the New World from proletarianization and all that comes with it.[148] America's pastures, which function as social safety-valves ("free vents / Supplied to turbid elements"), may very well defer class strife and thus suspend the birth of what seems inevitable. Ungar, nonetheless, has a radically different

147 Bernard de Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 5th ed. (London: 1728), 212-13; Marx, *Capital*, I: 799.

148 See J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters of an American Farmer* (1782), ed. Albert E. Stone (New York: Penguin, 1986); Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas"; and Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1955). An excellent counterpoint to this line of thought is Karen Orren's *Belated Feudalism: Labor, Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991).

understanding of the relationship between time and democracy:

> “But in the New World things make haste:
> Not only men, the state lives fast –
> Fast breeds the pregnant eggs and shells,
> The slumberous combustibles
> Sure to explode. 'Twill come, twill come!
> One demagogue can trouble much:
> How of a hundred thousand such?
> And universal suffrage lent
> To back them with brute element
> Overwhelming?”
> (4.21.110-119)

Here is another version of “the core of fire below”: the “pregnant [. . .] shells” “[s]ure to explode” model a kind of imminent historical transformation in which violence is effected through the medium of renewal (eggs). Not only the people but the democratic state “lives fast”; both are out of sync with the history in which they are enmeshed. Time always warps back, and democracy – never far removed from autocracy – cannot elude the ebb. Propelled by universal emancipation (the “pregnant” vehicle of political rebirth), premodern tyranny, Ungar suggests, will resurface and the postbellum world will witness the rise of so many latter-day Caesars. This meditation on democracy's internal “combustibles” then spins out into a broader prognosis that goes to the very core of the poem:

> “Sequel may ensue,
> Indeed, whose germs one now may view:
> Myriads playing pygmy parts –
> Debased into equality:
> In glut of all material arts
> A civic barbarism may be:
> Man disennobled – brutalized
> By popular science – Atheized
> Into a smatterer —”
>
> “Oh, oh!”
> “Yet knowing all self need to know
> In self's base little fallacy;
> Dead level of rank common-place:
> An Anglo-Saxon China, see,
> May on your vast plains shame the race
> In the Dark Ages of Democracy.”
>
> America!
> (4.21.133-149)

This speech is usually understood by critics as either an anti-imperialist jeremiad or an anti-democratic tirade but, on its lower frequencies, it resonates more as a materialist prophecy. For Ungar, the agent for transformation is not democracy qua self-contained governmental system but, instead, the combined forces of modernity (from “popular science” to the “glut of all material arts”) which extend

instrumentality into the realms of political representation and social relations, making everything play a "pygmy part." To "smatter," tellingly, means to speak without depth or "utter in [. . . a] meaninglessly repetitious manner"; it is the linguistic form of empty repetition, the verbal byproduct of instrumentality's reign. Ungar's is a prophecy about a global "empire for liberty" that instrumentalizes everything it touches, revaluing the world according to use, profit, and efficiency. The fulcrum of the passage, however, surfaces only at the very end. Ungar's speech, releasing the poem's deepest chronopolitical tensions and in effect pushing them to a climax, is punctuated by a cryptic exclamation: "America!" At once interrupting and concluding the preceding address, this single-word stanza floats, unquoted and unanchored, on the page. Cultivating the white space that surrounds it, this ambiguous ejaculation prompts one to ask: Is this an invocation, or a warning? A lament? An exultation? Or a call-to-arms? Melville leaves us, as always, in the blankness of whiteness. But this is also a peculiar absence, one that compels, for the poet and "thought-diver," further and deeper questions about revolution, poetic form, and the meanings of historical repetition.[149]

"TERROR THAT INTO HATE SUBSIDES": COMMUNISM, RECONSTRUCTION, AND REVOLUTIONARY REPETITION

In *Clarel*, there are no more dreamworlds. Uncompleted cycles and fragmented unities litter the globe. History, as always, still repeats itself – but not as farce. It is instead a potent force slouching toward a degeneration from which even the United States is not safe. And this is at the heart of the "America!" exclamation punctuating Ungar's outburst: whether it chides, invokes, or eulogizes the U.S., this one-word stanza conspicuously weaves America's future into the fabric of global history. Possessing no singular innocence, the U.S. is enfolded in the historical patterns that also touch Rome, Paris, and Jerusalem. *Especially* Paris, notes Mortmain:

> Recall the red year Forty-Eight:
> He storms in Paris; thence divides;
> The menace scarce outspeeds the fate:
> He's over the Rhine – He's at Berlin –
> At Munich – Dresden – fires Vien;
> He's over the Alps – the whirlwind rides
> In Rome; London's alert – the Czar:
> The portent and the fact of war,
> And terror that into hate subsides.
> (3.1.159-167)

Recent years, according to this exiled Isaiah, have witnessed the proliferation of rebellion: there is a single impulse tending toward upheaval that consumes the Continent in an Ahab-like transfusion of terror into hate. Filled with its own miniature explosions (pausing, then detonating, then pausing again), Mortmain's speech immediately recalls the spate of political revolutions in the wake of the Paris uprisings of 1848. Yet it also lunges forward in time by describing the contemporary epoch as punctured by related eruptions – an understanding of postwar history not dissimilar from the one

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149 *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition (New York: Merriam-Webster, 2003). On Melville's Melville's "fundamental [concern] with manifestations and fluctuations of white space," see Renker, *Strike Through the Mask*, 103.

offered by historian Frederick T. Wallace six years after the Centennial. The “wondrous events” “crowded into the [last] two decades,” he wrote, have been almost unparalleled: “The rebellion of the Sepoys [and the] emancipation of the Russian serf, the allied armies of Balaklava and Magenta, Solferino and the Quadrilateral, Garibaldi and Count Cavour and United Italy. Civil War and emancipation in the United States. Napoleon and Sedan, Paris and the Commune, Von Moltke, Bismarck, William and the German Empire. Political revolution in the Twentieth Congressional District of Ohio, and thunder in the Fifth Ward of Cleveland.”[150] Whereas for Wallace, however, this unprecedented sequence is spatially dispersed, for Mortmain the accrual of historical upheaval possesses a primal blueprint and a distinct geographical origin. The “red” menace in “Forty-Eight” spawns in Paris, *then* divides throughout the West. Like the other characters in the poem cognizant of history, Mortmain views the French capital as the starless Bethlehem of modern political revolution.

Clarel's fixation on French politics, and on Paris in particular, is hardly coincidental. As Walter Benjamin demonstrates so memorably in *The Arcades Project*, Paris became the structural archetype of capitalism's solidity in the nineteenth century: “Paris is a counterpart in the social order, to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order: a menacing, hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution.” Or in the words of Friedrich Engels: Paris is the city “in which all the nerve fibers of European history are intertwined, and from which arise, at regular intervals, those tremors which shake the terrestrial globe.”[151] *Clarel* anticipates these insights by conjoining, again and again, representations of historical transformation with reflections on Paris's many revolutions. From Rolfe's dismissal of “the Red Caps” of “to-day” as but latter-day Septemberists to the Dominican Monk's invocation of “The Red Republic slinging flame / In Europe,” *Clarel* repeatedly attempts to discern patterns of development in France's political pasts and emergent futures (2.16.46; 2.25.110-111).

Part of the impetus for this sustained focus is Melville's lifelong interest in French political history, and in the French Revolution in particular. The latter, which resurfaces throughout Melville's work, from *Mardi* on through *Moby-Dick*, *Battle-Pieces*, and *Billy-Budd*, tends to not only serve as an index for the historical birth of modern ideas about democracy but also becomes, in several of these texts, something like a symbol for democracy itself.[152] The revolt that acquires particular importance in *Clarel*, however, is not the Revolution of 1793 but the civil war that erupted in France just six years after peace was sealed at Appomattox. In 1871, Paris’s workers overthrew the dregs of the Second Empire and erected a council government which attempted, over the course of only a few months, to smash the bureaucratic-military machine of the state. Led primarily by Blanquists and by members of the First International, the Commune ended military conscription, destroyed the relics and monuments of Napoleonic imperialism (the Vendôme Column, the Tuileries, the Chapel of Atonement), outlawed symbols of religious expression, and drew up plans to reoccupy the city's abandoned factories.[153] The

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150 Frederick T. Wallace, *Men and Events of Half a Century* (Cleveland: Evangelical Association, 1882), 15.

151 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 83; Fredrick Engels, as quoted by Benjamin.

152 It is no accident, for instance, that *White-Jacket* continuously figures sailors as revolutionaries (who in the “time of tempests [. . .] issue forth” “like the mysterious old men of Paris, during the massacre of the Three Days of September”), or that two of the historical figures with whom Melville was most fascinated throughout his life – Napoleon, whose charismatic power and almost self-willed annihilation model Ahab's character and destiny, and Anacharsis Clootz, the radical egalitarian whose “mission of mankind” incarnates a “ruthless democracy on all sides”– were both offspring of this revolution.

153 Phillip Katz’s *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998) is an indispensable account of the American response to the French Civil War. Other informative commentaries include Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*,

image of this insurrection, and more specifically what it portends, cycles throughout the poem, functioning like a referential keystone in Melville's epic. All of the conceptions of aprogressive history that are hatched in Melville's war lyrics and amplified in *Clarel* are brought to bear on this event. Mortmain's description of "the red year Forty-Eight," which we just encountered, is punctuated by another "red" event – the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt, conducted in "the pause of artillery's boom" in 1870, which set the stage for the Communards' advance:

> While now the armed world holds its own,
> The comet peers, the star dips down;
> Flicker the lamps in Syria's tomb,
> While Anti-Christ and Atheist set
> On Anarch the red coronet!
> (2.34.34-38)

Yet the Paris Commune does not simply prolong some already existing historical pattern. In *Clarel*, it also collects and discharges everything that has preceded it. In his dialogue with Derwent about capitalism's "overplus" of "unhappy sons," Ungar ends with this comparison:

> Contrast these incidents: The mob,
> The Paris mob of Eighty-Nine,
> Haggard and bleeding, with a throb
> Burst the long Tuileries. In shrine
> Of chapel there, they saw the Cross
> And Him thereon. Ah, bleeding Man,
> The people's friend, thou bled'st forst us
> Who here bleed, too! Ragged they ran –
> They took the crucifix; in van
> They put it, marched with drum and psalm
> And throned it in their Notre Dame.
> But yesterday – how did they then,
> In new uprising of the Red,
> The offspring of those Tuileries men?
> They made a clothes-stand of the Cross
> Before the church; and, on that head
> Which bowed for them, could wanton toss
> The sword-belt, while the gibing sped.
> Transcended rebel angels! Woe
> To us; without a god, 'tis woe!
> (4.21.117-136)

100-106; Samuel Bernstein, "The Impact of the Paris Commune in the United States," in *Revolution and Reaction: The Paris Commune of 1871*, ed. John Hicks and Robert Tucker (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 59-70; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: Norton and Co., 1987), 17-24; and Mark J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990), 21-30. On the Commune itself, see Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard 1965); Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, trans. Robert Service (New York: Penguin, 1992), 33-51; and Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970).

Ungar distinguishes the humble bourgeois revolutionaries of the eighteenth century, who "despite the passion for the dream / Evinced no disrespect for God," from their contemporary proletarian heirs. Although the original Jacobins, along with their descendants, "Burst the long Tuileries [e.g., the palace of the kings]," they could not imagine defiling, like today's "Transcended rebel angels," the religious artifacts housed therein. This juxtaposition posits a historical difference, or implied epochal split, that questions the relationship between previous French revolutions and the current "uprising of the Red." Is the latter, *Clarel* asks, the fated issue of preceding upheavals? And if so, might the America of postwar Reconstruction already contain the germ of a New World socialism? The Paris Commune, and "the surge / Reactionary" which it either inaugurates or exemplifies, raises the specter of a world governed by a bad infinity of revolution in which solidity, perpetually overturning itself, contains in each of its upheavals "both the *datum* of world completion and the *data* of its content" (Hudson, 97). Yet the Communards' vision of another world that transcends both the divine and the everyday also appears to be the potential genesis of new movement altogether, the parturition of an unprecedented historical cycle. "America!" may be colored red but by another brush, one guided by a new phase in "the rich-and-poor-man fray / Of history" which promises the annihilation of faith in both God and State.

Clarel's critics have tended to misrecognize the role of the Paris Commune in the poem and, by extension, the significance of the text's interests in capital, labor, and conflict. The "evidence of the poem," writes Walter Bezanson, "is that Melville was thoroughly disillusioned with radical political action, that the adventures of the Paris Commune in 1871 increased them, and that as he grew older all experience seemed to support the essentially republican-aristocratic philosophy which his family had stood for." Concurring, Philip Katz argues that Melville "transformed the Commune into one long, apocalyptic vision," while for Larry Reynolds *Clarel* is where "Melville's conservative response to the French revolution" and "lifelong skepticism toward violent popular uprisings" coalesce (71, 30). Although the tone of the poem's references to the Commune, and to political revolution more generally, would seem to substantiate this reading, this interpretation is conjoined to the much broader shortcoming in the criticism that I mentioned earlier: the tendency to construe the poem as evidence of Melville's postwar politico-aesthetic withdrawal.

The text's chronopolitics and political theology are in fact inseparable from the Commune and its meanings. But Melville's diving, fathoms deep, into the meanings of the French Civil War is also a decidedly situated poetic experiment. When fratricidal violence engulfed France, numerous American observers immediately perceived the similarities in these cross-Atlantic rebellions. Oliver Wendell Holmes, entrenched in a philosophical pragmatism that refused epistemological certitude, perceived the communist movement as a repetition of militant abolitionism, since it "shows in the most extreme form what I came to loathe in the abolitionists – the conviction that anyone who did not agree with them was a knave or a fool [. . .] I detest a man who knows that he knows." Frank M. Pixley, a Union veteran who reported on the Commune, also recognized this kinship between socialist insurrection and abolitionist violence, writing that the "war of the Commune was to the Great Revolution what the mad raid of John Brown was to our civil war." Americans as far apart ideologically as A. Dudley Mann, a former Confederate politician, and General Adam Badeau, an aide to Ulysses S. Grant, could agree – albeit for drastically different reasons – that, despite their geographical distance, Gettysburg and Montmartre were in some respects historically contiguous and politically coextensive.[154]

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154 Oliver Wendell Holmes to Harold J. Laskin, October 24, 1930, *Holmes-Laski Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Harold J. Laski, 1916-1935*, ed. Mark DeWolfe Howe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), 2: 1291; Frank M. Pixley quoted in George B. Benham, *The Proletarian Revolt* (San Francisco: International Publishing, 1898), 211-12. A. Dudley Mann writes

Especially provocative for American commentators – whether it was the *New York Herald*, which labeled the Communards "Fire-Eater[s]," or the far more sympathetic Wendell Phillips, who claimed that the "Commune is one end of the telegraph wire of Liberty; the United States are the other" – was the unsettling similarity of the violence unleashed in these two wars. Writing in June on the "Summary Executions in Paris," which involved some of "the most bloody scenes of vengeance ever witnessed in modern warfare," the reporter for *Harper's* described the crimes of the Versailles troops as redolent of Confederate excesses in Andersonville and elsewhere: "The troops of the Commune were shot down without mercy, without even the form of trial, after all resistance had ceased, and it is estimated that nearly twenty thousand of them perished before the slaughter was suspended." "In front of the military school of St. Cyr," recalled Olin Levi Warner, an American sculptor then residing in Paris, "the deadly mitrailleuse or Gatling gun (that by turning a crank fires so many shots a minute) was employed and as fast as convoys of prisoners were brought up and properly placed in line to be killed they were systematically mowed down by this engine of death by the mere turn of a crank." When the *New York Herald* reported on this bloody end to the Commune, it enlisted the rhetorical and logical registers first made necessary by the slaughters at Shiloh and Ball's Bluff: "A burning city and an affrighted population, with the roar of cannon almost incessant, the crash of mitrailleuses constant and the rattle of musketry every moment, form a portion of the closing horrors of the dying hours of the Commune. The soldiers [. . .] show no mercy to the rabble who, with their country's arms in their hands, and clothed in the uniforms of the nation aimed at the destruction of France." "The telegrams which to-day appear in the columns of the HERALD," adds the reporter, as though suddenly spirited back to the Manhattan summer of 1863, "describe the gutters of the streets running with blood, the dead bodies of the insurgents shot down by the Versaillists lying in the streets unburied, and public and private buildings in flames, and still the work of slaughter goes on [. . .] They took Paris in all her beauty, with her grand edifices and noble monuments hallowed by the historic memories of the past, and now they die like beasts amid the rain which they brought upon the capital of France."[155]

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to Jefferson Davis in April of 1871 that in "the ferociousness of the inhabitants of Paris, one against another, I see an ample corroboration of the brutalness of men's nature; and almost despair of its Christianization [. . .The] astonishing scientific discoveries of this century . . . [are] employed as to produce a thousand devils instead of a solitary saint. In such a consummation Yankeedom has contributed more than its fair share . . . [with] its hypocritical engenderings and diabolical deeds." *Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist*, ed. Dunbar Rowland, 10 vols. (Jackson: Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, 1923), 7: 293. Adam Badeau's observation that "it need no peculiarly close or skillful observation to detect the points in which the two greatest wars of the last half-century bear a marked resemblance" can be found in his essay, "Two Great Wars: An Historical Parallel," *Fraser's Magazine* 2 (1870), 804; *Every Saturday*, February 25, 1871, 187. Theodore Tilton, abolitionist and friend of Frederick Douglass, saw the same historical linkage, but embraced it, proclaiming that "Communism is another name for Republicanism. If the Republic of America is right, the Commune of Paris is right. . . .The same logic and sympathy – the same conviction and ardor – which made us an Abolitionist twenty years ago, make us a Communist now." *Golden Age*, June 3, 1871, and December 9, 1871.

155 *New York Herald*, July 4, 1871; Wendell Phillips, *National Standard*, August 26, 1871; *Harper's*, "Summary Executions in Paris – Shooting Down Communist Prisoners," July 8, 1871; Olin Levi Warner in Albert Boime, "Olin Levi Warner's Defense of the Paris Commune," *Archives of American Art Journal* 29.3/4 (1989): 18; *New York Herald*, May 27, 1871.


SUMMARY EXECUTIONS IN PARIS—ROWS OF DEAD COMMUNISTS.

("Rows of Dead Communists," *Harper's Weekly,* July 8, 1871)

Believers in New World exceptionalism vehemently distanced American historical possibility from French revolutionary fact, but the narratives and images conjured up by the Commune and its aftermath – like the sketch above, equally at home in 1863 and '71 – posited an elusive yet undeniable interchangeability between French workers and American soldiers. Union conscripts and Parisian artisans were, like the systems in which they were enmeshed, brethren; and this realization carried a powerful and disenchanting charge. It indicated that Civil War was not simply an American affair. All the world was a grave-maker, and other nations were agents of fratricide.

This uncanny proximity between the American and French Civil Wars did not go unnoticed by Melville's German contemporary, Karl Marx. After devoting almost all of his journalistic writing from 1861 to 1865 to the American struggle (publishing articles on topics ranging from the cotton crisis to the ironclad battles), Marx turned to this first successful workers' revolution and could not help but interpret it through the lens of the American conflict. In *The Civil War in France*, he chides Thiers for comparing himself to Abraham Lincoln, christens the workers' insurrection "a civil war" and the Versaillists part of a "slaveholders' conspiracy," and concludes, in one early draft, by stating that the "Southerners fought for the slavery of labour and the territorial secession from the United States [. . . while] Paris fought for the emancipation of labour and the secession from [. . .] the would-be slaveholders of France!"[156] When E.L. Godkin reviewed Marx's book for *The Nation*, he published the review alongside a long report entitled "The Problem at the South" which documented the return to power of white slaveholders throughout the southern states. Godkin's description of Reconstruction's failures is in fact almost identical to his portrayal of the Commune's collapse. The radicals, he writes, "were put in possession of the whole administrative machinery [. . .] The experiment, however, totally failed." For Godkin, the Commune serves as a warning to all American reformers: "If we once get into the habit of treating the Constitution as a mere expression of opinion, to be set aside whenever its observance seems inconvenient, we shall have substituted a Gallic republic for an American one [. . .]

156 Marx, *The Civil War in France,* 81-3, 75, 98; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 20 (London: International, 1976), 20. Most of Marx's writings about the American conflict can be found in *On America and the Civil War,* ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

and we shall pass our lives as the French do – witnessing the struggles of one party to substitute its ideal for that of the other party [. . .] Surely what is passing in France ought to warn men of the danger of tampering with people's political habits and overthrowing their respect for the forms of law." Then, as if he were an older version of the speaker in "The House-Top," appalled by the dissolution of "civil charms" and "priestly spells," Godkin rationalizes state repression by correlating violence in France with violence in New York: "In judging him [Thiers], we must ask ourselves how we should feel towards, and deal with, a mob like that of 1863, which, while holding New York for three months against the State troops, and finding themselves hard pressed, should set fire to the upper part of the city, and the wharfs, and the shipping, and the public buildings, and seize on the Protestant ministers and hang them, and open groggeries and faro-banks in the principal churches, and then, rejecting all terms, should get into holes and corners and deal out murder on every soldier and policeman who came near the spot. We doubt if, under these circumstances, the State militia and the decent men would behave like sages or saints."[157]

Clarel situates itself in this discourse by reinterpreting the American Civil War through the example of the Parisian insurrection. The poem's representations of rebellion, slavery, and violence are tied together by a strong comparative analytic that stretches backwards and forwards in time, and from America through the Middle East to France, and then back again. The effect of this technique is a sustained if ambiguous sense of historical interchangeability, evident for instance in Ungar's pained recollection of "That evil day / Black in the New World's calendar":

> True Bridge of Sighs – so yet 'twill be
> Esteemed in riper history –
> Sad arch between contrasted eras;
> The span of fate; that evil day
> When the cadets from rival zones,
> Tradition's generous adherers,
> Their country's pick and flower of sons,
> Abrupt were called upon to act –
> For life or death, nor brook delay.
> (4.5.78-86)

The two metaphors of connection here – the "Bridge of Sighs" and the "Sad arch" – represent political upheaval as a break in time that can be crossed only by trauma. This imagined memory is the product of Ungar's injured American psyche, but the description of "cadets from rival zones" could also easily describe the class war in Paris. The point is not to simply collapse these two events, or distinct national histories, into one another. Like its many analogues in the poem, this passage in effect *globalizes* the American Civil War by reinserting it into a comparative history of antagonism. If in *Battle-Pieces* Melville deciphered conflict's forms in past rebellions, in *Clarel* he universalizes the United States' "strife intestine" through a political theology that forges its own philosophy of time (3.21.107). And it is through the latter that slavery returns, not as a theme but as an enduring presence:

> Black slaver steering by a star,
> 'Tis thou – and all like thee in state.
> Who knew the world, yet varnished it;
> Who traded on the coast of crime
> Though landing not; who did outwit

157 E.L. Godkin, *The Nation*, July 13, March 23, and June 1, 1871.

Justice, his brother, and the time –
These, chiefly these, to doom submit.
(2.37.76-82)

"Slavers" live on because time and its cataclysms resurrect accomplished injustices. The unsettling implication is that in spite of formal emancipation, slavery is not an annihilated institution but a transatlantic phenomenon, continuously reborn on other shores.

While Melville takes pleasure in exploring the historical, theological, and political links between France and America, many of his compatriots were more disturbed by the comparison because the Commune threatened to confirm a pattern for coming struggles between capital and labor. Some understood the revolt as an object lesson in centralization's consequences: "the commune contended for local self-government and for the decentralization of the national government. It saw [. . .] that under every form of government [. . .] the centralization of power in the hands of whoever was chief in the State for the time being had been inimical to the establishment and perpetuation of liberty, and tended always to provoke revolutions." Others translated the writing on the wall through the language of world revolution. "Scratch New York," Wendell Phillips declared in May of 1871, in a speech reprinted in Frederick Douglass's *New National Era*, "and you will find Paris just below the surface. The result of impressing the laboring classes with the belief that there is no such thing as Justice, and that the law is not sacred, will yet develop into revolution in the country." Phillips concludes by returning, like Godkin and others, to the New York draft riots of 1863, but then leaps forward into the future: "When July, 1863, comes again in 1873, perhaps they won't hang negroes to a lamp-post – they will indulge in a millionaire [. . .] New York will be Paris soon. You stand at the dividing of the ways. It is almost by the skin of our teeth that we have avoided open war in the coal-regions of Pennsylvania. Let it come again a dozen years hence, and the muskets will be actually loaded."[158]

During this post-Commune period, which historian Mark J. Heale has identified as the birth-moment of American anticommunism, a sense spread among the middle- and upper-classes in the U.S. that an "impoverished multitude, demanding an equal share in the wealth of the rich," as the *New York Times* phrased it, was pushing the nation toward an impending crisis. In the year following *Clarel*'s publication, a British traveler described the American bourgeoisie as "pervaded by an uneasy feeling that they were living over a mine of social and industrial discontent with which the power of the government [. . .] was wholly inadequate to deal." In its summary denunciation of the Commune, *The Nation* even came surprisingly close to reiterating Melville's idea of history in "The Apparition": "[that this revolution] was committed by men who have charged themselves in all seriousness with the task of reorganizing society on a juster and more humane basis, furnishes one of those horrible glimpses we get every now and then of the thinness of the crust which we call our civilization, and of the fierce fires which burn below it."[159]

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158 *New York Herald*, May 29, 1871; Phillips, *The New National Era*, May 10, 1871.

159 *New York Times*, 1871; Mark J. Heale, *American Anticommunism*, 24 and 27; *The Nation*, June 1, 1871. Heale points out that as anticommunism developed as an ideological weapon designed "to isolate labor organizations and control the untamed urban masses," Phillips's prophetic statements were in some ways substantiated: "The anticommunist animus in the years following the Paris Commune stemmed largely from the employers, elected officials, police authorities, and newspaper editors of the large cities, though the big operators of mines and railroads were equally prepared to use red scare tactics against both labor and agrarian radicals [. . .] The largest mine operator in Ohio's Hocking Valley refused to recognize a newly formed union branch in 1873-4 on the grounds that the concession would lead to 'anarchy and bloodshed that would approach, if not equal, the Communism of Paris.' A parade of the unemployed in Chicago was said to mark the destructive appearance of 'La

Now in the early 1870s, Melville's "core of fire below" had acquired new valences and meanings. Writers like Godkin and Phillips attempted, like Melville, to make sense of the henceforth incontrovertible fact that capitalist production ensures its own negation. What became increasingly clear to workers and their allies was that capital, in deterritorializing time and space, also generates antagonisms which imperil it. In 1866, Melville's representations of solidity think through the relationship between the war and the shape of time. *Clarel* revisits "the core of fire" but, in measuring the short distance between Paris and the U.S., relights it with different flames. That earlier poem's concluding query, "But who can think without a fear / Of horrors that happen so?," still applies to the shocks registered throughout the American North and South, but it also touches the other side of the ocean.

The unbearable weight of history, now burgeoning in a vast "surge / Reactionary," consumes all the globe at once, and Melville's epic anatomizes this transformation (4.6.183-4). In several cantos, this anatomizing impulse is directed toward communism, which, because it can enter the poem only through the text's chrono-theo-politics, appears at once as an epistemological proposition, as a historical project, and as a political desire. *Clarel* de- and re-codes communism, often when least expected:

> They turn; and, in that silence sealed,
> What works there from behind the veil?
> A counter object is revealed –
> A thing of heaven, and yet how frail:
> Up in thin mist above the sea
> Humid is formed, and noiselessly,
> The fog-bow: segment of an oval
> Set in a colorless removal
> Against a vertical shaft, or slight
> Slim pencil of an aqueous light.
> Suspended there, the segment hung
> Like to the May-wreath that is swung
> Against the pole. It showed half spent –
> Hovered and trembled, paled away, and – went.
> (2.39.149-162)

Offering two figures of hermetic closure (a sealed "silence" and a "veil"), the first lines situate the stanza, as well as the pilgrims it describes, within in a state of epistemological entangledness and ontological uncertainty. The passage as a whole pivots on the brief emergence of the avalanche's "counter-object," a "fog-bow" that *Clarel*'s critics have tended to read as the poem's symbol of religious hope. However, the concluding lines, in which the narrator analogizes the suspended light to the wreath hung on a maypole, add a layer of meaning that complicates this interpretation. The maypole symbolizes labor's fight against capital: it is an emblem that, as Peter Linebaugh argues, links the red and the green in the history of workers' struggles. Like the rainbow, it promises rebirth – but of a very different variety. Hawthorne had already grasped this meaning of the maypole in his short story "The May-pole of Merry Mount" (1837). In the founding conflict between Thomas Morton's "heathen

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Commune,' and when similar demonstrations in New York culminated in the so-called Tompkins Square Riot of 1874, when the red flag of the Commune precipitated the violent clash between police and workers, the police proffered evidence blaming the disturbances on Parisian 'Communists,' 'heavily armed German revolutionaries,' 'atheists,' and 'drunkards'" (27, 25).

crew" and the Puritan "men of iron," and in the resulting replacement of the maypole with the whipping post, Hawthorne perceived a hidden history of America's repressive violence.[160] Melville draws from his friend's reading of the pole in order to grasp communism as a politics of belief. The atheist's rejection of religious faith and tradition, Melville realizes, is structurally analogous to the communist's desire for politico-economic regeneration – an idea revoiced in Ungar's speech about "Transcended Rebel Angels" as well as in the stanza about the "cadets from rival zones" whose conflict springs from divergent hermeneutics:

> Touching construction of a pact,
> A paper pact, with points abstruse
> As theologic ones – profuse
> In matter for an honest doubt;
> And which, in end, a stubborn knot
> Some cut but with the sword.
> (4.5.87-92)

Critics have rightly pointed out the relevance of the Civil War to this passage. This document that cannot speak its truth except in "stubborn knots" and whose semantic ambiguity has yielded violence ("cut but with the sword") is the Constitution. But this condition of struggle, and its textual basis, applies to political as well as religious belief: articulating God's – enigmatic, beguiling – contract with man, the Bible, too, is a "paper pact, with points abstruse." Communism is to the nation what atheism is to religion: an absolute relation to knowledge and desire for transcendence; an act of refusal which, despite its potential for destruction, nonetheless enticingly heralds, like the disappearing fog-bow, the possibility of rebirth.

This interpretation of communism through theological standards of contract and fidelity framed many American newspaper accounts, which focused disproportionately on the anti-religiosity of the Communards. American journalists stridently denounced the workers – who, after formally separating church from state, destroyed temples and then, in a botched prisoner exchange, executed the Archbishop of Paris – as dangerous "free-thinkers" and "ultra-democrats" whose "schemes of political reform are [. . .] based on atheism." "All property in common," complained one reporter, "the Goddess of Reason, no Sunday – that is their programme."[161] One of the most shocking and significant events for American observers was the Communards' decision to commemorate their break from history by pulling down the Vendôme Column, Napoleon's "colossal symbol of martial glory" fashioned from the bronze of over one thousand captured cannons. The workers declared the column a "monument of barbarism, [a] symbol of brute force and false glory, an affirmation of militarism, [and] a negation of international right," and so, in the words of one witness, "the Column fell and by the hands of the people." Supervised by their own aesthetic Ahab, the painter Gustave Courbet (who considered the column an artistic as well as a political monstrosity), the Commune's mariners, renegades, and castaways razed this relic of imperialism: "The windlasses and ropes were all adjusted. The arms of the windlasses were manned by strong Marines from the navy. The clear notes of the bugle sounded 'the charge' and the windlasses commenced to turn, the ropes tightening and straining as the stalwart

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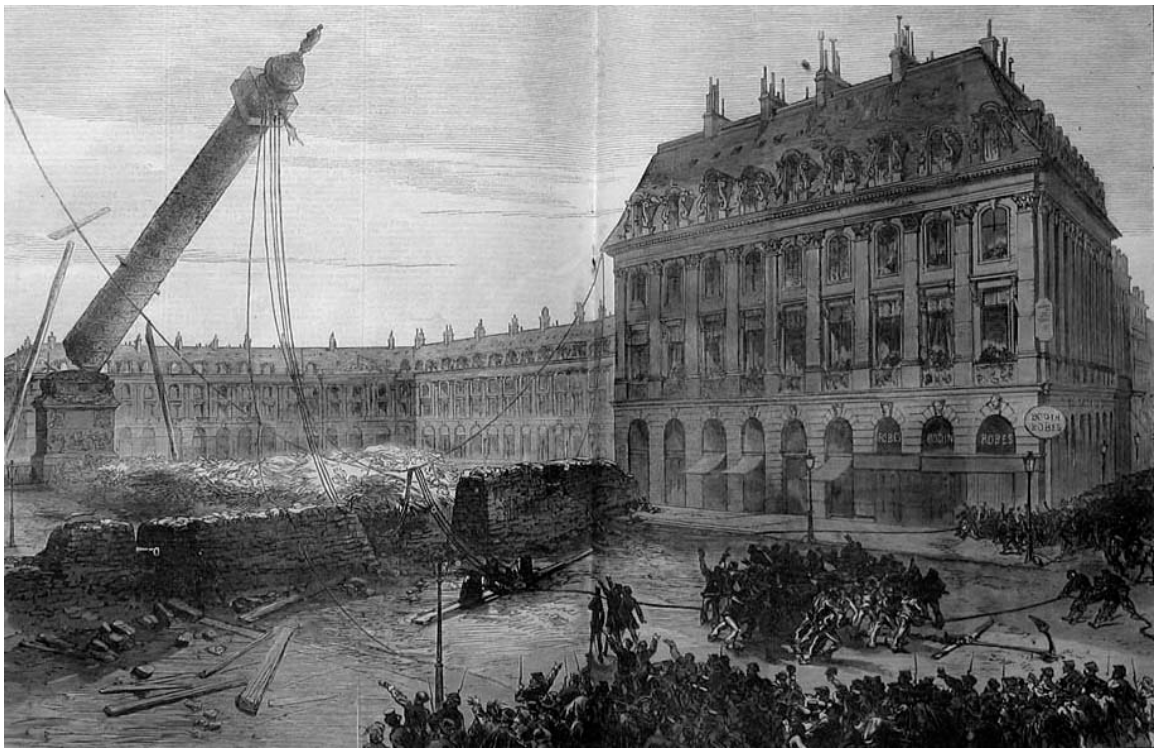
160 Peter Linebaugh, *The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful History of May Day* (San Francisco: Barbary Coast Press, 1997); Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," *Twice-Told Tales* (New York: Random House, 2001), 42-3.

161 Edward Beeches, quoted in Philip M. Katz, "'Lessons from Paris': The American Clergy Responds to the Paris Commune," *Church History* 63.3 (September 1994): 400-1; *New York Herald*, April 8, 1871.

men went round. All at once one of the anchorages gave way and it was evident the Column could not be pulled over by such means alone, so a long rope was fastened one end to the top and the other given to the throng in the street and then by a swaying motion the column was made to vibrate until it toppled, falling into a thousand pieces."



("Fall of the Column," *Illustrated London News*, May 27, 1871)

Contemporaries interpreted the workers' destruction of the column as a theological gesture as well as a political and historical act. For some, dethroning Napoleon from his posthumous position atop of Paris was akin to defiling a church and declaring a new, post-Christian epoch. The poet Catulle Mendes articulated these chronopolitical anxieties in an imagined address to the rebels: "It was not enough for you [. . .] to have destroyed the present and compromised the future, you still want to annihilate the past! [. . .] Do not think that demolishing the Vendôme Column is just toppling over a bronze column with an emperor's statue on top; it is unearthing your fathers [. . .] to say to them: You were wrong to be brave, to be proud, to be grand! You were wrong to conquer cities, to win battles. You were wrong to make the world marvel at the vision of a dazzling France."[162]

Melville, who viewed the Vendôme Column during his trip to Paris in 1849, was likely struck no less than Mendes by the workers' decision to "unearth" their "fathers." He understood, as *Moby-Dick*'s "Mast-Head" chapter makes clear, the symbolic importance of Napoleon's phallic self-tribute long before it was toppled by French mariners. The famous quarter-deck scene in Melville's "wicked book,"[163] in which Ahab mobilizes the crew behind his mad scheme by promising a gold coin to the first "mast-header" who espies the hated whale, is prefaced by this excursus on masses, captains, and the power of symbols:

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162 Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 78, 154; Warner and Mendes in Boime, "Olin Levi Warner's Defense," 18, 14.

163 Melville in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 1851, *Correspondence*, 192.

> Of modern standers-of-mast-heads, we have but a lifeless set; mere stone, iron, and bronze men; who, though well capable of facing out a stiff gale, are still entirely incompetent to the business of singing out upon discovering any strange sight. There is Napoleon; who, upon the top of the column of Vendôme, stands with arms folded, some one hundred and fifty feet in the air; careless, now, who rules the decks below; whether Louis Phillipe, Louis Blanc, or Louis the Devil [. . . Yet] neither great Washington, nor Napoleon, nor Nelson, will answer a single hail from below, however madly invoked to befriend by their counsels the distracted decks upon which they gaze; however, it may be surmised, that their spirits penetrate through the thick haze of the future, and descry what shoals and what rocks must be shunned. (168)

Although this passage begins as a joke, comparing living sailors to statues and then demonstrating how France's history of repeated repression is comically mirrored in the despots' nearly identical names (every tyrant's a Louis!), the narrator's jocularity dissipates as Ishmael concludes that such monuments nonetheless produce a kind of life after death, a prophetic signification in the body's absence. Although voiceless and dead to "counsel," monuments and relics still record the shape and force of history, which continues to exert itself "through the thick haze" of the present and the future. *Clarel* – a book filled quite literally with monuments, religious and historic, and itself constructed as a kind of poetic monument (the relic of a moment about to be superseded) – revises this passage through the cipher of Melville's postwar experiences. Although absent from *Clarel* itself, the column's fall predicates the poem's discussions of and references to revolution: it is a constitutive absence that signifies an absence both incipient and unsettling.

Starbuck, we remember, is struck by the impiety of Ahab's desire. "To be enraged," he avers, "with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous" (178). The white whale, however, is no "dumb" beast. Like the Vendôme Column, its meanings outstrip its physicality. After the war a different but related blasphemy has taken hold, and it is directed primarily against the "heartless void" of the state (212). *Harpers*' lamented that when the great "statue of the Emperor" was "set upon, smitten, and otherwise abused" by the atheistic workers, "[b]its of bronze and stone flying here and there were fought for and carried away as relics or trophies by the crowd."[164] These stone "relics," now in the hands of Paris's rebellious artisans, are the equivalents of Margoth's Holy Land souvenirs: shards of rocks once believed to be divine, now specimens for modern science.[165] Today's democratic

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164 *Harper's*, June 10, 1871, 526.

165 Margoth is instrumental to the poem's linking of geology with theology. At one point, he makes this startling call for change: "Wake up the dead; and let there be / Rails, wires, from Olivet to the sea, / With station in Gethsamane" (2.20.94-96). For Melville's "Hegelized" rock-hunter, technology effects political ecstasy (2.19.55). Universal freedom, as much as Ahab's soul, is laid with iron rails. If Margoth's call is heeded, it would seem, even cemeteries will need to be razed and holy sites dug up in order for freedom's wires reach around the world. To "Wake up the dead" nonetheless implies resurrection rather than removal. Margoth does not want to desecrate tombs but to render them obsolete. According to this fantasy, the dead will be utterly revivified through the global spread of capital's technologies. The idea that redemption will arrive not from "beneath the stone" but through modernity's perfected implements, Melville realizes, is as much a theological hope and spiritual projection as a rationalist plan (4.34.53). It is a secular chialism that reads the bodies of machines through the grammar of religious messianism. And this, in the end, is the point of *Clarel*'s political theology, as well as the philosophy of history, first hatched in *Battle-Pieces*, that frames it: belief can acquire infinite forms and translate into infinite acts; it can raise monuments, or tear them down; but it cannot elude time's destructive repetitions. One can welcome or renounce the slumbering fires, but

citizens, and especially the modern workers of the world, *Clarel* suggests, are so many Margoths daily chipping away at the stones of Church and State and engraving, with their hammers, political variants of the geologist's counter-inscription ("*I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss, / I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross*" [2.31.102-3]).

Melville does not withdraw from the problems of democracy after the war but, rather, reinterprets democracy through the postbellum antagonisms between capital and labor. Indeed, what we find in *Clarel*'s political theology is nothing less than a theory of democracy. *Clarel* is thematically centered on and narratively driven by the need to comprehend God in his non-presence, and its politics conform to the structure of this need: democracy requires, paradoxically, ruling by and through the masses despite the absence of the masses' voice. It is no accident that in *Clarel* every dialogue – whether Ungar's or Vine's or Clarel's own – is countered with its opposite. Entangled and cacophonous if not downright unknowable, the people's speech is filled with contradictions. And as the civil wars of the 1860s and 70s demonstrated so unforgettably, democracy obeys the same laws as history itself: it too "heaps Time's strand with wrecks" – in Paris, in Chicago, and in Virginia. "Democracy / Lops, lops," the poem declares,

> "but where's her planted bed?
> The future, what is that to her
> Who vaunts she's no inheritor?
> 'Tis in her mouth, not in her heart.
> The Past she spurns, though 'tis the past
> From which she gets her saving part."
> (4.19.133-139)

Melville's democratic faith is not, as has been alleged, annihilated after the war. Democracy, according to *Clarel*, grows out of a disavowal of the very past that makes it possible; it is a form of political governance always already temporally out-of-joint. Generative of almost ceaseless traumas and haunted by its incapacity to inhabit the futures that it creates, democracy nonetheless subsists by constantly awaiting its fulfillment in the to-come. Though "no inheritor," democracy cannot but inherit itself and thereby attempt to refashion, in the "thick haze of the future," history's "planted bed" of remnants and fragments.

In theology and in politics, Melville was neither a believer nor an apostate. His faith in both God and democracy shifted between fidelity and abandonment yet transcended both. Melville is thus not so far removed from the Rebel Angels – those red marines and members of a new mission of mankind – against whom his monomaniacs rail. He, too, sings of regeneration, however broken and uncertain. And he, too, a "crack'd Archangel," attempts to extract – but with a pen instead of a hammer – some semblance of hope or beauty from the ore of a world evermore delimited, homogenized, and hollowed out.[166]

"TO WRESTLE WITH THE ANGEL – ART": POETIC FORM IN *CLAREL* AND THE PROSING OF THE WORLD

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they will all someday, inevitably, reignite.

166 The phrase "crack'd Archangel" is Melville's own. He used it to describe the seventeenth-century theologian Sir Thomas Browne, whose *Religio Medici* (1643) he read while composing *Moby-Dick*. See Eleanor Melville Metcalf, *Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1953), 56.

Clarel's explosive interests in time, instrumentality, and belief also cohere in the text's poetic structures. In the previous two subsections I have discussed how *Clarel* refigures the senses of historical and political belonging that issue from the Civil War, and how it rethinks the event of Reconstruction through a comparative political theology. In this final part, I want to examine the ways in which the text's chronopolitical engagements are actively reassembled through its poetic structures.

A vehicle for prophecy precisely when machines have displaced oracles, *Clarel*'s form is both all-too-timely and profoundly untimely. It is a form that, by reactivating the historically antecedent in order to disclose and interrupt the historically emergent, braces itself against democracy's futures. At certain points in the poem, Melville speculates on poetry's relationship to transformation, most notably in Mortmain's response to Derwent's avowal of pacifism. In the future, Mortmain asserts, "yet more questionable war[s]" will inevitably occur:

> Prophet of peace, these wouldst thou bar?
> The world's not new, nor new thy plea.
> Though even shouldst thou triumph, see,
> Prose overtakes the victor's songs:
> Victorious right may need redress:
> No failure like a harsh success.
> (2.4.76-81)

This statement identifies an aesthetics in barbarism, and it heralds a coming order in which freedom's artistic expression (lyric or song) will be progressively stamped out by the language of repression ("Prose"). As revolutions and civil wars extend throughout the West, song itself – like the war lyrics of *Battle-Pieces* – will thus slowly disappear. Ungar's prognosis is even darker:

> "Arts are tools;
> But tools, they say are to the strong:
> Is Satan weak? weak is the Wrong?
> No blessed augury overrules:
> Your arts advance in faith's decay:
> You are but drilling the new Hun
> Whose growl even now can some dismay;
> Vindictive in his heart of hearts,
> He schools him in your mines and marts–
> A skilled destroyer."
> (4.21.15-24)

Removed from the divine ("No blessed augury overrules"), the arts, like poetry, are subject to the same laws of historical transformation as nations and economies. Artists "advanc[ing] in faith's decay" can adopt new methods but their innovations will only mirror the innovations of capitalism itself (a "skilled destroyer" in the aesthetic sphere). The implication of these two passages is that modernity is predicated on a prosing of the world. As instrumentality amplifies and revolutions swell, verse is either supplanted or turned into a counterpart of the market and its ideologies. Given this historico-aesthetic situation, Melville's use of the canto and of rhymed iambic tetrameter is hardly, as F.O. Matthiessen puts it, an "inexplicable choice." It is, among other things, a concerted rejection of the aesthetic model of Shakespeare, whose freewheeling iambic pentameter was for the antebellum Melville the very

embodiment of liberated speech.[167] Melville recognizes that the openendedness unleashed in free verse and in the five-beat line belong to an epoch of burgeoning possibility that has been eclipsed. Mass production and mechanized destruction have rendered the verse of regenerative self-fashioning wholly inappropriate. The world is more bounded now and "portioned out," and Melville, sensing that this compression inheres in the very condition of modernity, reclaims a verse form that in some respects has more in common with late-medieval poets like Dante and Spencer than with a Renaissance dramatist like Shakespeare, since the latter is part of a cycle of freedom that has likely run its course.

Melville switches from the lyric to the canto to sing to the world in a different key, but the song, by and large, is still the same. In *Battle-Pieces* a singular subjectivity frequently opens up and closes off within the space of a single poem, and in *Clarel*, although individuals are continuously entangled, the poem wards off any "intersympathy" of souls. Only atomization, frequently in the form of a metaphysical gap or epistemological incommensurability, persists. This strained relationality is reinforced in the poem's tetrameter, which, as Samuel Otter claims, Melville uses "to divide and multiply positions" because it is "a poetic line particularly suited to generating binaries and juxtaposing contradictions between and within characters." The canto in fact performs a similar function. Far less self-contained than the lyric, it is always inseparable from the series or repetitions of which it is a part. Allowing for a persisting interplay between part and whole, the canto is an almost ideal medium for representing, scrutinizing, and discharging the varied fragmentations of postwar temporal subjectivity. Walter Bezanson describes *Clarel*'s cantos as the form for "a wholly new mode of contracted discourse" that reflects the modern condition: "It is an essential part of the poem that the verse form is constricting and bounded, that the basic movements are right, hard, constrained. This is an unmannered verse, without processional possibilities [. . .] The tragedy of modern man, as Melville now viewed it, was one of constriction."[168] Bezanson's description of the verse as limiting "the flow of experience" is eloquent and compelling, but he overlooks the ways in which this poetic structure, which tends to circumscribe experiential possibility while at the same time posing futural alternatives, also breaks down, retards, or suspends in the course of its unfolding. *Clarel*'s cantos expose the *limits* as well as the logic of time's broken cycles and, in so doing, translate the poem's political theology into a poetic technique that duplicates and undermines the repetitions that subtly but powerfully determine modern life.

These formal aspects of *Clarel* are nicely encapsulated by the aesthetic theory offered in another poem of Melville's, "Art":

> In placid hours well-pleased we dream
> Of many a brave, unbodied scheme.
> But form to lend, pulsed life create,
> What unlike things must meet and mate:
> A flame to melt – a wind to freeze;
> Sad patience – joyous energies;
> Humility – yet pride and scorn;
> Instinct and study; love and hate;
> Audacity – reverence. These must mate,
> And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,

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167 F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), 401. Here I am following up Walter Bezanson's claim that the Civil War led Melville to replace Shakespeare's plays with Matthew Arnold's verse as an aesthetic model; "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry," *PMLA* 69.3 (June 1954): 365-91.

168 Otter, "How *Clarel* Works," 473; Bezanson, "Introduction," lxvi.

> To wrestle with the angel – Art.
> (*PP*, 280)

Although the poem begins by echoing the classical conception of art as the graceful combining of opposites, it concludes by refusing artistic transcendence. Differences "fuse" only in the realm of ambiguity (within an unknowable heart) and oppositions persist even in, and after, their aesthetic transfiguration, since art-making involves an incessant – and repeated – "wrestl[ing]." The final two lines characterize artistic creation as a kind of theological action by presenting Jacob, the bookish son of Isaac who in *Genesis* grapples with an angel and is rechristened Israel (in Hebrew: "Struggled with God"), as the artist's double. The poem's implication is that every artistic undertaking reenacts an originary struggle between heaven and earth, thus splitting open the space between worldly events and otherworldly reason over and over again. This oppositional aesthetics, according to which antagonism manifests immanently in art as an unresolvable crisis, on one level anticipates Frank Kermode's insight that modernity de-mythologizes temporal consciousness by displacing imminence (which derives from theological notions of time) with immanence (which entails a purely internal development).[169] In *Clarel*, Melville does not discard imminence (which grounds his negative historical eschatology) in favor of immanence (which frames the representations of capitalism, communism, and the winnowing of historical experience) altogether, but instead juxtaposes them in order to create in the reader a sense of lived tension or unevenness. The poem effectively situates the reader in the very moment of immanence's birth, and mourns the loss this parturition involves.

Clarel does not simply recognize the modern world's boundedness. It also carves out, chiefly through its poetic form, spaces for reflection and ideational action within the world's bounded limits. It is an immanent rather than transcendent engagement with modernity. It is a poetic disclosure and impassioned examination from the inside, as it were, and thus constitutes another "inside narrative" or Jonah-text of Melville's, but with this important difference: in the world of *Clarel* there are no more singular witnesses; we are, all of us, the abandoned castaways and orphaned survivors of a wreck that is still ongoing.

On the level of poetic technique, this aesthetics manifests as an internal dis-figuration not dissimilar to the formal strategies we observed in *Battle-Pieces*. The poem is shot through, for instance, with para-rhymes, off-rhymes, slant-rhymes, and absent rhymes, which have perplexed critics such as Robert Penn Warren and Lewis Mumford. Because of these strange rhymes and the structures that hold them, we "must pick," Mumford writes, "like precious shards, from the refuse heap of the poem." In putting pressure on the poem's unstable words, however, Melville's crooked rhyming continually draws attention to the poem's form and achieves an important effect: the deceleration of thought and perception. Instrumentality not only reifies time and language but also habituates how people apprehend the world. The democratic state, we recall, "lives fast," and the effect is a tragic quickening or speeding up of consciousness. Walter Benjamin, generations later, would construe this process as the dominance in modernity of immediate over long experience – the reign, that is, of *erlebnis* (which is discrete, isolated, and divorced from history) over *erfahrung* (which is collective, accumulated, and related to ritual). Melville has his own peculiar understanding of capitalism's reshaping of temporal consciousness, which he recodes through his political theology and then re-presents through a poetic figuration that in effect "deautomizes perception," as Victor Shklovsky words it, and produces a "lingering" wherein the artistic "object is perceived not in its extension in space, but [. . .] in its continuity." And this forced re-perception of the felt unevenness I described earlier as the issue of civil war occurs primarily not in the poem's "precious shards" but in the ostensible "refuse

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169 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 29-30.

heaps" of its meter and rhyme.[170]

Let's look first at the rhyme. In "The Pillow" canto from part four we witness, in one of Rolfe's dreams, the death of Sylvanus (a variant of Pan in Roman mythology) and the subsequent fleeing of the oracles. In this ancient story of deicide the narrator discerns the hard kernel of modern belief:

> Such fables old –
> From man's deep nature are they rolled,
> Pained and perplexed – awed, overawed
> By sense of change? But never word
> Aerial by mortal heard,
> Rumors that vast eclipse, if slow,
> Whose passage yet we undergo,
> Emerging on an age untried.
> If not all oracles be dead,
> The upstart ones the old deride:
> Parrots replace the sibyls fled –
> By rote repeat in lilting pride:
>
> "Lodged in power, enlarged in all,
> Man achieves his last exemption –
> Hopes no heaven, but fears no fall,
> King in time, nor needs redemption."
> (4.9.8-23)

Modernity, the narrator laments, is a vacuous repetition. In this historical "eclipse," the expected routs the untimely and mechanism replaces prophecy. "Parrots" supersede oracles and their empty words only repeat "[b]y rote" the rationalist myth of man's unfettered autonomy. Nonetheless, a gap opens up between this declaration of repetition's power and the verse's form. The b-line ("pained and perplexed – awed, overawed") is detached from the rest of the stanza's rhyme scheme. Suspended, as it were, in the midst of the other rhymed lines, it comprises a formal remainder that evinces repetition's incompleteness. This immanent scrutinizing of mechanism's limits creates a small space, or at least a line, relatively free from modernity's "Parrots" and their soulless speech. Usually this kind of dynamic assertion of aesthetic difference, wherein a poem enunciates a time or place not yet subsumed, is identified with the lyric, but in *Clarel* it becomes the labor of the canto. We witness this labor at work in the speech about art and instrumentality we encountered earlier:

> "Arts are tools;
> But tools, they say are to the strong:
> Is Satan weak? weak is the Wrong?
> No blessed augury overrules:
> Your arts advance in faith's decay:
> You are but drilling the new Hun

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170 Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction," 11-12; Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: Literary Guild of America, 1929), 322; Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Selected Writings*, 4: 315-19; Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion Reis, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 720.

Whose growl even now can some dismay;
Vindictive in his heart of hearts,
He schools him in your mines and marts--
A skilled destroyer."

Lines six ("You are but drilling the new Hun") and ten ("A skilled destroyer"), both unrhymed, are set off from the rest of the stanza. In their form, they mimic a force inserting itself from the outside, which is precisely their point on the level of content: capital annexes everything it touches, whether "mines and marts" or art. As this claim advances, a tension arises between the poem's content and the medium of its expression: as we continue to read, we see the rhyme scheme break down half way through, recuperate, and then collapse altogether in the final line. The concluding descriptive fragment, "A skilled destroyer," appears to destroy the verse itself and substantiate Ungar's prophecy. Containing lines that it cannot formally incorporate, this rhyme scheme also makes the reader slow down and reconsider whether "Arts" are in fact mere "tools," since repetition – the vehicle and consequence of instrumentality – fails here on a very local level. Melville's verse, here and elsewhere in *Clarel*, does not disallow experiential variation by keeping the reader's "movement along an insistently narrow corridor," but insists instead on a constriction that it then formally rethinks by depositing – as if within geological strata – breaks, absences, and remainders within its sequences of rhymes (Bezanson, "Introduction" lxviii).

This dis-figuration from the inside is likewise cultivated in *Clarel*'s meter. Ungar's speech deviates metrically at both the beginning and end: the lines "Arts are tools" and "A skilled destroyer" establish different beats that disrupt the stanza's iambic tetrameter and encase the claims about repetition's perpetuity within irregularity and deviation. And this technique fills out *Clarel.* In this poem replete with speeches, declamations, and monologues, meter is frequently unsettled at the endpoints of stanzas. Whether it's Rolfe's meditations on Alphonse de Lamartine's post-revolutionary realism ("— That cry! / And would the jackal testify / From Moab?") or Derwent's exasperated reply to the notion that "men / Get tired at last of being free" ("Your noble Western soil – / What! *that* be given up for spoil / To – to –"), meter often meets its limits in the bookends of dialogue, due in no small part to the dashes that proliferate at the inception and completion of these stanzas (2.16.57-9, 2.26.126-7 and 121-3).

Indeed, the dash in *Clarel* – hardly less prevalent or meaningful than in Emily Dickinson's poems – is in many respects the equivalent of parentheses in *Battle-Pieces*: it simultaneously ties together, complicates, and disorders the poetry's syntax; it divides and sets apart meaning while also expanding signification and providing detail; and it translates the text's thematic concerns about epistemology and communication into a formal problematic.[171] In the remarkable canto about deserts in "The Wilderness," the dash works as both historical marker and signifying chain: it envelops the narrator's excursion through Sinai before "the thundered Law" and situates the meditations on deserts' atheistic essence ("For Judah here – / Let Erebus her rival own: / 'Tis horror absolute – severe, / Dead, livid, honeycombed, dumb, fell – / A caked depopulated hell" [2.12.68-72]). The volcanic speech about "the Dark Ages of Democracy" that we examined earlier is also preceded by dashes that are as loaded with meaning as the one-word stanza that follows soon after: "Man disennobled – brutalized / By popular science – Atheized / Into a smatterer ——" (4.21.139-141). These dashed lines can be read as conjunctions ("and," "yet," "even," "or"), as oratorical pauses, or even as breaks in thought

171 Hester Blum also points out the importance of the hyphen in Melville's writing in "Douglass's and Melville's 'Alphabets of the Blind," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 257-8. In her reading of the "Encantadas," Blum demonstrates that the dash is utterly crucial to Melville attempts to represent violence and the unnameable typographically.

(suggesting that these things may not be as closely related as they at first appear). However interpreted, they tend to force the reader to slow down and then, by the time the unrhymed, metrically irregular climax (“America!”) is reached, re-encounter and re-perceive this nationalist signifier in a deautomized manner. The dash, I would suggest, expresses stylistically the logic of Melville's theory of democracy. If the latter, as *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* attest, is marked by both a vexing absence and a superabundance of meaning, the dash is the form of democratic punctuation *par excellence*. Uniting fragments while insisting on totality's incompleteness, it, as much as *Clarel*'s rhyme and meter, redirects the text's political theology and philosophy of time, creating on the level of form innumerable broken cycles.

These dashes, like the cantos that incorporate them, are reproduced in dizzying numbers. Along with the metrical irregularities and twists in rhyme and syntax of which they are part, they at once break up and constitute *Clarel*'s poetic form. In the structure of Melville's epic we therefore find a complex reiteration of its thematic content: the upturned rhymes, dislodged metrical patterns, and defaced sentences are, in a sense, so many local revolutions. If we learn anything from Melville's disclosure of “earth's foundation bare,” however, it is the geologic truth that the most local upheavals are also at the same time the most global. There is something of Paris in every dash, and a bit of Charleston in each missing rhyme. As history “Surges, and heaps Time's strand with wrecks,” poetry records, like the earth's strata, these accumulated cataclysms. Yet it is also a living rock – capable, even, of its own self-willed explosions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Speaking in the Breaks:
Frederick Douglass and his Speeches

In the summer of 1861, as Whitman and Melville began writing some of the poems that would soon fill out *Drum-Taps* and *Battle-Pieces*, Frederick Douglass delivered a remarkable lecture in which he described the Civil War in terms strikingly redolent of "The Apparition (A Retrospect)" and "Misgivings (1860)." Speaking at a Methodist assembly in Rochester, New York, he affirmed that the war, no matter what President Lincoln said, constituted nothing less than a struggle against slavery itself, that "ever active, ever increasing, all comprehensive crime against human nature." The Union's purpose, he explained, was to rid the earth of this "crime," and this would require something greater, and deeper, than military victory:

> Slavery is not an earthquake, swallowing up a town or city, and then leaving the solid earth undisturbed for centuries. It is not a Vesuvius which, belching forth its fire and lava at intervals, causes ruin in a limited territory; but slavery is felt to be a moral volcano, . . . a hell on the earth, the smoke and stench of whose torments ascend upward forever . . . It is a compendium of all the wrongs which one man can inflict upon a helpless brother . . . [Consequently,] the strong and enduring power [of] anti-slavery . . . is [not] explained by the cunning arts of rhetoric [. . .] The explanation of the power of anti-slavery is to be found [instead] in the inner and spontaneous consciousness. ("The Decision of the Hour," *FD*, 458-60)

In these incendiary sentences, we find Douglass – like Melville after him – turning to geology to secure an analogue for the nation's eruptive disorder. Yet whereas Melville insists on a certain dialectical stability, according to which history oscillates between periods of "crust" and bursts of a "core of fire below," Douglass claims that because slavery yields permanent discord, no "undisturbed earth" can ever cohere in the first place. Destroying this unremitting "volcano" will thus require more than bullets or "the cunning arts of rhetoric." For the war to succeed, its armies and advocates must sway the American people in a more primal capacity and, he declares, reach that "inner and spontaneous consciousness."

This argument centers partly on sentiment, since Douglass, like Harriet Beecher Stowe before him, enlists an idea of moral intuition to protest slavery. But his words also invite another reading. "Inner" denotes an internal mind, a kind of primal psyche, and "spontaneous" points to the instinctive reflexes of one's consciousness, the habituated events of mental life. Douglass's contention is not simply that slavery's overturning involves an event more elemental than law, or war, or national development. It is not even that "the power of anti-slavery" resides in feeling. His point, rather, is that radical social transformation inheres in the mind's *immediate* machinations, in the active and unbidden operations of thought, memory, and desire, and that abolitionists must therefore be attuned to this underlying psychic architecture. As Douglass realized, this explanation presents a variety of challenges to the reformer. Indeed, if genuine transformation can occur only when the masses' immediate reactions and associations have been reordered, how can such a change occur? How can one access that which precedes memory and the mind's routines? And what precisely activates the "immediate and spontaneous consciousness"?

These concluding two chapters are about Douglass's answers to these questions. Moving from his orations (the subject of this chapter) to his enlistments of poetic verse (the subject of the

dissertation's concluding pages), they maintain that politics for Douglass is, inextricably, a problem of aesthetics. I contend that throughout his writings, from his initial speeches in the mid-1840s to his final condemnations of lynching in the 1880s and 90s, Douglass's principal political concerns develop as part of a broader inquiry into the relationship between subjectivity and historical time. The "inner and spontaneous consciousness," in other words, emerges in his motley essays, lectures, and autobiographies as an aesthetic and temporal problem. Freedom and emancipation, he realized, may acquire their concrete identity through laws and institutions, but they ultimately depend on lived relations to political history, and these relations are the chief subject of his writings.[172]

The term "aesthetics" might at first glance seem misplaced. Nonetheless, ever since its inception in ancient Greece, aesthetics (derived from *Aisthetikos*: 'that which is known by feeling and sensation') has been a discourse less about contentless form than about embodiment and transformation. From Friedrich Schiller to Fred Moten, it has been used to tie experience to the political, it continues – for us, as for Douglass – to be inextricable from questions about universality, agency, and revolution. When Kant, for instance, argues in his third *Critique* that art (which he defines as "production through freedom," i.e., as the opposite of coerced or "mercenary" labor) is essentially and inescapably transgressive, he makes an argument about freedom's priority over necessity that strikes at the very heart of modern rationality. Art is not "a law-abiding activity, nor even of rational contemplation" but, he maintains, an experiential upheaval that opens one up to contingency. This model, which finds an afterlife in the writings of Burke and Coleridge (two of Douglass's favorite philosophers), construes the aesthetic as a mode of experience which slips beyond present consciousness in order to awaken, in Kant's words, "an inner causality (which is purposive)."[173] My interest is in how and why Douglass fashions his own version of the aesthetic. Originating not with Kant but with Douglass's own experiences as a slave and with his engagements with Euro-American legal, artistic, and philosophical thought, this other aesthetic emerges as an improvisation, a reinscribed

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172 Ernst Bloch's critique of classical aesthetics' "repression of being" also informs my reading of Douglass here. "The basic feature of bourgeois [Enlightenment] aesthetics," Bloch argues, "is not hope (and as a result, the aroused will); rather, it is contemplation (and as a result, passive enjoyment). Here beauty eradicates material in an illusionary way through form [. . .] that is indifferent to the material, even to the tendency of the material." "The Wish-Landscape Perspective in Aesthetics: The Order of Art Materials According to the Dimension of their Profundity and Hope," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*: *Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (London: M.I.T. Press, 1988), 71. To rephrase my argument in a Blochian vein: I am positing that Douglass's political reconstellations of national memory and (as we will see later) of Romantic poetry reassert an aesthetics of "hope" and of "the aroused will" over an aesthetics of mere "contemplation" and "passive enjoyment."

173 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Prometheus, 2000), 183-4. On the aesthetic as a discourse about transformation and embodiment, see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*; Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics," *American Literature* 76.3 (September 2004): 497-500; Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2002), 101; and Robert Kaufman, "Red Kant, or the Persistence of the Third 'Critique' in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (Summer 2000): 682-724. In emphasizing the role of creolization or miscegenation in Douglass's aesthetics, I also draw from recent scholarship about the generative significance of transplantation in the history of Atlantic slavery. I am thinking, in particular, of Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007) and Wai Chee Dimock's "African, Caribbean, American: Black English as Creole Tongue," in *Through Other Continents*, 142-165.

power invested with subaltern rhythms and potentials. And it is, I will argue, far less interested in engendering psychic harmony (the latent telos of Kant's aesthetic philosophy) than in effecting a kind of cognitive remapping through counter-commemorative oratory and poetry.

This chapter thereby seeks to extend and deepen recent critical arguments about the affiliation between aesthetics and politics in Douglass's writing. John Stauffer, for instance, has argued that art for Douglass resolves the tension between slavery and freedom. Drawing attention to Douglass's wartime declarations about the imagination (man's "sublime, prophetic, and all-creative power"), as well as his myriad invocations of Western literary works, from Aristotle to Milton, Stauffer contends that this resolution is achieved through the fostering of "empathy": by severing the bonds between speaker and subject, aesthetic experience promotes interracial attachment and, by extension, a sublime anti-slavery politics. Sterling Stuckey, writing about Douglass's representations of music in his 1845 and 1855 autobiographies, claims that Douglass locates the origins of modern blues music in the acoustics of slavery, offering "the best explanation yet of the source of that genius in black art that allows the music of sadness to contain its seeming opposite in the sound of joy." Paul Gilmore, focusing on Douglass's observations about technology, identifies a strong contiguity between his understanding of the aesthetic and nineteenth-century discourses about electricity. He asserts that Douglass, as a result of his "increasing realization of the shortcomings of rational political discourse," particularly after the Compromise of 1850, turned to the aesthetic in order to enlist a language that could access the universal aspects of people's experience. And Robert Fanuzzi, in a related vein, contends that Douglass's orations are constructed through a sublime displacement of time and space that challenges standard abolitionist beliefs in the inevitability of progress and in the coherence of public identity.[174] Collectively, these critics have provided us not only with a keener understanding of the depth of Douglass's literary and philosophical investments, but also with a novel appreciation for the degree to which politics for Douglass is not an autonomous or static set of concerns but a profoundly dynamic bundle of commitments which, in turn, shape how he writes and speaks to the American public.

My own interest is in the temporality of this aesthetics; I am curious about how it works as a discourse about memory, and how it constitutes itself by arresting and rearranging national narratives about freedom's pasts and futures. In Douglass's writings, this aesthetics acquires two principal forms: a counter-commemorative impulse that divorces readers and listeners from official modes of remembrance, and a method of poetic invocation that enables him to forge transnational spaces of temporal experience. The first of these aesthetic modalities is the subject of this chapter.[175] Focusing

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174 John Stauffer, "Frederick Douglass and the Aesthetics of Freedom," *Raritan* 25.1 (Summer 2005): 117, 115, and "Interracial Friendship and the Aesthetics of Freedom," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 134-158; Sterling Stuckey, "Frederick Douglass's Seizure of the Dialectic," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 32-4; Paul Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism: Electricity and American Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), 111-148 (the quotes I use come from his earlier essay, "Aesthetic Power: Electric Words and the Example of Frederick Douglass," *ATQ* 16.4 [December 2002]: 298); and Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 83-128.

175 My argument about Douglass's counter-commemorative impulse also builds on Dana Luciano's reading of Douglass's politics of memory in *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. Luciano identifies "an essentially countermonumental perspective" in Douglass's oratory that draws "on the legacy of the American Revolution." The "subject of the countermonument," she points out, "is less the truth content of a given event than the formal arrangement of time around the event; in response to the sacralizing appeal of the monumental, the

on his orations – the literary spaces in which he attempted to fashion counter-publics against slavery and its legacies – I will argue that Douglass's speeches are most legible not as discrete but powerful responses to various political conjunctures, but as clustered acts of public thought. Whether they reflect on the injustice of the color line or on revolutions in France, Douglass's lectures are driven not simply by ideological engagements but by an underlying revisionary impulse, a structuring principle of politico-artistic *re*-creation. His varied, explosive addresses unfold much like the poems and clusters of *Leaves of Grass* – that is, as interlinking experiments which develop both synchronically and diachronically, looping back at some moments and at others stretching forward, against, or even beyond their individual iterations. Continuously reclustering in order to transcend the nation's broken promises, Douglass's speeches comprise lyric-like articulations, thought-acts that form not a string or a series but an array of concentric circles. What this chapter argues for is therefore not only a renewed attention to time's importance in Douglass's politics and writing, but a recognition of time's fundamental, structuring role in his development of the lecture as a political and literary form.

In order to disentangle the inner relations of these speech-clusters, this chapter will consider a wide array of Douglass's lectures. But I will focus, in particular, on those grouped around America's two foundings: the Revolution of 1776 (which grounds his addresses about the Fourth of July, the European revolts of 1848, and the Constitution), and the Civil War (which shapes his lectures about Decoration Day and Reconstruction). What connects all of these orations is a common desire to slip into, and sometimes out of, historical time, through either a recircuiting of temporal experience or a reordering of memory. As such, Douglass's speech-clusters anticipate the fractured sense of temporality that Ralph Ellison, generations after Douglass's death, would describe in terms of a productive tension between progression and abeyance: "Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around."[176]

Herein lies the divergence between Whitman and Melville on the one hand and Douglass on the other. On some levels – or on some frequencies, we might say, in keeping with Ellison – they occupy a common ideological or discursive terrain. All three authors insert themselves, both willfully and unknowingly, into debates about the country's historical tendencies: Whitman's chants, Melville's poems, and Douglass's speeches address – sometimes circuitously, and sometimes with stunning intensity – the ideologies of time that emerge through and help buttress the expansion of American capitalism and the solidifying of the American state. We have seen how Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass*, attempts to ensoul an impending order of techno-political harmony by infusing liberal ideology with a "weight and form and location" that it cannot fully realize or contain (*LG*, I: 104). We have seen, too, how Melville's poetry – particularly in the startling, discomfiting verse of *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* – not only rethinks nationalist and Providential narratives about America's postwar fate but also, in its wayward form, challenges instrumentality's extension into the realms of art and belief. Douglass also engages these same senses of time (which all derive from the transformative experiences of politico-economic consolidation in the mid- to late-nineteenth century) by attempting to – as he himself words it

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deliberately untimely countermonument marks out spaces in which damaged time becomes visible" (170). My discussion of Douglass's political aesthetics is by and large continuous with Luciano's reading of his "countermonumental" sense of time, with one crucial caveat: whereas she construes the temporal gaps in his lectures and addresses as so many means of "quicken[ing] the pace of [Douglass's own] relation to the present," I maintain that these varied fissures issue primarily from a deeper – and not always present-oriented – understanding of historical time's essential contours and tendencies.

176 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 8.

– place his "hands on the dial-plate of American civilization."[177] Yet in his lectures, essays, and autobiographies, he is always either "ahead" or "behind" of this civilization's discourses, slipping "into the breaks" of time's ideologies. It is my contention that this vexed relation, at once inside and outside of history's striations, enables Douglass to reimagine historical time in his speeches not as a uniform or unilinear telos but as a process inexorably marked by return, deferral, and even redemption.

In the following pages, we will find that the terms often used to describe these texts – "lecture," "speech," "address," and "oration" – are woefully inadequate, since they hardly capture the volatility or layeredness of Douglass's reflections. By continuously fashioning a politics of memory that reactivates the past through the present, and by mixing the most seemingly discrete of discourses (philosophy with poetry, and aesthetics with history), these speech-clusters offer nothing less than an array of political experiences that exceed the nation's constricted temporal boundaries. Forged in those "nodes" of history in which "time stands still or from which it leaps ahead," Douglass's is a politics of retrospection, and in the fullest sense of the word: looking back in order to look forward, he insists on the inseparability of severance and renewal without closing off the latter's possibility.[178]

Accounting for Douglass's intricate chronopolitics is necessary if we are to revise some of the prevailing narratives about his career. I noted in previous chapters that a story of loss prevails in much of the criticism about these three authors. Commencing with the first and second generations of American Studies and continuing through the current dispensation of post-nationalist scholarship, literary critics have maintained that, in one way or another (it is a story with many variations), the antebellum literary avant-garde eventually stalled or retreated, either because of the Civil War or because of some personal trauma. Even if one maintains that this narrative centered around a subject

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177 Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 771.

178 And this, ultimately, is also the meaning of "progress," reborn in Douglass's writing: it is an arrest that both returns and advances, injecting a "now" with potentials that derive from history's aporias. Another way of conceptualizing Douglass's revised understanding of "progress" is through the figure of the "cut," or "break," in African American studies. James Snead identifies the "cut" as a constituent element of black aesthetics in his seminal essay, "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59-80. European cultures, he argues, tend to code repetition as progress, whereas the cultural traditions coming from Africa tend to present repetition as a variegated process in which "the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is [always] 'there for you to pick it up when you come back to get it.' If there is a goal [. . .] in such a culture, it is always deferred; it continually 'cuts' back to the start, in the musical meaning of 'cut' as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental da capo) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series" (67). Elaborating on Snead's insights, Stephen Best has identified the "cut" as a kind of lawless law within black cultural production, according to which a line or beat is sundered by an "unmotivated, unwilled" break and then brought "back to the start, back to a moment already experienced and, hence, more easily re-membered [. . .] The cut is an embrace of accident and rupture: the accommodation black culture makes to intrusion." In *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), he argues that, while this broken repetition "structures a plurality of black aesthetic forms, finding expression in the riffs and shouts of gospel melody, the call-and-response structures of jazz improvisation, and the antiphonies of blues lament," it finds its most "memorable expression" in Douglass's autobiographies (263). Fred Moten also uses this phenomenon of the "cut" to describe Douglass's portrayal of plantation life, arguing that Douglass's autobiographies expose the broken acoustics of slavery. See *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3-6, 10-11, 21-23, 250-3.

(i.e., the 'American Renaissance') that never truly existed, since it was less an artistic phenomenon in its own right than a retrospective, Cold War-era fantasy, the fact remains that this story of decline has had potent, if largely unacknowledged, afterlives. Whitman and Melville may now be more widely read as authors whose writing engages directly with contemporary struggles and discourses about racial justice, class formation, and the meaning of sexuality, but they are also still framed – again, not universally but predominantly – as the victims of some politico-artistic withdrawal or reversal. And Douglass has not escaped this story of loss.

It was only within the past few decades that Douglass was reclaimed as part of a literary tradition that also includes writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Only after the emergence of Black Studies in the 1960s, and through the seminal work done in subsequent years by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., William Andrews, and Houston Baker, did Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* (and then, later, his 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*) come to be read as a text as remarkable for its literary qualities as for its historical and political significance. This reclaiming of Douglass has, to be sure, frequently held Douglass somewhat at a distance from his Euro-American literary compatriots. As Samuel Otter and Robert Levine point out, in considering the relation between Melville and Douglass: "Even as literary critics have turned their attention to Douglass and those who study Melville have analyzed their works in their historical contexts, most have treated the two writers as though they lived and wrote in separate worlds: black and white, political and literary."[179] Despite this split approach, some of the principal narratives about Douglass have nonetheless tended to reiterate, in their structure, the same stories of abandonment and decline that originated in the very criticism from which Douglass was for so long excluded. His supposed fall is most frequently presented as a kind of political complicity. Douglass's militant, subversive politics, which derive from his experiences as a slave, ostensibly give way – the story goes – to a recuperated Republicanism. David Leverenz, Teresa Goddu, and Craig Smith locate Douglass's "separation from his black roots" in his responses to the political setbacks of the 1850s, while James Oakes, Fionnghuala Sweeney, Wayne Mixon, and William McFeely construe Douglass's political fall as a definitively postwar event. Whether Douglass's transformation is characterized as an embrace of liberal-progressive ideology (Kenneth Warren); as a more general "movement into white discourse" (Goddu and Smith); as a transition from reformist agitation to political conciliation (McFeely); as an embrace of American imperialism (Lazo) and "Black Orientalism" (Sweeney); or as a retreat from a "sacred world view" in favor of a "supremely rational" philosophy (Martin), the underlying narrative remains the same: as Douglass moves further and further away from his life as a slave, his writing and politics suffer. The implication of this story, of course, is that Douglass's intellectual development as a former slave only severs his organic connection to black culture, and renders his thought increasingly complicit with the very systems against which he initially struggled.[180]

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179 Eric Sundquist, "Introduction" to *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*; Levine and Otter, "Introduction" to *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation,* 1. The scholarship I am thinking of here includes: William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), especially 123-138, 214-238; Houston Baker, "Revolution and Reform" in *Long Black Song*, and *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 39-51; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial' Self* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 80-124; and "From Wheatley to Douglass: The Politics of Displacement," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Sundquist, 47-66.

180 Teresa Goddu and Craig Smith discuss Douglass's "movement into white discourse" and away "from his black roots" in "Scenes of Writing in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*: Autobiography and the Creation of Self," *Southern Review* 25.4 (Autumn 1989): 839. David Leverenz argues that, in the

In making this argument (about how Douglass makes arguments, as it were), I do not want to simply replace this regressive narrative with a correspondingly progressive one. Mine is not a story about Douglass transcending the conjunctures in which he is entangled in order to produce a timeless political vision. I aim, instead, to construct a critical narrative whose trajectory is immanent to Douglass's own uneven career, which is to say progressive and regressive at turns, reaching points of sublime confrontation as well as ironic concession. By returning to Douglass's own plural returns – those reiterations of time and place that always contain a difference – we can potentially complicate, and in some cases reject, this story about a slave who eventually loses his authentic, rebellious self over the course of his long career.

WHAT TO AMERICA IS THE FIFTH OF JULY?: DOUGLASS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Douglass delivered his most well-known lecture, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," in 1852, as Melville was reading the first disparaging reviews of *Pierre* and Whitman was experimenting with the unrhymed verse that would soon expand into *Leaves of Grass*. Speaking on the occasion of the "nation's jubilee," Douglass highlighted the distance between African Americans and the promise of unburdened liberty supposedly guaranteed by the American Revolution. "It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom," he declared, positing a sharp difference between black and white, slave and free: "This, to *you*, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your national deliverance" (114). Disjoining the pronoun for freedom's subjects ("you") from a constitutive outside (slaves and their kin, an absent "I" or "us"), Douglass's very rhetoric challenged the fictions of historical perfection bolstered by the holiday's celebration. In a country ruled by slaveholders and their sympathizers, Douglass

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1850s, Douglass comes to distance himself from "lower-class black people" and "unswerving[ly]" advocate "middle-class individualism and hard work" *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 134, 129. The other sources here include: James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007), 279-81; Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2007), 138, 182; William McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1991), 291; Wayne Mixon, "The Shadow of Slavery: Frederick Douglass, the Savage South, and the Next Generation," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Sundquist, 233; Rodrigo Lazo, "The Ends of Enchantment: Douglass, Melville, and U.S. Expansionism in the Americas," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 226; Waldo Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 173-82; Kenneth Warren, "Frederick Douglass's *Life and Times*: Progressive Rhetoric and the Problem of Constituency," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Sundquist, 266. Also see John Stauffer's contention in "Frederick Douglass and the Aesthetics of Freedom" that Douglass eventually abandons "his revolutionary ethos" and becomes an "insider" (131). "With legal freedom," Stauffer posits, "Douglass abandoned his sublime aesthetic" and reconstrued history as "linear, rational, and dispassionate [. . .] rather than millennial" (132). It should be noted that I am decidedly *not* taking exception to each of these individual arguments; rather, I am attempting to excavate an underlying narrative about Douglass's abandonment of an organic, plantation-based politics that subsists even in some of the most incisive Douglass scholarship.

insisted, commemorations of the American Revolution necessarily forget that Revolution's concrete failures. In fact, he argued, this mass amnesia, which ensures that "as a people, Americans" can remember only "the facts which make in their favor," is so deeply engrained in the nation's collective psyche that the Fourth of July has now become little more than a farce (109).

This was incendiary oratory. Douglass was not only denouncing Americans' impaired memory; he was accusing them of a kind of metaphysical treason. Yet rather than dismissing outright the claims of the Revolution in some Ungar-like jeremiad, and rather than endorsing a break with the past through colonization (as his former *North Star* collaborator, Martin Delany, recently had), Douglass reappropriated the past by reimagining its form and contents.[181] In his speech, he does not dismiss the Founders as flawed philosopher-kings but re-presents them as militant abolitionists *avant la lettre*: "They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission and bondage [. . .] They believed in order; but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was 'settled' that was not right. With them, justice, liberty and humanity were 'final'; not slavery and oppression." In Douglass's chronopolitical vision, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, whose "statesmanship looked beyond the passing moment, and stretched away in strength into the distant future," thereby become inseparable, and to a degree indistinguishable, from anti-slavery agitators like Wendell Phillips, James McCune Smith, and Douglass himself (113).

This historical refashioning enables him to both re-narrate the Founding (such that the Fourth of July becomes "the very ring-bolt in the chain" of a "yet undeveloped" national destiny) and ostensibly leave the past behind:

> My business [. . .] is with the present. The accepted time with God and his cause is the ever-living now.
>
> 'Trust no future, however pleasant,
> Let the dead past bury its dead;
> Act, act in the living present,
> Heart within, and God overhead.'
>
> We have nothing to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time. (112, 115)

Expanding the philosophy of praxis conveyed in Longfellow's poem "A Psalm of Life" (1838), Douglass presents history as a political instrument: the past is relevant precisely to the extent that it can be integrated into a powerful, liberating "now." This present is an elastic force, one that aims to generate a future in which slavery is obliterated and the nation reclaims its repressed heritage of

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181 Partly in response to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, Douglass's former *North Star* co-editor, Martin Delany, was advocating large-scale colonization at this moment. Only a few months before Douglass delivered his "What to the Slave" speech, Delany published a book in which he argued that slaves could find freedom only by leaving the United States and settling in a country untouched by the history of white authority. See *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia: published by the author, 1852). On the complicated relationship between Douglass and Delany, see Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), and *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 8-10, 12, 14.

universal enfranchisement. Yet this is also a strangely cyclical gesture. By positioning himself, as Eric Sundquist puts it, "*outside* the American dream but *within* the circle" of the Founding, Douglass is able to retrieve the past by refashioning it, wresting from the nation's revolutionary history a latent temporality of rebellion.[182] We thus get a glimpse, at this fractious moment in 1852, after the sinking of the *Pequod* but prior to the emergence of Whitman's erotic, poetic "I," of a very different sense of time than we encountered in previous chapters. For Frederick Douglass, time manifests neither as a self-regenerating telos (as it does in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and *Children of Adam*), nor as a degenerative process (as in *Clarel*), but as an improvised creation that is split between remaking and remembrance.

Douglass, however, appears to be both too early and too late for the "present" time of political action. He delivered this spirited oration not on the fourth but on the *fifth* of July; he reinforced the political antagonism described in the speech (between "you" and "us," between democracy's subjects and democracy's others) through the temporal dislocation of its setting. Castigating America's post-revolutionary generations for their deferral of freedom's promise, Douglass speaks after – and launches a belated critique of – the nation's unfinished jubilee. But his critique also, at the same time, heralds an impending liberation, a global blossoming of liberty that is already "in operation" and evident in the very "wind, steam, and lightning." It is from this vexed position, both inside and outside the American revolution, "betwixt and between" freedom and unfreedom, in one of the slips in history's fabric, that Douglass, here and elsewhere in his oratory, castigates Americans for being "false to the past" and for "solemnly bind[ing]" themselves "to be false to the future" (128-9, 117).[183]

"What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" is far and away the most frequently read and cited of Douglass's lectures. Often it is the one public address of Douglass's that makes its way into course syllabi and into analyses of his autobiographies. Nonetheless, the very popularity of this speech has imparted a false sense of its anomalousness. It tends to be excerpted or enlisted not in conjunction with other orations but as a unique declaration, but it is in fact part of a long series of attempts by Douglass to reframe the Revolution's inheritance. In July of 1862, exactly one decade after his famous speech in Rochester, he delivered what we might call a "sequel" to his earlier lecture, titled "The Slaveholders' Rebellion." Speaking again in upstate New York, but now to a different audience and in the midst of the Civil War, Douglass reconsidered the tenuous links between past and present, between promise and fulfillment. "Eighty-six years ago the Fourth of July was consecrated," Douglass observed, "as the birthday of American liberty and Independence," yet "[n]ever was this national anniversary celebrated in circumstances more trying, more momentous, more solemn and perilous, than those by which this nation is now so strongly environed. We present to the world at this moment, the painful spectacle of a great nation, undergoing all the bitter pangs of a gigantic and bloody revolution. We are torn and rent asunder" (*FD*, 495). In the previous decade, Douglass rejected Garrisonian pacifism and endorsed violence as a political instrument for inflicting precisely these kinds of "bitter pangs." But the Confederacy's attempt at a second founding was a reverse image of the events that Douglass, as well as John Brown and other militant abolitionists, had yearned for and imagined – a series of rebellions that would put some "St. Domingo [. . .] into the coffee of our [. . .] slaveholders" and remake the nation.[184] The Confederacy's rebellion, Douglass argues in this second "What to the Slave" speech, is *not* a

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182 Eric Sundquist, "Introduction," *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 14.

183 The phrase "betwixt and between" in reference to Douglass comes from Priscilla Wald's reading of his name change and enduring sense of social liminality in *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 99. On the timing of Douglass's lecture, see also James A. Colaiaco, *Frederick Douglass and the Fourth of July* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 7-32.

184 *Douglass Monthly*, August, 1859.

reiteration of 1776 but, rather, a monstrous historical aberration. It has the peculiar quality of possessing no chronopolitical connections: it "has no point of comparison with that which has brought liberty to America, or with those of Europe, which have been undertaken from time to time, to throw off the galling yoke of despotism" (*FD*, 498). In 1852, Douglass held out the possibility of the Revolution's belated fulfillment through a rereading of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution's preamble, the United States' "GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT[S]" ("What to the Slave?," 127). Now, ten years later, in the throes of disunion, the Revolution seems irredeemably removed from the present, and what requires explication and chastisement is not an inter-generational bond but a barbarous anomaly in time.

Douglass tries to grasp this historical logic, which is essentially a logic of exception, by presenting the Union cause as wholly continuous with the original founding. "Our slaveholding rebels," he declares, "with an impudence belonging to themselves, have [. . .] compared themselves to Washington, Jefferson, and the long list of worthies who led the revolution of 1776, when in fact they would hang either of these men if they were now living, as traitors to slavery, because they each and all considered the system an evil" (*FD*, 498). This separation of the Confederacy from the Revolution is neither surprising nor, in the context of Northern political culture at this moment, at all uncommon. Insisting on the Union's closer proximity to the Revolution's ideals was more or less axiomatic in Northern pro-war discourse. What interests me is *how* Douglass performs this rhetorical move; I am curious, that is, about the ways in which this historical judgment is bound up with both a more general sense of time and politics of perception. Douglass, significantly, is not content to simply point out the Confederacy's singularity; he also insists on its historical *necessity*: "I hold that this conflict is the *logical* and *inevitable* result of a long and persistent course of national transgression" (*FD*, 498; my emphasis). And Douglass would return to this argument again and again in subsequent years, during Reconstruction and after, holding tenaciously to the belief that the Civil War was "too momentous an affair to be accidental."[185]

One cannot help but be struck by the tension between these claims about the rebellion's untimeliness on the one hand and its historical inevitability on the other. The Confederacy cannot both contradict history's movement *and* culminate it. However, this split conception of the war's temporal character neither originated nor ended with Douglass: it issued from a ubiquitous ideology of time that sprang directly from the experience of the war in order to compensate for its psychic violence. One of the principal objects of this ideology was the Confederacy's historical lineage. On the level of political rhetoric, the South's rejection of Northern "tyranny" bore a troubling resemblance to the Founders' rebellion against English authority. Melville drew attention to this disturbing connection in his *Battle-Pieces* poem about Robert E. Lee:

> In his mien
> The victor and the vanquished both are seen –
> All that he is, and what he late had been.
> Awhile, with curious eyes they scan
> The Chief tho led invasion's van –
> Allied by family to one,
> Founder of the Arch the Invader warred upon:
> Who looks at Lee must think of Washington;
> In pain must think, and hide the thought,

185 "A Lecture on John Brown," in the *Frederick Douglass Papers* (LC), reel 14, 6, as quoted by Blight in *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989), 109.

So deep with grievous meaning it is fraught.
("Lee in the Capitol," *BP*, 165)

One of the more effective attempts to ward off this "grievous meaning" was Edward Everett's 1863 oration at Gettysburg. Speaking just before Lincoln delivered his famous speech, Everett posited a radical separation between America's founding Revolution and the South's political treason, claiming that the Confederacy threatens to transform the Founders' "fair creation" into outright "Chaos," a primal state of anarchy in which nothing exists but the "wretched fragments" of the New World's laws. Nonetheless, this seemingly unprecedented insurrection also finds, in Everett's speech, an analogue in France's Reign of Terror: in the Gallic republic as in the U.S., the "bloodhounds of civil strife" were released after the nation's birth, vowing "permanent alienation and hatred" but succumbing, in the end, to the "strong arm" of freedom .[186] Similarly paradoxical assertions about the Confederacy's connections and disconnections proliferated throughout the North, not only among politicians such as Everett and Lincoln but among an array of writers and intellectuals. Arising from the dual experiences of historical rupture and regional partisanship, this ideology of time endeavored to rescue nationalist narratives from the war's violence and rationalize its trauma through fictions of historical continuity.

It should not surprise us that this ideology, which was formally split, was also quite powerful and widespread. Ideologies work not to the degree that their logics remain beautiful and unbroken but to the extent that they enable individuals to manage and distill their everyday experiences. Moreover, precisely *because* they are generated through people's differentiated encounters and positions, ideologies are never entirely uniform, either in their shape or in their politics. And this is the point I would like to make, on the basis of this understanding of ideological formation: Frederick Douglass fully partakes in this split historical consciousness, which is divided between an experience of dislocation and a desire for affiliation, but he also slips into it via his own chronopolitical vernacular.[187] In Douglass's speeches, this ideology is drawn into a more general pattern in his thought, in which a given historical cycle (the Fourth of July, the Civil War, West Indian Emancipation, etc.) is initially depicted as both even and complete, but then fragmented and reinscribed.

We see this revisionary method at work in "The Slaveholders' Rebellion" when Douglass

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186 *The Rebellion Record*, I: 39, 41

187 I am arguing, in other words, that as much as ideology functions as a preconceptual force – by inhering, as Jacques Rancière phrases it, in an established "distribution of the sensible" – it also comes up against its own limits. (See *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill [New York: Verso, 2007].) Via art, science, or historical crises, ideology's elements rise to the level of consciousness and can thereby be contested and reconstituted. My decidedly non-Lukácsian conception of ideology flows, in part, from the theoretical insights of Marxist scholars such as Slavoj Žižek, Theodor Adorno, Michel Pêcheux, and Robert Kaufman. See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, trans. Jon Barnes (New York: Verso, 1989), 2-3, 11-54, 87-130, and *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2006), 3-5, 330-386; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, and "Reconciliation Under Duress," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (New York: Verso, 2007), 151-176; Pêcheux, "The Mechanism of Ideological (Mis)recognition," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1994), 141-151; and Kaufman, "Red Kant." As we will see in chapter six when we examine the literary relations realized in Douglass's poetry, this more circumscribed understanding of ideology offers a way to read texts post-symptomatically. One of the chief politico-conceptual arguments of this dissertation is that it is through aesthetic modes of experience – generated in Whitman's unrhymed verse, Melville's intricate stanzas, and Douglass's counter-commemorative poetics – that the world can be reimagined and, for a brief but powerful time, literally transformed.

meditates on the meanings of the founding documents. He begins by partaking in the celebration of Independence Day, rehearsing the dream of the Revolution's unabridged success. In creating the American government, the Founders, he claims, concretized the abstract "principles in the Declaration of Independence" and "prepare[d] the world for" a new historical cycle, "a millennium of righteousness and peace." But he then breaks up this narrative in order to disclose its flaws and potentials. This benevolent "millennium" never came about, not because of some fated regression but because of a wholly contingent development: the rise to dominance of a tyrannical legal aesthetics. As slaveholders and their allies usurped the government, they imposed on the rest of the country their skewed reading of the Constitution and the Declaration, wherein the founding documents are approached as if they were "intended to be viewed like some colossal statue at the loftiest altitude, by the broad eye of the whole world, meanly subjected to a microscopic examination and its glorious universal truths craftily perverted into seeming falsehoods." The emergence of this false aesthetics, which misrecognizes living documents as sacred objects, was chiefly responsible, Douglass maintains, for what future generations will identify as "the downward career of the republic," which culminated in the Civil War but can be traced back to the *Dred Scott* decision, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the Missouri Compromise. These legal codifications of slavery, he concludes, "will [eventually] be seen" as incepting national disunion "by bartering away an eternal principle of right for present peace. We undertook to make slavery the full equal of Liberty, and to place it on the same footing of political right with Liberty" (*FD*, 495, 500).

Douglass's argumentative method here is remarkable for the way that it develops a rhythm of broken progress: he cuts into a moment of crisis – literally, in the midst of war – in order to reassert a subaltern history. Arresting time's movement in the space of his speech, he imparts a repressed narrative about the nation's trajectory. His is the story of a freedom drive refused at the founding and traduced by laws, but which today has manifested in all its violent dynamism. It is a freedom drive, moreover, that is legible only through a political aesthetics generated in *direct opposition* to the slaveholders' legal hermeneutics. Advocating an aesthetics centered not on objects but on their *effects*, Douglass implicitly formulates a model of reading in which counter-memory plays an active and indispensable role. "The Slaveholders' Rebellion" offers, in a sense, the philosophy of memory upon which "What to the Slave" unknowingly depends – one not thinkable in 1852 because the Civil War alone made it possible. A decade earlier, he had reclaimed the founding documents as malleable instruments; now he broadens this gesture by developing an aesthetics of remembrance that subjects collective memories, as well as the texts and events upon which they are based, to chronopolitical critique and renewal.

These two speeches, separated by ten years, are the most politically charged of Douglass's Fourth of July orations, but they are not his only public meditations on the Revolution. Throughout his career Douglass tended to respond to political events by retrieving, and then improvising on, the inheritance of the American founding. The interdependence of "The Slaveholders' Rebellion" and "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" is symptomatic of a deeper pattern of political and literary association in Douglass's orations, one that clusters his speeches according to tendencies in his counter-commemorative thought. His lectures are therefore best understood as compounded oratorical experiments, as assemblages that are woven together through shared chronopolitical anxieties and investments. His responses to the *Dred Scott* case, for instance, are tied to his reflections on West Indian Emancipation; his writings about the Constitution both derive from and augment his 1845-6 addresses in Ireland and Britain; and his lectures on John Brown evolve in productive tension with his commentaries on President Lincoln. Drawn together not only in theme and structure but also in their chronology (i.e., frequently delivered on common holidays or anniversaries), these speech-clusters establish their own terms of politico-historical legibility, and, in so doing, oblige us to approach Douglass's lectures differently in terms of their literary status and their literary form. Excerpting these speeches on their own, as is often done, without acknowledging the motley ways in which they link

into certain lecture-cycles and patterns of counter-commemorative thought, risks effacing precisely what renders them distinct.

"THE MORNING STAR OF FREEDOM": 1776 / 1848 / 1789

Douglass's lectures cluster together, as I mentioned earlier, around two foundings. His Fourth of July addresses in fact make up only part of Douglass's abiding, lifelong effort to understand the first of these foundings, the American Revolution, in relation to global struggles against tyranny. He realized that the emergence of the United States was on its lower frequencies the "very ring-bolt" in a great chain of worldwide upheaval, and throughout his life he tied his understanding of politics at home to his reflections on politics abroad.

When revolutions rocked Europe in 1848, Douglass, on the heels of his trip throughout the United Kingdom, responded by almost immediately conjoining these movements across the Atlantic to their New World analogues. In August of that tumultuous year, Douglass delivered a lecture titled "The Revolution of 1848" in which he used the rhetoric and ideology of the American Revolution to frame Europe's anti-monarchical struggles. There exists, he claimed, a revolutionary attachment to "human freedom" that spans the Atlantic and is bound by neither space nor time. In France, in the West Indies, and in the United States, "[t]yranny, in all its varied guises" can consequently "on this day be exposed – oppression and injustice denounced, and liberty held up to the admiration of all" (*FD*, 104). The recent attempts by the French masses to reclaim the democratic heritage of their Revolution are thus part of a circum-atlantic enterprise designed to wed the Old World to the New in an untimely bond. This invisible linkage inheres not in some vaguely idealized mutuality, but, according to Douglass, in the ineluctable fact of class warfare: "[t]he despots of Europe," he posits, are the siblings of "the slaveholders of America," while "the humble poor, the toil-worn laborer, the oppressed and plundered, the world around" form their own subaltern class, or counter-power, all over "this terraqueous globe" ("France," *FD*, 304; Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 70). Now, in the midst of 1848's upheaval, "[t]he magic power of human sympathy is rapidly [. . .] bringing mankind into the harmonious bonds of a common brotherhood," and the Romantics' dream of unbounded intersympathy may finally be realized: "In some sense, we realize the sublime declaration of the Prophet of Patmos, 'And there shall be no more sea.' The oceans that divided us, have become bridges to connect us, and the wide 'world has become a whispering gallery.' The morning star of freedom is seen from every quarter of the globe" ("The Revolution of 1848," *FD*, 105).

Such jubilant assertions of transatlantic political contiguity were fairly common among American democrats in the immediate aftermath of the revolts. As Larry Reynolds has demonstrated, Europe's insurrections had a profound effect on many of the major writers of the antebellum literary avant-garde, from Herman Melville to Margaret Fuller, and influenced their writing about rebellion, reprisal, and class warfare for decades afterwards. When the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1856, one of Whitman's most fervent defenses of democracy sprang, not coincidentally, from a remembrance of 1848:

> Suddenly out of its stale and drowsy lair, the lair of slaves,
> Like lightning Europe le'pt forth . . . . half startled at itself,
> Its feet upon the ashes and the rags . . . . Its hands tight to the throat of kings.
>
> O hope and faith! O aching close of lives! O many a sicken'd heart!

> Turn back unto this day, and make yourselves afresh.
> ("Untitled," *LG*, I: 144)

Here, in the poem that would later become "Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Years of These States," Whitman shuttles back to the moment of "the morning star of freedom" in order to illuminate an international rebellion against slavery, a revolt that touched but was not limited to America's shores. Melville's engagement with this Atlantic-wide zeitgeist in *Mardi* (1849), *White-Jacket* (1850), and *Moby-Dick* (1851) was far more ambivalent than Whitman's, but each of these novels also displays a sense of modernization's historical inevitability which originated, in part, in 1848's revolutions. Despite the diversity of their governments, almost all the islands of *Mardi* are increasingly subject to "serfs" discontented with their legally-sanctioned "life of deaths." *White-Jacket* is in essence a clarion call for the extension of the egalitarian spirit of '76 and '48 into the spheres of naval law (so that the ship will no longer be an unfree "terra firma cut off from the main"). And in Melville's self-proclaimed "wicked book," Ahab is doomed from the very outset, we recall, not because fate simply dictates his annihilation, but because his superlative attachment to a non-utilitarian, unprofitable affect (hate, taken to its sublime extreme) dooms his ship.[188]

Douglass's own response to 1848 – speeding across the Atlantic and back again – hinges on a distinct sense of temporal movement and possibility. In his "Revolution of 1848" speech, the present, shot through with instability ("There is no telling what a day may bring forth") and anticipatory desire ("The human mind is everywhere filled with expectation [. . . and] [t]he moral sky is studded with signs and wonders"), becomes a point of historical release: "High upon the whirlwind, Liberty rides as on a chariot of fire. Our grave old earth rocks with mighty agitation [. . .] The long pent up energies of human rights and sympathies, are at last let loose upon the world." This temporal imaginary flows in part from Douglass's more general tendency, powerfully on display in his autobiographies, to – in Robert Stepto's words – incessantly "conjoin past and present."[189] But this conjoining technique also depends on something quite specific, here and elsewhere in his orations: an understanding of the present as a determining, connecting force – a now-time that renanimates the past. Releasing the "long pent up" energies of the masses, this present enables Douglass to slip into history's movements; and what he finds, in pausing at this moment in 1848, is, strangely, something that has already occurred. As he declares at the climax of the speech, "The grand conflict of the angel Liberty with the monster Slavery, has at last come [again]" (*FD*, 105). Looking from the past to the present, Douglass sees today's emancipations as repeating those from other places and other times. Because history is

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188 Larry Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance*; Melville, *Mardi*, 191; *White-Jacket*, 371; letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 1851, in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 43. Russ Castronovo also provides an insightful commentary on American literary reactions to Europe's 1848 in *Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and Anarchy in a Global Era* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), 73-82. Castronovo argues that the English translation of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire* should be recognized as an important "installment [. . .] in the panoply of the American Renaissance," and that doing so "reveals an international dimension to the aesthetic language welling up" throughout the Atlantic world (73). My argument in these concluding chapters similarly attempts to provide, by way of Douglass's poetry and speech-clusters, an alternative political and literary chronology for these transatlantic connections.

189 Stepto identifies this technique as a crucial feature of Douglass's autobiographical writing in *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979), 20, 23. Albert Stone similarly contends that Douglass's aim in his 1845 *Narrative* is the construction of a decidedly "historical self"; see his essay, "Identity and Art in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*," in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991), 62-78.

propelled by a single, unceasing struggle (between "Liberty" and "Slavery") that springs up in different guises, Louis Blanc and Giuseppe Garibaldi, properly viewed, are both the heirs and the contemporaries – the progeny and co-actors – of earlier revolutionaries like Touissant L'Ouverture and George Washington.

For the rest of his life, Douglass maintained faith in this idea that revolutions loop back and between different times and locations. But his sanguine prophecies for 1848 fell away in the following years, as Europe's bourgeois and aristocratic armies either defeated or co-opted the working-class revolts, and in the U.S., Northern compromises to slavery's westward extension crushed abolitionists' hopes for political renewal. From the standpoint of the counter-revolutionary 1850s, it seemed that "[t]he grand conflict" between slavery and liberty was either over and the "monster" had emerged victorious, or it had been deferred. Whitman construed this defeat as a sacrifice that would later be redeemed through freedom's completion:

> Meanwhile corpses lie in new-made graves . . . . bloody corpses of young men:
> The rope of the gibbet hangs heavily . . . . the bullets of princes are flying . . . .
> the creatures of power laugh aloud,
> And all these things bear fruits . . . . and they are good.
>
> Those corpses of young men,
> Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets . . . those hearts pierced by the gray lead,
> Cold and motionless as they seem . . live elsewhere with unslaughter'd vitality.
> [. . .]
>
> Not a grave of the murdered for freedom but grows seed for freedom . . . . in its
> turn to bear seed,
> Which the winds carry afar and re-sow, and the rains and snows nourish.
> ("Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Years of these States," *LG*, I: 145)

For Melville, the "winds" that followed revolution were far more chaotic. His account of 1848's aftermath can be glimpsed in the transition from *White-Jacket* to *Moby-Dick*, as the narrator's attachment shifts from the ship's masses to its tyrannical captain. If, as C.L.R. James argues, the principal drama of the novel is not the sea-journey itself but the developing relation between the captain and the crew, Melville's insights into Ahab's "anti-democratic personality" flow quite directly from the political landscape of the post-1848 Atlantic world. Following the suppression of Europe's rebellions, class conflict emerged for the first time as an explicit and prevailing concern of bourgeois thought.[190] Class consciousness was henceforth inescapable – and *Moby-Dick* is, among many other

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190 C.L.R. James *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: Herman Melville and the World We Live In*, 8-33. The accounts I am drawing from regarding 1848 and its influence on bourgeois consciousness are those of Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) and Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel* (1937). Lukács posits, more specifically, that 1848's class battles transformed bourgeois ideology into a "class ideology" in "a much narrower sense" and occasioned a radical shift in "the mass experience of history itself" (*The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell [Boston: Beacon Press, 1963], 172). While I disagree with his understanding of ideological formation, the *historical* account that Lukács offers is nonetheless persuasive, even if that account, when we transport it across the Atlantic, must assume a very different form (i.e., one centered around racial slavery rather than a white working class). On "the American 1848," see Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 102-151.

things, an eloquent record of this tragic ideological shift.

Douglass was no less affected by the counter-revolutionary events of the late-1840s and early-1850s. The lesson he construed from these defeats, however, was different. The solidification of a global bourgeois order arrayed in the interests of tyranny forced him to come to terms with, and eventually embrace, the fact that politics – to invert Clausewitz's famous epigram – is but war by other means. In light of the cycles of rebellion and reprisal in both Europe and the United States, he began to reconceive of history as something that is always incomplete, unstable, and driven by antagonisms. When he came to reconsider the American Revolution and its documents, he consequently reimagined the founding as a continuing process instead of an established event: the Revolution, he came to believe, incepted a malleable ideology that was – and continues to be – emancipationist in spirit, capable of revision, and generative of rights that eclipse their initial historical moment.

In his speeches, Douglass would most often return to this bond between 1776 and 1848 in moments of crisis. During the Civil War, he made a habit of drawing from Europe's revolutionary history to explain the North's political situation. One of his most famous orations of this period, "The Mission of the War" (1864), was based largely on this historical linkage. After commencing with a maritime metaphor that Melville surely would have savored ("One wave brings its treasure from the briny deep, but another often sweeps it back to its primal depths"), he turns directly to the Franco-American analogy to test out the idea (recently popularized by Lincoln's Secretary of War, William Seward) that "revolutions can never go backward." That assertion, he argues, "must be taken with limitations. The revolution of 1848 was one of the grandest that ever dazzled a gazing world. It overturned the French throne [. . .] and inaugurated a glorious Republic. Looking from a distance, the friends of democratic liberty saw in the convulsion the death of kingcraft." This optimism nonetheless proved misguided: "Great was their disappointment. Almost in the twinkling of an eye, the latent forces of despotism rallied. The Republic disappeared. Her noblest defenders were sent into exile [. . .] Politics and perfidy proved too strong for the principles of liberty and justice in that contest" (*FD*, 555). Douglass then pulls the comparison *back* across the Atlantic, arguing that the Union's struggle against the Confederacy comprises an analogous strike for "democratic liberty." The South's treasonous government, which "has planted agony at a million hearthstones, throned our streets with the weeds of mourning, filled our land with mere stumps of men, ridged our soil with 200,000 rudely-formed graves, and mantled it all over with the shadow of death," is but the American version of European despotism and tyranny. "The blow we strike" is therefore "not merely to free a country or continent – but the whole world from Slavery – for when Slavery fails here – it will fail everywhere" (*FD*, 557). The problem with the idea that "revolutions never go backward" is that it is only in the fissures and unvoiced compacts of history that revolutions find meaning. This is why, Douglass insists, it can be accepted "only with limitations." The Civil War, like the American Revolution before it, does not advance in a straight line: it doubles back to the failed upheavals in the past, like those of 1848, repeating with a difference their attempts to exact revenge against the world's "creatures of power."

In thinking about history as a form of repetition, Douglass frames rupture as inextricable from renewal. "The issue before us," he declares in his "Mission of the War" speech, "is a *living* issue. We are not fighting for the dead past, but for the living present and the glorious future" (*FD*, 561; my emphasis). This notion of the "living issue" – a complex state of animation in which the past is simultaneously buried and reborn – offers a kind of theory of remembrance. Whether one is reading the Constitution, or remembering the revolts of '48, or meditating on the South's rebellion, two modes of perception (and recollection) prevails: one that canonizes the dead, and another that sees the dead and the living as co-existent; one that freezes texts and events in their historical moments, and another that views the world as dynamic and unsettled.[191] According to Douglass, it is only by activating this

191 My reading of Douglass's aesthetics of the "living issue" borrows from Saidiya Hartman's account

other aesthetics (which is also the hermeneutics of counter-memory) that freedom can take hold micropolitically.

Less than a decade later, Whitman would make a comparable argument in *Democratic Vistas*. Whitman stressed that because America carries within itself differing velocities, one grounded in freedom and another in feudalism, democracy must buttress itself in people's very souls: it must get "at least as firm and as warm a hold in men's hearts, emotions and belief, as, in their days, feudalism or ecclesiasticism, and inaugurat[e] its own perennial sources, welling from the centre forever" (*PP*, 959). Both before and after his "Mission of the War" speech, Douglass points toward a similar temporal misalignment but construes it in terms of slavery and race. By the early 1850s, Douglass begins to argue in his speeches that the nation is, and always has been, anti-slavery in principle but pro-slavery in practice, and that it thereby contains diverging temporalities. The war's deepest aim for Douglass is therefore not simply legal, political, or militaristic, but *chrono*political: the regeneration that he hopes the war will bring about is not – as some critics have argued – a nationalist redemption of the State (now miraculously cleansed of racial injustice) but a radical readjustment of the speeds and rhythms of national development. "We know that large bodies," Douglass explains, "move slowly – and often seem to move thus – when, could we perceive their actual velocity, we should be astonished at its greatness" (*FD*, 565). The war is an engine in its own right. It is a motor of historical realignment. And what issues from its tragic losses and shattered ideals, according to Douglass's political prognosis, is nothing less than a subtle but massive change in the way that Americans experience and inhabit time.

This metaphor of bodies and speeds offers a powerful vehicle for imagining the nation's movement through history. Yet it cannot fully manage the anxiety that it is supposed to contain. Adjusting one's vision to the world's "large bodies" demands, at the same time, recognizing an inequivalence between bodies large and small. It requires, in other words, an acknowledgment of distance and difference *between* nations and individuals. Douglass's speeches constitute so many attempts to bridge this troubling "between." By seizing time and disrupting the nation's cycles of remembrance, he hoped to realign these uneven velocities in Americans' collective psyche.

His desire to provide a different conjunction – an "and" to unite self and nation – proved especially important when he reinterpreted the United States' founding documents during and after 1848. When he began his career under the wing of William Lloyd Garrison and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass held fast to the group's view of the Constitution as a historically circumscribed, pro-slavery text. Even by 1847, his anti-Constitutionalism was so entrenched that he could proclaim, "I have not, [and] I cannot have, any love for this country, as such, or for its Constitution. I desire to see its overthrow as speedily as possible, and its Constitution shivered in a thousand fragments" ("The Right to Criticize American Institutions," *FD*, 77-8). By the turn of the decade, Douglass nonetheless began to abandon this viewpoint and embrace the nation's founding texts as open-ended instruments of liberation; and, as scholars such as David Blight and James Oakes have shown us, this shift in Douglass's thought proved to be crucial to his later career, not least because it allowed him to embrace revision and self-fashioning as acts that could draw the self into the nation, and vice versa.[192]

Before moving on to Douglass's speeches about the second founding, I would like to draw attention to the connections between his revised legal hermeneutics and his chronopolitical responses to

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of slavery's uncanny temporality. The "time of slavery," she contends, inheres in an antagonism between loss and futurity, and between "redemption" and irreparability": "the 'time of slavery' negates the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or progression; then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead." Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (Fall 2002): 759.

192 See David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War*, 30-5, and James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, 7-8, 15-27.

1848 and 1861-5. I want to linger, in particular, in a moment immediately prior to his decision to side with pro-Constitution reformers such as Lysander Spooner and Gerrit Smith over anti-Constitutional abolitionists such as Garrison and Wendell Phillips. In January of 1851, just a few months prior to his very public break from Garrison, Douglass conceded in a letter to Gerrit Smith that he still had one overarching reservation. The terms of his reluctance are significant because they bear directly on the issue of memory and its aesthetics. His one lingering question, he writes,

> is this: may we avail ourselves of legal rules which enable us to defeat the wicked intentions of our Constitution makers? It is this question which puzzles me more than all others involved in the subject. Is it good morality to take advantage of a legal flaw and put a meaning upon a legal instrument the very opposite of what we have good reason to believe was the intention of the men who framed it? (*FD*, 171)

To what degree, asks Douglass, is the Constitution determined by its letter rather than its spirit? Or, more accurately: as a legal instrument and textual object, is the Constitution *contained within* its historical moment or is it instead capable of transcending it? Does it have the potential to extend far beyond its ostensibly fixed historical (and thus semantic) limits, or does a constitution, by definition as it were, foreclose the possibility of its own future transformation? Voicing anxieties about the tenuousness of language and time, and about the political bonds between the dead and the living, these questions query how history is to be read. Douglass ends up opting for a political aesthetics of the "living issue," as we have seen, but this shift first originates in these anxious, probing questions about political origination itself.

Douglass eventually answered his own reservations by embracing an almost lawless hermeneutics that privileges the imagination and political desire over ritual and teleology. Douglass addressed his misgivings about how to read America's founding documents, in other words, by reconceiving them, in the counter-revolutionary environment after 1848, as *aesthetic* objects. By the early 1850s, he viewed the Constitution and the *Declaration of Independence* not as reified texts but as documents subject to unending improvisation and revision. Recall that in "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (delivered not long after his adoption of a pro-Constitution politics), Douglass lambasted the inheritors of the Revolution for living outside the time inscribed by the Founders and thereby dislocated himself from the accepted patterns of remembrance. When we looked at this speech earlier we passed over its third and final movement, wherein Douglass's argument shifts to a reconsideration of the Constitution's limits and potentials. "In that instrument," he insists, "I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor action of [slavery]," since "interpreted, as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? Or is it in the temple? It is neither" ("What to the Slave?," 127). Because this living text contains a political surplus annexed neither by its moment of birth nor by its official arbiters (i.e., the Supreme Court), it can be comprehended only by and through the masses: "I scout the idea that the question of the constitutionality, or unconstitutionality of slavery is not a question for the people. I hold that every American citizen has a right to form an opinion of the Constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one" (128). Douglass thus retrieves the Constitution, paradoxically, by advocating a political practice foreclosed in the document itself: vernacularization, or the antinomian reading by the people. By construing the Constitution as mutable, even fragile, Douglass turns the language of instrumentality back on itself, extracting the principle of utility from the logic of profit and making it labor for black freedom. Democracy's texts are accordingly revised by the masses' lettered desires, just as the American Revolution gets continually reimagined – and, in a sense, reenacted – by the working-class movements that erupt throughout the Atlantic world.

In his writings and lectures on the first founding of the United States, Douglass forges an improvisational political vision that links into a broader tradition of radical black aesthetics. Extending from the slave songs to jazz and beyond, this tradition makes art out of closure by drawing from established patterns (of beats and phrases, of memories and practices) only to refashion them. It moves forward by moving back, re-creating the world without provision and thereby forcing you, as Fred Moten puts it, "to look ahead with a kind of torque" or "redoubled turn" (63). Douglass's speeches hinge, to a large degree, on this improvisational mode. From his earliest lectures on slavery to his latest addresses on lynching, he persistently constructs a political temporality in which the present is construed as a historical moment that is complete only in its internal brokenness and in its capacity to be remade. Indeed, what unites Douglass's revised hermeneutics of the Constitution with his speeches about the revolts of 1848, the American Revolution, and the U.S. Civil War is not a mere thematic bond but a chronopolitical interdependence: the labor of Douglass's public thought lay in reimagining and reconnecting the temporal links between these divergent moments and events. These speeches, both individually and collectively, promote a non-linear sense of historical movement in which time unfolds not through even procession but by way of caesurae, unsensed rhythms, and incomplete cycles.

Douglass calls this movement "progress." This is a profoundly discontinuous understanding of historical progression and, as such, is structurally dissimilar from both Whitman's and Melville's more linear visions of futural transformation. Whitman may be Derwent to Melville's Ungar, but both authors reproduce certain prevailing Euro-American assumptions about temporal continuity. Regress, like teleology, still proceeds along a relatively even plane, and this sense of time as unidirectional is, as Antonio Negri words it, "[t]he hard core of the idea of time in the Western tradition" (*Time for Revolution*, 30). From Newton to Kant, and even in the phenomenological thought of Heidegger and Bergson, time is considered to be measurable, singular, and ultimately unilinear. Douglass's chief contribution to the tradition of black radical aesthetics is thus his philosophy of history, which construes time as immeasurable, unsettled, and co-extensive with the task of liberation.

One of the most remarkable things about Douglass's sense of history is the extent to which it would seem to be either disallowed by the Atlantic world's prevailing ideologies of time. According to Kant's philosophical anthropology, for instance, Douglass's experience and concept of time could be nothing more than a psychological aberration or impossibility. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, time is defined as a static condition of perception that "possesses only one dimension." Time is formally immutable and therefore, Kant argues, "different times" are "successive" rather than "simultaneous." Time, the *Critique* concludes, is best understood in terms of its non-relation to the material world, because temporal experience "has to do neither with shape nor position, but with the relation of representations in our inner state [. . .] We represent the time-sequences by a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series of one dimension only." Kant anticipates the rhythms and logic of industrial production: his schema, according to which time is vacant and unvarying, describes the soulless rule of the clock. Yet his framing of time as an arrow also inaugurates a long tradition of Euro-American thinking about temporality. This abstracted sense of lived history, generations later, enabled Bergson to erroneously define time as "an empty homogeneous medium."[193] And it is this same experience of temporality as hollow and unilinear that also began to predominate in

193 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kempt Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 74-5, 77; Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Co., 1913), 95. On the transformation of temporal consciousness in the nineteenth century, see Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time*, and Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time*. On heterogeneity and homogeneity in Bergson's phenomenology of time, see Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006), 64-66.

the U.S. after the market revolution, and especially after the Civil War, as time was codified and regulated in the factory, in the bank, in the railroad station, and in the American mind. The modernization of the state and of the economy depended, quite fundamentally, on rendering universal a sense of time as simultaneously sequential and removed from the sphere of human action.

In their suspensions and reconstellations of collective memory, Douglass's speeches offer a radical counter-point to this temporality. Whether they are reflecting on 1848 or on the Constitution, his lectures unfailingly impart a complex vision of time's overlaps and redoublings. They present time, in other words, as neither one-dimensional nor successive but as an uneven process that is subject to unceasing improvisation and renewal. And, we will see, it is this chronopolitical commitment derived from an understanding of time's heterogeneity, which, after Emancipation, leads him to continue returning to the past in order to imagine the future.

DECORATION DAYS:
RECOLLECTION AFTER THE SECOND FOUNDING

The events of the Civil War, Douglass was often fond of saying, obeyed a "stern logic."[194] Tottering between stoic acceptance and chastened awe, refusing any concession to chaos, this locution speaks directly to Douglass's desire to rescue an orderly design from the nation's violence. It was this same impulse to wrest some inner reason from "the Abolition War" (as Douglass preferred to call it) which, as we saw in previous chapters, both inspired and haunted Whitman and Melville. Whitman ceaselessly returned to the war in the postbellum decades, scattering his wartime chants throughout *Leaves of Grass* and enlisting the idea of the war to create an evolutionary theory of democracy's aesthetics. In Melville's case, the struggle between the North and the South was crucial to his taking up of poetry: his first volume of verse, *Battle-Pieces*, reveals the war to be a complex historical synecdoche, one whose "contrasted airs" revive a number of violent premodern revolts; and his following "kraken" of a poem, *Clarel*, resurrects the war in numerous cantos in order to construct a syncretic political theology (mixing geography, history, political economy, and religion) and a complementary, winding, and almost serpentine poetics (*BP*, 3).

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194 This phrase appears again and again in his Civil War writings. In one of his first speeches after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, he contended that emancipation is the single overarching purpose of the war, and that even if the "American people and the Government at Washington may refuse to recognize it for a time, the 'inexorable logic of events' will force it upon them in the end." "Nemesis," published in *Douglass Monthly*, May 1861, reprinted in *FD*, 451. In the article that immediately follows this piece in the *Douglass Monthly*, he again invokes this phrase in order to explain why slavery is a "doomed institution," writing that "[w]hoever will calmly and impartially contemplate the present aspect of the slavery question, cannot fail to read in the stern logic of passing events, the resolute determination on the part of the South to subjugate every other section of the country, and bring it wholly within the sphere of its unlimited control" ("Past and Present," *FD*, 451). This was, to be sure, a deeply compensatory gesture, but to Douglass's credit he seems to have also occasionally recognized it as such. As he wrote in August of 1861, after spending several months recruiting black soldiers only to discover that they were receiving lower pay and would likely never see battle: "Looking at [. . .] the fact that the government consents only that Negroes shall smell powder in the character of books and body servants in the army, my anti-slavery confidence is blown to the winds. I wait and work relying more upon the stern logic of events than upon any disposition of the Federal army towards slavery" ("Letter to Rev. Samuel J. May," *FD*, 470).

Like Whitman and Melville, Douglass cannot let go of the war. His postbellum lectures and essays are utterly replete with the conflict's events, personages, hopes, and disappointments. The depth of his lasting attachment is in this sense decidedly familiar, but the terms of his recollections are quite distinct. Unlike most Northerners, Douglass experienced the Civil War – and Emancipation in particular (which he considered its natural issue and animating telos) – as nothing less than a second Revolution, a revisionary repetition of the original founding. 1776, he came to believe, was the sublime precondition for 1861-5. Manifesting as a generative rip in time's fabric which had already, paradoxically, been anticipated and prepared for, the Civil War promised to concretize Douglass's counter-commemorative politics. "It is one of the strangest and most humiliating triumphs of human selfishness and prejudice over human reason," he remarked near the war's outset, amending the language of the founders through the Union's abolitionist struggle, "that it leads men to look upon emancipation as an experiment, instead of being, as it is, the natural order of human relations. Slavery, and not Freedom, is the experiment" ("The Future of the Negro People of the Slave States," *FD*, 483). According to Douglass, this second founding offers to restore freedom to its natural priority and correct for the nation's wayward velocities. It is a "radical revolution in all the modes of thought" that is also a reiteration, forcing history to return in order to salvage it (*FD*, 522).

This rupture that is also a repetition is the subject of these concluding pages. Douglass's political reflections, I have been arguing, are shaped through his aesthetics of historical time. The Civil War did nothing less than reshape this connection between the political and the temporal in Douglass's writing. His postbellum lectures cluster along a different axis: they are tied together through a common refusal to cede the war's legacies to the South and its sympathizers. As Americans' political memory atrophied in the 1870s and 80s – a psychic collapse that coincided with the return of the Democrats and the systematic undoing of black civil rights – Douglass remade his politico-literary project into a counter-memory of the war, one oriented towards irruptive remembrance precisely in the midst of this massive forgetting. The Union's struggle, his postwar orations proclaim again and again, must not be remembered as anything other than a re-founding meant to recover the promise of universal emancipation.

Almost immediately after peace was sealed at Appomattox, emancipatory narratives of the war began to be displaced. Conservative Republicans and Democrats ("the party of forgetfulness," as Douglass termed them) labored for a political reconciliation that would absolve the Confederacy of its crimes, and they finally succeeded in 1876 when the South recaptured political power in the national elections through backdoor dealings.[195] This reunification was fueled by an ideology of time that reframed the struggle as a deracialized, anomalous, and short-lived conflict within a single white family – the very opposite of a "radical revolution in all the modes of thought." Buttressing Lost Cause ideas in the South and reconciliationist memory in the North, this capacious ideology, over time, supplanted the other variants of Civil War remembrance, and it rendered psychically inhabitable the resurgence of white political supremacy and the large-scale modernization of the nation's economy. Americans came to remember the war very much in the manner of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who, in his 1884 and 1895 Memorial Day speeches, characterized it not as a political contest but as an existential endeavor. "I do not know what is true," he explained, "But in the midst of doubt, in the collapse of creeds, there is one thing I do not doubt, that is that the faith is true [. . .] which sends a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use." Pivoting from this meditation on the priority of duty over belief, Holmes concluded that the "generation that carried out the war has been set apart by its experience. Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing." In

195 Douglass, "New Names But Old Faces," *New National Era*, December 15, 1870.

Holmes's reconstruction, the armed struggle inaugurated by John Brown's zealous insurgency; the clash that led to the emancipation – however partial and incomplete – of an entire people; the war that mobilized the industrial machinery of the North, and spawned massive changes in the nation's political economy; the half-decade-long contest that resulted in more per capita American deaths than all the wars from the Revolution to World War II combined; the war that because of its unprecedented scale of devastation, restructured how Americans experienced death and mourning; the bloody struggle that Whitman deemed "the [very] Verteber of Poetry and Art [. . .] for all future America" – is figured as a strangely amoral and apolitical affair. It is not a battle over divergent causes or beliefs, but a tragic quarrel between two equal – and, more importantly, equally justified – forces.[196] And Holmes was far from alone: in the post-Reconstruction period, writers, politicians, and historians all offered variations of this same narrative about martial heroism and predestined unity, which dislodged the story of black freedom from the memory of the United States' most significant conflict. Whitman captured this revisionary spirit at its very outset in his poem "Reconciliation" (1867):

> Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
> Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in
> time be utterly lost;
> That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly
> softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:
> [. . .]
> For my enemy is dead – a man divine as myself is dead;
> I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin – I
> draw near;
> I bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face
> in the coffin.
> (*LG*, II: 555)

In this brief, pacific lyric, Whitman's own ameliorative persona – at once spectacularly singular and overwhelmingly representative – achieves a kind of symbolic reconciliation by joining the scores of "enemy [. . .] dead," lip-locked, in "the coffin." Proceeding not from the causes of the war but from the "beautiful" reunion that results from it, Whitman's poem heralds the erasure of the conflict through the dual forces of time and death, in effect re-presenting the contest not as a struggle over slavery but as an almost "divine," existential human tragedy.

Douglass's postwar speeches are firmly aligned against such patterns of remembrance. Speaking at Arlington National Cemetery in 1871, in a speech titled "The Unknown Loyal Dead," he tackled this revisionary ideology head on. "We are sometimes asked in the name of patriotism," he remarked, "to forget the merits of this fearful struggle, and to remember with equal admiration those who struck at the nation's life and those who struck to save it, those who fought for slavery and those who fought for liberty and justice." But this obliged forgetting carries a violence of its own:

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196 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *The Occasional Speeches of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, ed. Mark De Wolfe Howe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), 4-5, 76; Whitman, *Memoranda*, 4. On the war's massive devastation and the resulting changes in American practices of mourning, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008). On Holmes's response to the war, also see George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press), 218-21; Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War*, 161-2; and Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 3-4, 23-48, 58-69.

> I am no minister of malice. I would not strike the fallen. I would not repel the repentant; but may my 'right hand forget her cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,' if I forget the difference between the parties to that terrible, protracted, and bloody conflict. If we ought to forget a war which has filled our land with widows and orphans; which has made stumps of men [. . .] which has [. . .] swept uncounted thousands of men into bloody graves and planted agony at a million hearthstones – I say, if this war is to be forgotten, I ask, in the name of all things sacred, what shall men remember? (*FD*, 609-10)

Douglass's lament, of course, is not directed toward forgetfulness as such: he is not warning against the possibility of the war's utter vanishing from the nation's memory. Rather, he is warning Americans against the wrong *kind* of memory, since to recall the struggle as anything other than a just strike for emancipation is, in effect, to forget it altogether. The absent bodies and missing limbs of the Union's soldiers, Douglass suggests, continue to signify in their absence, and in the interest of black freedom.

Douglass defended this partisanship of memory in a speech delivered exactly seven years later. Speaking in New York's Union Square not long after the electoral and legal collapse of Reconstruction, in a speech provocatively titled “There was a Right Side in the Late War,” he refused to separate past from present, and he tied the war's remembrance to the current political conjuncture:

> Brave and noble spirits! Living and dead! May your memory never perish! [. . .] If the great work you undertook to accomplish is still incomplete; if a lawless and revolutionary spirit is still abroad in the country; if the principles for which you bravely fought are in any way compromised or threatened; if the Constitution and the laws are in any measure dishonored and disregarded; [. . .] if the elective franchise has been overborne by intimidation and fraud; if the Southern States, under the idea of local self-government, are endeavoring to paralyze the arm and shrivel the body of the National Government [. . .], the fault is not yours. You, at least, were faithful and did your whole duty. (*FD*, 628-9)

America's second founding, Douglass stresses, is not yet complete because the “lawless and revolutionary spirit” of the Confederacy still thrives. These postbellum rebels have violated the memory of the Union's “living and dead” and compromised the fundamental “principles” of the war's revolution. And the North has allowed this to happen. This story that Douglass is telling by way of the past is essentially the story of white supremacy's return. When he delivered this speech in 1878, the systematization of racial terror throughout the South – secured by disenfranchisement, economic re-enslavement, and white militia groups which reinforced legal oppression through illegal violence – was largely accomplished. W.E.B. DuBois, in his classic study of this period, described this movement as a “counter-revolution” which began with brute force and was “gradually transmuted into economic pressure,” especially in the form of slavery-like tenant laws and the convict lease system (673). The elections of 1876 restored the Democratic Party to power and rulings by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Cruikshank* (1875) and *United States v. Reese* (1876) began the long process of excluding African Americans from the guaranteed protections of the Fourteenth Amendment. “The only obligation resting upon the United States,” the court declared in *Cruikshank*, defining the state's power in exclusively negative terms, “is to see that the states do not [outright] deny the right [to vote]. This the amendment guarantees, but no more. The power of the national government is limited to the

enforcement of the rights guaranteed."[197] Yet even this circumscribed "enforcement" was not carried out. The South's counter-revolution led to the imposition of Jim Crow and the Black Codes, those legal terrors which Douglass likened to "the grating hinges of a slave prison": "They environ the helpless Negro like the devilfish of Victor Hugo, and draw the blood from every pore. He may writhe and twist, and strain every muscle, but he is held and firmly bound in a strong, remorseless and deadly grasp" (*FD*, 718). When Douglass invokes the "brave and noble spirits" of the Union army, and when he declares in both the title and text of his speech that "there was a *right* side in the war," he is therefore making a historical claim that bears as much on the present as it does on the past. Linking the emancipatory promise of the war to the repressive aftermath of the post-Reconstruction era, he suggests that the "deadly grasp" of the postbellum Confederacy is bound up with, and even dependent upon, the ways in which people remember the war's causes and consequences.

Years later, Douglass averred that "the American people [. . .] will forget the Negro's service in the late war" and they "will forget the enmity of the old slaveholding class to the government. They will forget their solemn obligations [. . .] to the Negro, and press to their bosoms the white enemies of the nation" (*FD*, 727). By the time that he delivered his "Right Side" speech, however, this mass amnesia had already taken hold, and one of the principal results was a widespread depoliticization of the war's liberationist holidays. Speeches such as "The Unknown Loyal Dead" and "There was a Right Side in the Late War" were, as I previously mentioned, Decoration Day speeches – that is, orations given on the final Monday of May, when former slaves and their kin would lay flowers on the graves of slain Union soldiers. Beginning in the late-1860s and early-1870s, this holiday was transformed into the commemorative event we all know today, Memorial Day, which replaced partisan remembrance with a universal celebration of all fallen soldiers. Richard Henry Stoddard's poem "Decoration Day," written on the cusp of this transition and published in *Harper's Weekly*, nicely encapsulates what was lost in this re-dedication:

> Such flowers as will to-morrow,
> Be scattered where they lie,
> The blue and gray together,
> Beneath the same sweet sky;
>
> No stain upon their manhood,
> No memory of the Past,
> Except the common valor
> That made us One at last.[198]

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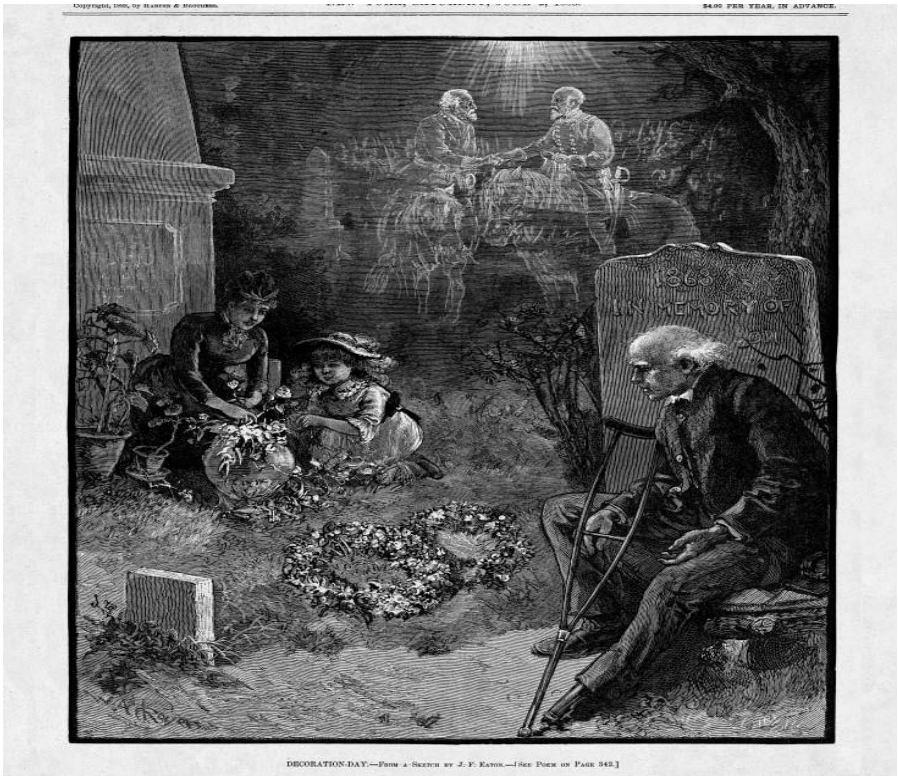
197 *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92, U.S. 542. My account of the South's counter-revolution is informed by discussions in Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 2002), 139-158; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 587-601; DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 580-636, 670-710; and David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*.

198 Richard Henry Stoddard, "Decoration Day," *Harper's Weekly*, 2 June 1883, 342. Stoddard's poetic reconstruction of the war is redolent of a Decoration Day poem that Whitman penned five years later:

> While not the past forgetting,
> To-day, at least, contention sunk entire – peace, brotherhood uprisen;
> For sign reciprocal our Northern, Southern hands,
> Lay on the graves of all dead soldiers, North or South,

These two stanzas conclude Stoddard's ode by offering a retrospective fantasy of union, a vision of the Civil War as a struggle that aimed from its very inception at nothing other than national harmony. The people's multitude of flowers, unlike Whitman's lilacs, are laid before *all* American soldiers, "the blue and gray together." And the occasion for this holiday, the war itself, is presented as an affair without a cause, an accidental conflict that had nothing to do with slavery but everything to do with "common valor," duty, and union, a "stainless" tragedy that rendered "us" – as was always fated – "One at last." This account of the war is visually rearticulated in J.F. Eaton's "Decoration Day" sketch, which supplemented Stoddard's lines in the same issue of *Harper's Weekly*:



("Decoration Day" by J.F. Eaton, *Harper's Weekly*, 2 June 1883)

In Eaton's sketch, an old veteran with an amputated leg meditates next to a flower-covered grave, while two women nearby, probably members of his family, craft wreaths for the fallen soldiers of both armies. The name, or form, of Decoration Day remains, but its content is absent: this is an exclusively white commemoration, a ritual of remembrance conducted entirely within the bounds of a cohesive, harmonious family. The picture itself, like the dead soldiers in Stoddard's poem, seems to have "no memory of the Past" as a Union and Confederate general in the background shake hands, reunited under an illuminating light. In this revisionary sketch, there is no room for slavery – not in the space of the image, and not in the memories of the survivors. The year of jubilee manifests only as a lifeless epitaph inscribed behind the veteran's aged head: "1863: IN MEMORIAM." This is the very pattern of Civil War remembrance – false, forgetful, and consonant with racial oppression – that Douglass refutes time and again in his speeches about Decoration Day. Clustering together across different decades but

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(Nor for the past alone – for meanings to the future,)
Wreathes of roses and branches of palm.
(*LG*, III: 722)

joined through their shared chronopolitical commitments, these lectures attempt to dispel the whitewashed dream of reconciliation and thereby rescue emancipation from the grave. They thus enact so many acts of "time-seizure" – we might say, following Michael Hanchard – by wresting from the nation's broken histories the memory of a freedom drive that has either been renounced, stolen, or usurped.[199]

The aesthetics of time evinced in these Decoration Day speeches distinguish Douglass's postbellum thought from that of many of his white, Northern contemporaries. It was during this same period that pragmatism emerged, partly as a response – as Louis Menand has demonstrated – to the chaos of the Civil War. For Northerners such as William and Henry James, John Dewey, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and Charles S. Pierce, the war manifested not – as it did for Douglass and for political compatriots like Wendell Phillips – as a second founding that redoubled the need for a militant politics of liberation, but, on the contrary, as a tragedy that revealed the need to renounce militancy itself. Pragmatism consequently grounded itself in a deep epistemological agnosticism, a loss of "belief in beliefs" as Menand words it (4). Reflecting on this link between the war's destabilization and pragmatism's birth, Maurice Lee has argued that Douglass's postbellum writings can be read as part of this pragmatist intellectual tradition. Lee contends that Douglass, whose recruitment efforts were never fully appreciated and whose calls for liberationist recollection went largely unheeded, experienced a "growing disenchantment" after the war, became "less committed to arguing about – and from – absolutes," and turned "instead to ways of thinking that anticipate a type of [philosophical] pragmatism."[200] While Lee's account admirably challenges the critical narrative of decline, Douglass's own Decoration Day speeches belie such an interpretation of his postwar thought. His fiercely partisan recollections of the war's origins, events, and meanings challenge pragmatism's foundational claims about belief and certainty. In his 1878 Decoration Day address, he concedes, "I admit that the South believed it was right," but then insists that "the nature of things is not changed by belief. The Inquisition was not less a crime against humanity because it was believed right by the Holy Fathers." Douglass's point bears not on the efficacy of beliefs, but on their correctness: beliefs, he insists, are neither equal nor exchangeable (as the pragmatists assume), but differently oriented toward the actual "nature of things." "There was a right side and a wrong side in the late war," he adds, "which no sentiment" – or belief – "ought to cause us to forget, and while to-day we should have malice toward none, [. . .] it is no part of our duty to confound right with wrong. The war will not consent to be viewed as a physical contest. It is not for this that the nation is in solemn procession about the graves of its patriot sons to-day [. . .] It was a war of ideas, a battle of principles and ideas which united one section and divided the other: a war between the old and new, slavery and freedom, barbarism and civilization" (*FD*, 631). Positing that belief, like memory, is a form of action that can be either consonant with freedom or complicit with repression, Douglass offers something like an *anti*-pragmatist chronopolitics, a sense of history in which epistemological certainty is tied to the possibility of present and future political change.

For Douglass, the difference between North and South was not only regional but also, and profoundly, temporal: they contained the "old and [the] new," respectively, the antiquated and the emergent. This chronopolitical distinction separates Douglass as much from Melville as it does from the pragmatists. *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* tend to undermine precisely this kind of historical claim;

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199 "Time-seizure," or "time appropriation," Hanchard argues, is a constitutive feature of Afro-modernist politics, and it involves an act, at once individual and collective, designed to reappropriate missing or stolen time. See his essay, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 11.1 (1999): 245-268 (the quotes are from 256).

200 Maurice S. Lee, "Melville, Douglass, the Civil War, Pragmatism," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 396-415 (the quotes are from 404).

their formal structures, references, and sense of history figure the war as part of a long series of destructive cycles that "burst from the waste of Time" and extend from ancient Rome and medieval France to the disunited states ("Misgivings," *BP*, 13). When civil strife returns again in several of *Clarel*'s most somber, anti-Centennialist cantos, distinctions between "the old and new, slavery and freedom, barbarism and civilization" tend to dissipate rather than crystallize. In Melville's massive epic, the repressions of the past and the dreams of the future fold into one another and evince history's negative eschatology:

> [Now] what is stable? Find one boon
> That is not lackey to the moon
> Of fate. The flood weaves out – the ebb
> Weaves back; the incessant shuttle shifts
> And flies, and wears and tears the web.
> (*Clarel*, 2.4.93-97)

Douglass's insistence in his Decoration Day lectures on the Union cause's absolute priority over, and justified shaping of, the "web" of national memory is far closer to Whitman's extravagant claims about in the war in *Specimen Days*, *Democratic Vistas*, and "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood." Whitman's poetics of the modern originate as a response to the war, which he considered an unprecedented historical transition (i.e., a decisive overturning of feudalism). Like Whitman, Douglass grasps the war as a generative fracturing of time, but he abjures the reconciliationist impulse that structures much of Whitman's postbellum writing. At the end of his 1878 speech on Decoration Day, for instance, Douglass ties his recollections about "the Abolition War" to a strident critique of post-Reconstruction white supremacy:

> Man is said to be an animal looking before and after. It is his distinction to improve the future by a wise consideration of the past. In looking back to this tremendous conflict, aftercoming generations will find much at which to marvel. They will marvel that men to whom was committed the custody of the Government, sworn to protect and defend the Constitution and the Union of the States, did not crush this rebellion in its egg; that they permitted treason to grow up under their very noses [. . .] with approval, aid, and comfort – vainly thinking thus to conciliate the rebels [. . .] They will marvel still more that, after the rebellion was suppressed, and treason put down by the loss of nearly a half a million of men, and after putting on the nation's neck a debt heavier than a mountain of gold, the Government has so soon been virtually captured by the party which sought its destruction. (*FD*, 632)

In these concluding remarks, Douglass shuttles between the war's memory and the United States' current regression, chastising those who have capitulated to the South in past and present alike. However, this is not simply a matter of Douglass "using" the past, so to speak, or of simply integrating it into the present, because he offers a view of democracy that shoots backward and forward at once. Douglass's remembrances are also projections and interjections, and this instance is no different: his indictment of the "the old master class of the South" and their allies in the North, who have allowed "the Government" to be "virtually captured by the party which sought its destruction," refigures this enemy as a *living* presence, a political nemesis whose actions and beliefs are at once historical and still approaching – and, therefore, dangerous on multiple temporal planes.

To travel from the United States' second Revolution to the present and then back again, Douglass constructs a recursive aesthetics of time. At the outset of "There Was a Right Side in the Late

War," he connects the holiday's political meanings to the problem of its translatability: "The eloquence of the most gifted orator of our country would fail to fitly and fully illustrate the heroic deeds and virtues of the brave men who volunteered, fought, and fell in the cause of the Union and freedom." On its own, reasoned discourse, it would seem, cannot grasp the significance of Decoration Day or the grand struggle of which it is a part. Another language is needed, one attuned to sound and spirit alike and able to register the acoustics of a freedom drive: "We need something broader, more striking and impressive than speech, to express the thoughts and feelings proper to these memorial occasions. We need [. . .] drums, fifes, and bugles; signs, sounds, and symbols; the clang of church-going bells; the heaven-shaking thunder of cannon; the steady and solemn tramp of armed men; [. . .] the shouts of a great nation rejoicing in its salvation." This ideal language would fuse the sensuous to the rational and thereby allow people to reinhabit history anew:

> such [a] high discourse [. . .] can be heard and seen by all. It speaks alike to the understanding and the heart. It carries us dreamily back to that dark and terrible hour of supreme peril [. . .] It tells us of a time of trial and danger, when the boldest held their breath and the hearts of strong men failed them through fear; when the very earth seemed to crumble beneath our feet; when [. . .] this grand experiment of self-government, not yet 100 years old, torn and rent by angry passions, had fallen asunder at the center. (*FD*, 627-8).

What Douglass develops in this brief but provocative passage is something like an aesthetic theory of counter-memory, a model of temporal sensation that complements his political reconstructions of the war and its meanings for the post-Reconstruction U.S. If official memory is realized through oratory and reasoned discourse, counter-memory must be more subtle, sensuous, and subterranean; it must connect "understanding and the heart" by making people re-perceive the familiar as strange. Douglass's final, Melvillean figure of disunion, in which "the very earth seemed to crumble beneath our feet," is therefore not simply about recollection but about *reenactment*: it suggests that comprehending and feeling history's unevenness demands a recollection that reorders the senses and the understanding.

Douglass's Decoration Day lectures try to record liberty's almost inaudible notes, those sounds that are increasingly broken and fleeting after the war and yet invariably replete with potential. His counter-commemorative aesthetics, however, do not merely disrupt the formative mythologies of the postwar United States; they also enable his political vision to move *outside* the nation. His 1871 Decoration Day address, "The Unknown Loyal Dead," was delivered in May of that year, precisely when – as we saw in chapter four – the Communards of Paris were engaged in the bloodiest period of their struggle. Like Melville, Douglass turns to France's Civil War in order to discern a logic in history, and ends up linking the American Confederates to the rebellious workers of France. "We must never forget that victory to the rebellion," he declares, "meant death to the republic [. . .] If to-day we have a country not boiling in an agony of blood, like France, if now we have a united country, no longer cursed by the hell-black system of human bondage, if the American name is no longer a by-word and a hissing to a mocking earth [. . .] and our country has before it a long and glorious career [. . .] we are indebted to the unselfish devotion of the noble army who rest in these honored graves all around us" (*FD*, 610). Yoking 1871 to 1861 and France to America, Douglass's analogy characterizes the Union's fallen soldiers as martyred guardians of a contested ideal, as "noble spirits" who fought in the service of a "radical revolution" that has been suppressed.

This historical conceit brings us back to some of our earlier examinations of Whitman and Melville. At this same moment, in the immediate aftermath of the French insurrection, Melville was drawing from the workers' uprising in order to disentangle history's patterns of violent revolt. When Douglass delivered his address on the "Loyal Dead," Melville was in the first stages of *Clarel*'s

composition, conjuring up France's "Transcended Rebel Angels" in order to illustrate time's destructive cycles and connect the contemporary Atlantic world to its ancient analogues in the Middle East (4.21.135). Douglass's invocation of Paris's turmoil, delivered when the barricade fighting was at its most intense, is far less interested in divulging cycles of historical regress than in rescuing and reactivating a largely forgotten, liberationist ideal. It is much closer in its chronopolitics to Whitman's ruminations in "O Star of France":

> O Star of France!
> The brightness of thy fame, and strength, and joy,
> Like some proud ship that led the fleet so long,
> Beseems to-day a wreck, driven by the gale – a mastless hulk.
> [. . .]
>
> O star! O ship of France, beat back and baffled long!
> Bear up, O smitten orb! O ship, continue on!
>
> Lo! as the ship of all the Earth itself,
> Product of deathly fire and turbulent chaos,
> Forth from its spasms of fury and its poisons,
> Issuing at last in perfect power and beauty,
> Onward beneath the sun, following its course,
> So thee, O ship of France!
>
> Finished the days, the clouds dispell'd,
> The travail o'er, the long-sought extrication,
> When lo! reborn, high o'er the European world,
> (In gladness, answering thence, as face afar to face, reflecting ours, Columbia),
> Again thy star, O France – fair, lustrous star,
> In heavenly peace, clearer, more bright than ever,
> Shall rise immortal.
> (*LG*, III: 646-7)

Published just one month after Douglass's speech on "The Unknown Loyal Dead," Whitman's poem depicts the French Civil War as a repetition of its American forbear. Extracting "beauty" from "fire" in consort with history's evolutionary law, the Commune occasions for France a rebirth-through-trauma just as the "Union war" had for the United States. Douglass seems to echo the poem's first four lines by interpreting France's bloodshed as either a sad deviation or an anarchic event (marked by "turbulent chaos"). Nonetheless, the most cogent meaning of France's conflict in Douglass's speech is as a figure for the slaveholders' *failure*: the fact that the country is not currently "boiling in an agony of blood" redoubles the importance of Decoration Day as a moment of Unionist remembrance, as a day to reclaim interracial democracy and universal emancipation through the past's return. Douglass seems to repeat in his prose the second movement in Whitman's ode, shifting from tragedy to exaltation and from a consideration of historical regress to a celebration of impending regeneration, much as he had done decades before after the revolts of 1848. But now in the wake of the second founding, this unfolding renewal takes a different form, that of a "debt" which Americans owe to "this noble army who rest in [. . .] honored graves all around us." And it can be repaid only through action in the present, action that remembers as it enacts and completes a promise that was never fulfilled. The souls of these slain soldiers, he suggests, "[s]hall rise immortal," "more bright than ever," only if the

oppression that reigns in America is cast out, never to return; and until this occurs, Americans' debt will accumulate indefinitely and continue to obscure the nation's "lustrous star."

Whether their subject is an insurrection in Paris or a mass amnesia that haunts the postbellum U.S., these Decoration Day speeches are striking evidence of the extent to which the Civil War shaped Douglass's sense of time, politics, and aesthetics long after the physical conflict had ceased. While critics have chided Douglass for this abiding attachment, leading some to read his postbellum career in terms of a disavowal of the present or a gradual reconciliation with the American status quo, such interpretations disregard the political and aesthetic dynamism of Douglass's later orations about the war.[201] His Decoration Day addresses in particular are fiercely engaged with the politics of racial oppression in the Gilded Age *precisely through* their willful refusals to cede the past to the present. Indeed, Douglass's evocations of the Union dead – who, like the fallen boy-soldiers of *Drum-Taps*, are at once deceased and animate, maintaining an almost corporeal presence in the survivor's memory – insist on an eternal return of the ostensibly completed, a bridging between past and present that refuses the "homogeneous, empty time" of the state and its racial ideologies. Douglass grasped the centrality of chronopolitics to national politics. He returned to the war over and over again – speaking on the same emancipationist holidays, invoking the conflict's memory in the wake of Reconstruction's collapse, in the aftermath of the 1883 demolition of black civil rights, and, finally, in response to the rise of lynching at the turn of the century – not out of some dislocated sense of temporal belonging but because of his deep understanding of history's layered political meanings and potentials.

My argument, then, is not simply that historical time plays a crucial role in the political content of Douglass's speeches but that this temporality is *structurally* important to these orations' very form. What we discover in the speech-clusters that spring from the Fourth of July, the revolts of 1848, the Civil War, and Decoration Day is that Douglass's acts of public thought are constructed as conjoined expressions, or grouped articulations, that persistently span out, draw back, and reconnect. Their closest structural analogues are those protean, unstable verses in *Leaves of Grass* – clustering and reclustering along a variety of chronopolitical axes over the course of decades – which we encountered in chapters one and two. In their complex reiterations and overlappings, Douglass's meditations on the war – which shoot back to 1848, 1776, and 1789, while bringing these still uncompleted events far into the future – constitute oratorical variants of *Drum-Taps*, *Songs of Insurrection*, and *Two Rivulets*, voiced in a subaltern key.

The temporal destabilization of the Civil War influenced each of these authors' art and politics. It occasioned for Whitman a novel principle for *Leaves*' reorganization, and for Melville a turn towards an untimely and elliptical poetics. This upheaval was no less significant in the case of Frederick

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201 Peter Walker, for instance, contends that the war brought Douglass "into the family of American citizens" for the first time by providing him with a unitary social identity. According to Fionnghuala Sweeney, Douglass after the war embraced the "logic of historical positivism" and "project[ed . . .] a normative U.S. world-view onto other spaces" (183). Benjamin Quarles castigates the postwar Douglass for his "advocacy [of] the gospel of wealth," while James Oakes characterizes him as a mere political operative. "Scrounge through the heap of Douglass's postwar writings," Oakes laments, "and it is possible to find evidence which, carefully arranged, suggests an aging lion unable to find either the cause or the words to reanimate his roar [. . .] Before the war he was a radical first, increasingly committed to politics but always in the service of reform. After the war he was a Republican, still committed to equal justice but always by means of party politics." Walker, *Moral Choices: Memory, Desire, and Imagination in Nineteenth-Century American Letters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), 225; Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World*, 179, 183; Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1948); Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, 279, 281.

Douglass. His aim was to construct a positive liberationist project out of this destabilization. Arced around a revolution more ideal than material, Douglass's speeches attempt to remember – or, more correctly, *re*-remember – against the grain of prevailing recollections, and this is the reason behind their strange form: endeavoring to touch that most elusive locus of transformation, the "inner and spontaneous consciousness," they fuse time to the political and conjoin, in a stunning and singular manner, the ideal of freedom to the machinations of social memory.

The varied connections between these speech-clusters also suggest that contrary to the reigning narrative of decline, Douglass political and historical insights do not gradually wither but *intensify* at particular moments: after 1848, during the Civil War, and during the crises of Reconstruction. And they are brought into relation through an aesthetics of time that alternatively expands, contracts, and refocuses. This flexible aesthetics, however, does not reside solely in the reasoned discourse of Douglass's words. Endeavoring to promote "something broader, more striking and impressive than speech," it also erupts from the outside, materializing frequently in the form of poetry.

It is this other side of Douglass's aesthetics – cultivated through the "high[er] discourse" of literary verse – that is the subject of my final, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Douglass the Poet

Large bodies move slowly. But what does the moving?

Douglass hoped that it was oratory. By practically all accounts, his public performances were masterful. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Douglass's friend and political associate, captured the unusual power of his speeches when she wrote: "He spoke with burning eloquence, with wit, satire, and indignation [. . .] Around him sat the great antislave orators of the day, earnestly watching the effect of his eloquence on that immense audience, that laughed and wept by turns, completely carried away by [. . . his] wondrous gifts. All the other speakers seemed tame after Frederick Douglass. He stood there like an African prince, majestic in his wrath." One reporter, after hearing Douglass speak at an anti-slavery meeting before the war, described the performance as akin to a geological event: "It was the volcanic outbreak of human nature, long pent up in slavery at last bursting [from] its imprisonment. It was a storm of insurrection . . . [that] reminded me of Toussaint among the plantations of Haiti." Douglass was nonetheless painfully aware that oratory alone could not surpass "the rifled cannons of reason."[202] Because the "gifts" of reason, even if coupled with wit and pathos, were insufficient, and because the problem of political antagonism was inextricable from issues of aesthetics, something more explosive and boundless than logical argument was required. If Americans' collective memories and political desires were to be reordered, their minds needed to be freed from their debilitating routines of perception – and Douglass needed a weapon, or technique, to make this happen.

For this purpose, he turned persistently and strategically throughout his career to poetry. His autobiographies and lectures are full of verses from Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Milton, William Shakespeare, John Greenleaf Whittier, William Cowper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Thomas Hood, and Robert Burns, among others. Douglass, who was first introduced to verse through the medium of the slave song, included a poetry section in both *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*; frequently entertained guests at his house by reading poetry out loud; and sometimes wrote his own poems in response to political events. He was, in short, a rigorous critic and practitioner of poetry throughout his life. And this attachment to verse flowed directly from the latter's peculiar politico-aesthetic qualities: its fusion of tradition and improvisation; its relative autonomy; and, perhaps most of all, its capacity to explode the world's fixed state and create new ways of sensing and remembering.

It was not accidental that when Lincoln freed the slaves in the nation's capitol, Douglass responded by declaring, "This is scarcely a day for prose. It is [instead] a day for poetry and song" (*FD*, 523). He was at once fascinated and influenced by this distinction between poetry and prose. Poetry, indeed, was central to his writing, politics, and sense of career, yet only a few critics have paid close attention to this aspect of his life and thought. John Stauffer argues that Douglass's poetic invocations, which begin to proliferate increasingly in the early 1850s, index the degree to which Douglass integrates white literary discourse into his process of self-fashioning. Paul Gilmore links Douglass's use of verse to his attempt to find a Burkean sublime that would solidify anti-slavery sentimentalism. And William Gleason, in the most rigorous examination of Douglass's poetics to date, points out that this critical neglect has not only resulted in a failure to account for important original productions, such as Douglass's 1856 poem "The Tyrant's Jubilee!," but also short-circuited analyses of

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202 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, letter in *In Memoriam: Frederick Douglass*, ed. Helen Douglass (Philadelphia: J.C. Yorston & Co., 1897), 44; *Concord Herald of Freedom*, quoted in Philip Foner, "Introduction" to *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, I: 58.

how Douglass's "poetics of insurrection" relates to the verse written by Whittier, Melville, and Byron. Douglass's use of poetry, as Gleason points out, is the "least well known [. . .] [o]f all his rhetorical modes."[203] This chapter attempts to correct this shortcoming – to fill in some of the gap, as it were – by analyzing why Douglass quotes verse and how it is related to his politics of memory. In the previous chapter, we saw how the counter-commemorative impulse in his speeches reshapes the political afterlives of the American Revolution and the Civil War. My subject here is the kinship between Douglass the reformer and Douglass the poet.

In the following pages, I will argue that Douglass's experiments with politics in his orations are ineluctably bound up with, and even structurally dependent upon, his experiments with verse. I use the verb "experiment" because Douglass almost never deploys poetry solely in order to buttress the underlying argument of his speeches. His interactions with verse are decidedly more complex. Poetry most often *intervenes* in his lectures and autobiographies – descending below and rising up beyond the impassioned reason of his words – in order to create an aesthetic experience in which history itself is momentarily arrested. Because verse breaks apart time's determinations and compels us to "feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know," it is, for Douglass, the most adequate medium for psychic transformation. Poets, he once claimed, are properly appreciated only when one understands that like "prophets and reformers" they are essentially "picture makers – and this ability is the secret of their power and of their achievements. They see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction."[204] Striving to resolve the world's "contradictions," poetry emerges in Douglass's writing as the literary vehicle through which historical memory is most radically re-formed and transnational spaces of experience are most fully opened up.

For Douglass, we will see, poetry is not merely a supplemental or secondary rhetorical register but an important experiential medium in its own right. He was not an orator and autobiographer who occasionally tinkered with verse, but a political poet who mixed and stretched the medium of his art. This is part of the reason why, when poetry surfaces in his speeches, it is always altered: in his wayward quotations we discover rearranged words, phrases wrested from their original sentences, and transposed commas and periods. In Douglass's poetic quotations, the act of reappropriation only *begins* with the verse's seizure from its original context. Born from a series of miscegenative encounters, Douglass's verse is at once white and black, borrowed and original. If, as the great jazz musician Cecil Taylor once remarked, improvisation consists in the formation of an "unknown totality" out of "the conscious manipulation of known material," we must grasp the poems in Douglass's works as, in a sense, his own.[205] Usurped from their origins and born anew in their revision, these are improvised verses, fashioned out of the slaveholding world's "known material[s]."

This concluding chapter is about these novel poetic creations. Moving from his entanglements with Shelley, Byron, and Cowper to his deployments of his own original verse, I will argue that politics in Douglass's writing is generated through and realized by nothing less than an aesthetics of time, an impulse to sense, perceive, and desire not only against but *outside* of slavery's epistemology. The

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203 Stauffer, "Frederick Douglass and the Aesthetics of Freedom"; Gilmore, "Aesthetic Power: Electric Words and the Example of Frederick Douglass," 298; and Gleason, "Volcanoes and Meteors: Douglass, Melville, and the Poetics of Insurrection," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 110-133 (the quote about Douglass's "rhetorical modes" comes from 112).

204 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Defence of Poetry" (1840) in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 505; Frederick Douglass, "Pictures" (1864), as quoted by Stauffer, 117.

205 Cecil Taylor, "Sound Structure of Subculture Becoming Major Breath / Naked Fire Gesture," liner note for *Unit Structures*; LP, Blue Note84237 (CD reissue 1987, Capitol Records).

Douglass that emerges through this reading will be a different figure and writer from the one most scholars are accustomed to – a Douglass whose cosmopolitanism is as much aesthetic as political, and whose sense of history develops alongside an abiding interest in the properties and potentials of verse.

A VERSE "MINGLED INTO ONE": DOUGLASS, SHELLEY, AND RADICAL ROMANTICISM

Douglass's poetics is, at heart, a chronopoetics – a song-making delivered through the encounter of the timely with the untimely. We see it laboring in some of the very orations that we looked at in chapter five. The upheavals of 1848, we recall, first appeared to Douglass as the eruption of a "grand conflict" between "the angel Liberty" and "the monster Slavery," which had commenced as far back as classical antiquity. In his "Revolution of 1848" lecture, he articulates the meaning of Europe's revolts not by quoting any politicians, or newspaper editors, or reformers, or even the revolutionaries themselves, but instead by invoking three lines from Percy Bysshe Shelley's posthumous poem, "Liberty":

> From spirit to spirit – from nation to nation,
> From city to hamlet, thy dawning is cast;
> And tyrants and slaves are like shadows of night

One could argue that in quoting Shelley, Douglass is attempting to display his progression from slave to orator: now, five years after his escape from bondage, he is continuing his rebellion against his prior status as a mere "text" (to the Garrisonians, and to his white listeners) by showing his familiarity with British verse. Or, following the recent, insightful work of critics such as Paul Giles and Elisa Tamarkin, one could contend that Douglass is trying to fuse his arguments to a broader symbology through a flexible, "black anglophilia": this recourse to Shelley partakes in a widespread abolitionist tendency to imagine emancipation through the political and cultural history of "old England."[206] While neither interpretation is necessarily mistaken, they both risk overlooking the vibrancy of Douglass's politico-literary imagination. There are very particular reasons why he quotes these lines from this poem, and the terms of Douglass's borrowing – his slip into and out of his own speech through Shelley's lines – manifest only when we consider the entirety of the original text:

> The fiery mountains answer each other;
> Their thunderings are echoed from zone to zone;
> The tempestuous oceans awake one another,
> And the ice-rocks are shaken round winter's zone
> When the clarion of the Typhoon is blown.
>
> From a single cloud the lightning flashes,

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206 See Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia*, 180-199; and Paul Giles, "Narrative Reversals and Power Exchanges: Frederick Douglass and British Culture," *American Literature* 73.4 (December 2001): 779-810. On Douglass's British connections, also see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 20-1, 58-74; Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World*; and the essays in *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform*, ed. Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1999).

Whilst a thousand isles are illumined around,
Earthquake is trampling one city to ashes,
An hundred are shuddering and tottering; the sound
Is bellowing underground.

But keener thy gaze than the lightning's glare,
And swifter thy step than the earthquake's tramp;
Thou deafenest the rage of the ocean; thy stare
Makes blind the volcanoes; the sun's bright lamp
To thine is a fen-fire damp.

From billow and mountain and exhalation
The sunlight is darted through vapour and blast;
From spirit to spirit, from nation to nation,
From city to hamlet thy dawning is cast, –
And tyrants and slaves are like shadows of night
In the van of the morning light.[207]

Analogizing human conflict to the earth's natural violence (hence the proliferation of dyads and parallels), Shelley's poem is about the rise of freedom from below. Liberty, these lines suggest, is the result of unfolding action: emerging from "underground" with the astounding capacity to "blind [. . .] volcanoes," it is a force at once ingrained and unfamiliar. Douglass draws from this vision of freedom in order to reconsider the political zeitgeist of 1848, when France's new "Revolution has stirred the dormant energies of the oppressed classes all over [the globe]" and "[t]he morning star of freedom is seen from every quarter" (*FD*, 105). Through these intervening poetic lines, Douglass attempts to make sense of the historical link between Europe's contemporary struggles, America's founding, and slavery's abolition. For Douglass, this vast revolution, developing its own time-space full of gaps and yearnings, finds powerful elucidation in Shelley's ode.

However – and this is where the matter of Douglass's poetics comes into play most decisively – there is also a difference, even a tension, between Shelley's "Liberty" and Douglass's truncated version of the same poem. In his invocation, Douglass cuts out Shelley's concluding line ("In the van of morning light"), which radically alters the meaning of the preceding lines. The image of "tyrants and slaves" grappling "like shadows of night" with neither sunlight nor the prospect of morning even arriving introduces an element of undecidability absent in the original poem. Douglass's reframing impacts the ode's form as well: Shelley's regular, final line smoothes out the poem's earlier metric aberrations (such as the concluding trochee, "fen-fire damp"). Douglass's adaptation invokes Shelley's idea of international liberty but complicates its sense of time by dislocating, in the poem's content and meter, the "grand conflict" from any schema of assured redemption. Douglass's strategic quotation prompts us to ask: what does Shelley's fiery ode *mean* without its concluding qualification? And, perhaps more importantly for Douglass, how are we to imagine liberty as something that is not predestined but acquired through struggle? Such questions underscore the need to approach these poetic invocations not as mere efforts at demonstrating some cultural literacy or intellectual progression, but instead as dynamic attempts to fuse divergent events and epochs together.

In his "Revolution of 1848" speech, Douglass could have enlisted a variety of other poets. Why, then, does he turn to Shelley rather than, say, to Shakespeare, or Milton, or to some American

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207 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Liberty" (1820), *The Complete Poems*, ed. Mary Shelley (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 661.

bard? To grasp how and why Douglass borrows and remakes verse, we have to first consider the affiliations of that verse, and the poetry that Douglass hooks into, more often than not, is Romantic – and of a very particular sort. Although he quotes from a stunning array of literary sources, from *Paradise Lost* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, his most common invocations derive from a specific strand of, or poetic sub-tradition in, Euro-American Romanticism. In this verse, less emphasis is placed on modernity's turn away from nature (the chief province of Wordsworth's poetry, and to a lesser degree that of Keats) and more focus is given to that modernity's potentials for transformation. Originating with figures like Shelley, Byron, and Heine, this poetic strain grafted the structure of political revolution onto a philosophy of art, thereby refiguring the latter as the "unacknowledged legislator" of the former.[208]

Whitman tapped into this sub-tradition in *Leaves of Grass*, especially in clusters like *Songs of Insurrection* and in his postwar prose about democracy's aesthetics. Melville extracted it and made it new in novels like *White-Jacket* and *Moby-Dick*, and then integrated it into the sinuous poetics of *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel*. In the decades preceding the Civil War, and particularly in the 1850s, this reconfigured Romanticism also circulated in the intellectual cultures of Northern abolitionism. James McCune Smith, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Henry David Thoreau, among others, all borrowed from it in order to reconceive of slavery from the perspective of a liberated future anterior. Douglass likewise inserts himself into this politico-poetic tendency, but does so in a very specific manner. His methods of twisting this Romanticism's poetic lines and political ideas are bound up with his more general engagements with memory and its aesthetics. When he quotes Robert Burns, for instance, at the end of his 1881 speech "The Color Line" (a lecture about slavery's micropolitical afterlives) –

> 'Then let us pray that come it may,
> As come it will for a' that,
> That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
> May bear the gree, and a' that.
>
> 'That man to man, the world o'er,
> Shall brothers be, for a' that.'

– he is putting this vein of Romantic poetics to a new use, forging a hitherto "unknown totality." These lines, which celebrate an imminent experience of universal equality, surface in a speech about this equality's non-existence in the postwar United States. Almost two decades after its official exile, slavery "still lingers over the country," Douglass insists, "and poisons [. . .] the moral atmosphere of all sections of the republic" (*FD*, 653). The main form this abiding "spirit" assumes is racial prejudice, which he defines as a metaphysical "disorder" that "creates the conditions necessary to its own existence, [. . .] fortifies itself by refusing all contradiction [. . . and] paints a hateful picture according to its own diseased imagination," which "distorts the features of the fancied original to suit the portrait" (*FD*, 648-9). Racial prejudice, it would seem, is the ugly obverse of poetic experience: averse to "contradiction" and generative of only a decrepit "imagination," it defaces reality rather than transcending it. Douglass's appropriation of Burns's verse accordingly promotes of a kind of counter-

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208 Shelley, "Defence of Poetry," 508. I am drawing here from Michael Löwy's and Robert Sayre's redefinition of Romanticism as a critique of capitalist modernity in *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), especially 29-42. On Douglass and Romanticism, also see Bill E. Lawson, "Douglass Among the Romantics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*, ed. Maurice S. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 118-131.

aesthetics, a politico-sensual experience that pushes back against history's unfolding oppressions. If this reinscription of Burns's poem would in all likelihood make his verse almost unrecognizable to Burns himself, that is all the more reason to view it as an improvised poetic act. Douglass's seizure of this verse effectively reconstitutes it beyond the boundaries of its own historical moment, making it speak of and for a radical universality it cannot fully imagine on its own.

When Douglass deploys poetry in this manner, he fashions an aesthetic complement to the rhetorical strategies of counter-commemoration that I discussed earlier. Douglass's varied slices into and out of verse are specifically designed to challenge the passive and reified types of remembrance that make racial repression ideologically possible – and his enlistment of poetry for this purpose is hardly coincidental. From the Romantic poets and philosophers, Douglass inherited a belief in the generative separateness and autonomous power of aesthetic thought in general and of literary verse in particular. Poetry represents for Douglass an independent time-space, a mode of imagining with an unparalleled capacity to reconnect the past to the present and the future.

To Douglass's mind, verse was therefore all the more necessary to recreate and redistribute. As he claimed in an 1857 speech, the United States, under the yoke of slavery and the "cunning machinery" of racial capitalism, had become a decidedly un-poetic country. Douglass identified this poetic lack with an imbalance between sensual perception and political economy. The U.S., he argued, has in recent years "literally shot forward with the speed of steam and lightning," but this material progress has taken on a dangerous life all its own: "Nations are not held in their spheres, and perpetuated in health by [. . .][r]ailroads, steamships, electric wires, tons of gold and silver, and precious stones [. . .] A nation may perish in the midst of them all, or in the absence of them all. The true life principle is not in them." This idea of the "true life principle," which recalls some of Emerson's first philosophical formulations as well as Whitman's theory of art in *Democratic Vistas*, gestures toward a collective political aesthetics that would, ideally, measure the immeasurable and enable Americans to desire emancipation as a sovereign event:

> We have taken a microscope to view the stars, and a fish line to measure the ocean's depths. We have approached it [i.e., the cause of freedom] as though it were a railroad, canal, a steamship, or a newly invented mowing machine, and out of the fullness of our dollar-loving hearts, we have asked with owl-like wisdom, Will it pay? Will it increase the growth of sugar? Will it cheapen tobacco? Will it increase the imports and exports [?] [. . .] These and sundry other questions, springing out of the gross materialism of our age and nation, have been characteristically put respecting [. . .] [e]mancipation. ("West India Emancipation," *FD*, 361-2).

When Douglass invokes poetry, he seeks to circumvent this distorted perception. His varied poetic acts do nothing less than offer a different experience, and scale, of valuation. When he quotes from Whittier in each of his autobiographies, or from Shelley in 1848, or from Burns once again in "The United States Cannot Remain Half Slave and Half Free" (1883), he is attempting to undo and reorder the dominant sense of value in the U.S. – that unjust "distribution of the sensible" in which all is subjected, in Melville's words, to a cold "geometric beauty" and "calculations of caloric."[209]

POETRY AND PROGRESS:
BYRON, DOUGLASS, AND EMANCIPATION

209 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12-19; Melville, "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," *BP*, 44.

To oppose those who would use "a microscope to view the stars," Douglass frequently turned to the poetry of Lord Byron. By the mid-nineteenth century, Byron was as renowned for his political martyrdom in Greece as he was for his verse, and he was especially popular among American abolitionists. Childe Harold's insurrectionary plea, "Slaves who would be free / must themselves strike the blow!," even became a common slogan within the more militant abolitionist circles before the Civil War, and found its way into Douglass's own 1855 autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. In the chapter titled "The Last Flogging," after describing his brawl with Covey and his subsequent "resurrection from the dark [. . .] tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom," Douglass defends anti-slavery violence by invoking these well-known lines from part two of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). It was James McCune Smith, the African American doctor, abolitionist, and essayist from New York, who likely introduced Douglass to Byron – around the same time that, as Samuel Otter and John Stauffer have documented, McCune Smith also composed the first review of *Moby-Dick* by an African American. Published in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, the review linked Melville's novel to Byron's epic poem, *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), by drawing both works' "intricate structure[s] of allusions" – as Otter and Stauffer word it – into the political crisis generated by the Compromise of 1850 and the elections of 1855.[210] Considering Douglass's uses of Byron in his later speeches, we can also discern that Douglass's interest in and familiarity with the poet deepened over time, continuing to evolve after these important antebellum exchanges with McCune Smith and others.

Douglass tends to associate Byron's poetry with the act of revolution. This tie between insurgency and Byron's poetic irruptions initially surfaces in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), even prior to Douglass's use of Childe Harold's bloody edict. Chapter eleven, which describes his intellectual and political awakening through his acquisition of literacy, derives its title from Byron's 1816 poem "The Dream," and for good reason. Douglass asserts that upon studying the revelatory contents of *The Columbian Orator* (1797) – which included poems by John Milton, Joel Barlow, Benjamin Franklin, and David Everett, in addition to the insurrectionary addresses by Sheridan and Daniel O'Connor – he experienced a twofold illumination. First, he began to more fully comprehend – and even experience aesthetically – the meaning of his enslavement, "hear[ing]" freedom now "in every sound" and "beholding" it "in every object": "Liberty! The inestimable birthright of every man [. . .] was [henceforth] ever present, to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. The more beautiful and charming were the smiles of nature, the more horrible and desolate was my condition [. . .] I do not exaggerate, when I say, that it looked from every star, smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm" (112). Second, Douglass came to perceive that his struggle

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210 Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Frederick Page and John Jump (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), lines 720-1; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. John David Smith (1855; New York: Penguin, 2003), 182. Childe Harold's famous plea also makes its way into Douglass's "West India Emancipation" speech of August, 3, 1857, the very lecture in which he laments the fact that Americans "have taken a microscope to view the stars, and a fish line to measure the ocean's depths." Not long after describing emancipation as "one complete transaction of vast and sublime significance, surpassing all power of exaggeration," he turns to Byron's poem and, in so doing, makes a much broader statement about poetry itself: "The poet was as true to common sense as to poetry when he said, 'Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow'" (*FD*, 360, 366). James McCune Smith's review, written under the *nom de plume* Communipaw, is reproduced in Samuel Otter and John Stauffer's essay, "James McCune Smith's 'Horoscope': Melville, Byron, and the American Political Crisis," 28-34. Otter and Stauffer use the phrase "intricate structure of allusions" on page 12.

against slavery necessarily entailed a struggle between dueling classes. "I had been cheated," he writes, by "robbers and deceivers"; "Nature [may have] made us friends; [but] slavery made us enemies" (118-19). These two transformations are at once encapsulated by and distilled through Byron's stirring, five-beat line, which Douglass borrows to title his chapter: "A change came o'er the spirit of my dream." In Byron's poem this declaration appears not once but six times, in each case announcing, at the inception of a new stanza, an unanticipated transformation. When Douglass seizes Byron's words, he preserves their insistence on upheaval but represents the latter as a rebirth-through-literacy, as a personal discovery of poetry's unruly power.

Byron continued to play a crucial role in Douglass's thinking about art and politics. Indeed, Byron was in many respects the bard whose verse engaged most directly with the questions about time, violence, and freedom that both fascinated and disturbed Douglass. Six years after *My Bondage and My Freedom* was published, just after the Civil War's first shots were fired, he delivered a speech in which he attempted to reflect on historical time through a reading of *The Giaour*, Byron's 1813 poem about love and revenge in the Orient. Meditating on the common proposition that "revolutions never go backward," Douglass points out that this concept "is two-edged. It cuts both ways. It is as good for one section, as for the other. If revolutions never go backward, they are of course as likely to go forward in one section as the other – in the north, as in the South. The slaveholders have resolved to battle for slavery, and the people of the Free States will yet come forth to battle for freedom. The end is clearly foreshadowed" (*FD*, 430). After exposing these diverging velocities, he enlists Byron's poem:

> Freedom's battle once begun,
> Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,
> Tho' baffled oft is ever won.

What these lines mean – and, just as importantly, *how* they construct this meaning – turns on their position within the speech. Douglass's underlying argument is not that the belief that revolutions are wholly and unalterably progressive is inherently false. His thought is far too dialogical for such a conclusion; it never works through simple negation. Douglass aims, instead, to integrate a recuperated understanding of progress back into the politics of anti-slavery. To achieve this, he reframes the nation's history as uneven, contending that the American Revolution was a striated event with multiple locations and historical trajectories. Douglass posits that Americans' collective memory can therefore never be fixed, because it is a contingent formation that must be continually re-made. Byron's verse intervenes in this argument by suggesting that freedom is a living force and a catalyst of temporal change: every revolution, from Lexington to Haiti and beyond, is propelled by a latent desire opposed to coercion, exploitation, and non-recognition.

These lines come from the opening sections of Byron's poem, after the main character (a Western "giaour," or *infidel* in Turkish) has arrived at Thermopylae, site of the famous Spartan resistance to Persian invaders in 480 B.C. Meditating on the landscape's political history, the poem's narrator calls on today's generation to honor their ancestors by reclaiming their spirit of revolt:

> Snatch from ashes of your sires
> The embers of their former fires;
> And he who in the strife expires
> Will add to theirs a name of fear
> That Tyranny shall quake to hear,
> And leave his sons a hope, a fame,
> They too will rather die than shame:
> For Freedom's battle once begun,

Bequeath'd by bleeding Sire to Son,
Though baffled oft is ever won.
Bear witness, Greece, thy living page!
Attest it many a deathless age![211]

Byron's narrator critiques Greece's contemporary citizens for having forgotten or erased this revolutionary heritage. As Douglass would later do repeatedly in his speeches about the American Founding, Byron laments that the political bonds between past and present have been tragically severed, not by some external force but by an inner degradation that has emptied out people's historical consciousness:

no foreign foe could quell
Thy soul, till from itself it fell;
Yes! Self-abasement paved the way
To villain-bonds and despot sway.
What can he tell who treads thy shore?
No legend of thine old time,
No theme on which the Muse might soar
High as thine own in days of yore,
When man was worthy of thy clime.
The hearts within thy valleys bred,
The fiery souls that might have led
Thy sons to deeds sublime,
Now crawl from cradle to the grave,
Slaves – nay, the bondsmen of a slave,
And callous, save to crime;
Stain'd with each evil that pollutes
Mankind.
("The Giaour," 186-7)

In reading these lines, Douglass likely saw a parallel between the United States of the 1850s and 60s and Byron's Greece. In both countries a political heritage that originated in a "sublime" overthrow of tyranny has degenerated into a "callous" embrace of slavery. In Byron's poem this historical collapse is nonetheless incomplete, and this is the import of Douglass's three quoted lines: because freedom constructs its own self-generated history, it can resurge even when it appears to be either conquered or absent. In the above stanza, this reiterative power returns to manipulate the verse's form: a semi-detached d-rhyme, beginning with line "No legend of thine old time," intermittently resurfaces, and eventually finishes the stanza, literally having the last word (that universal, declamatory *dernier mot*: "Mankind"). Douglass, transporting these lines into a very different time and place, draws from their faith in liberty's veiled irrepressibility while injecting it with an altered meaning: recoded through Douglass's poetic seizure, this latent freedom drive manifests now not in Greek history but in the Union's struggle against the South. The war against the Confederacy contains an inner "sublim[ity]," Douglass argues, by way of Byron, and this is why it "cannot stop": "It has at last got on the much coveted seven mile boots [. . .] One success begets another. Once on the outer circle of the whirlpool, you are sure of being drawn in due time to the centre" ("Revolutions Never Go Backward," *FD*, 433).

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211 George Gordon N. Byron, "The Giaour; A Fragment of a Turkish Tale," in *The Poetical Works* (London: J. Murray, 1867), 186.

But what exactly is this "centre" that reconnects the past to the present? David Blight, in the most trenchant analysis of Douglass's Civil War-era thought to date, has argued that Douglass's historical understanding of the North's struggle issues in large part from the logic and rhetoric of Christian millenarianism. His insistence on the war's redemptive power is bound up, according to Blight, with his "activist faith" in providential destruction (87). Following Blight, we might read Douglass's "centre" as an apocalyptic force. While this theological tradition certainly helps shape Douglass's temporal imaginary in these years, however, his careful invocation of Byron, as well as his enlistment of Sir Walter Scott's metaphor of the "seven mile boots" (a figure that, six years later, Marx would use to great effect in *Capital*), also indicate that his historical sensibility is attached to a political aesthetics that is not entirely reducible to millenarianism. By transporting the split temporality of Byron's poem (wherein today's lapsed generations are at once removed from and privy to an abiding emancipationist spirit) into the space of American history, Douglass articulates a hidden narrative of freedom. And the latter is not merely the issue of some bloody apocalypse, providential or otherwise, but a sublime principle that cannot be circumscribed by either time or space.

As Douglass continued lecturing and writing to shore up support for the war, he found that Byron became more and more important to his understanding of "the slaveholding rebellion." The British poet proved indispensable when Douglass delivered an unusual – and, for his audience, unusually perplexing – speech in Boston, late in 1861. Speaking in December at Tremont Temple as part of the Fraternity Course lectures – a series that previously hosted orators such as Wendell Phillips, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Henry David Thoreau (it was the site for his famous "Plea for John Brown" in 1859) – Douglass addressed a topic that, in the midst of a bloody war and in the wake of several Union losses, one could well assume was far from his listener's minds: the philosophy of pictures. We encountered this remarkable lecture – which divulges, more than almost any other speech, the ways in which Douglass connects historical transformation to the problem of perception – in the previous chapter, but only in part, and all too briefly. Let us now, with a longer look, expand to its bulk.

Rather than beginning with a meditation on the war's historical significance, as he had already done in numerous other lectures, Douglass chose to speak at length about the relationship between art, vision, and worldly change. "Our age," he contended in his initial remarks, "gets very little credit either for poetry or song. It is generally condemned to wear the cold metallic stamp of a passionless utilitarianism." The modern photograph has only contributed, it would seem, to this deadening: "pictures are decid[ed]ly conservative. [. . . As] Byron says, a man always looks dead, when his Biography is written. The same is even more true when his picture is taken." Yet, adds Douglass, anticipating some of Benjamin's insights in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," there is at the same time another impulse in photography and other similar arts: a liberating drive that pushes one beyond the world's "frozen truths." Pictures, he maintains, in all their variety (in the mind as well as on the page or canvas), "spring" from a single source: the "picture making faculty of man," that motive-force of thought and feeling "in which all the great facts of the universe" are animated and through which "all that is religious and poetic about us" is realized. Douglass even goes on to offer something like a definition of the human: "I am at liberty to touch the element out of which our pictures spring. There are certain groups and combinations of facts and features, some pleasant[,] some sad, which possess in large measure the quality of pictures, and affect us accordingly. They are thought pictures, – the outstanding headlands of the meandering shores of life and are points to steer by on the broad sea of [. . .] experience. They body forth in living forms and colors, the ever varying lights and shadows of the soul [. . .] [O]f all the animal world man alone has a passion for pictures [. . .] [M]an is everywhere, a picture making animal."[212]

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212 Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, Series 1,

This commentary confused or irritated most of the audience. One Bostonian reported that the lecture "came near being a total failure," and that "the speaker only saved himself by switching off suddenly from his subject, and pitching in on the great question of the day." Indeed, Douglass then shifted – not accidentally, we know, because we still have the text of the speech, written in shorthand and published as "Pictures and Progress" – to a consideration of the war's causes and consequences. One audience member later described the effect of this switch as "magical," since it transformed a "listless and unattentive body" into an "attentive and enthusiastic congregation."[213] Douglass's attempt to expose that which lies beneath war was thus met not with derision but, more maddeningly, with silence. Whitman, perhaps unsurprisingly, was decidedly more attuned to Americans' aesthetic inclinations in this "year of the struggle," as he put it in his poem "1861":

> No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible year!
> Not you as some pale poetling, seated at a desk, lisping cadenzas
> piano;
> But as a strong man, erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing,
> carrying a rifle on your shoulder,
> With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands–with a knife in
> the belt at your side,
> As I heard you shouting loud–your sonorous voice ringing across the
> continent;
> Your masculine voice, O year, as rising amid the great cities, [. . .]
> Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs, clothed in blue, bearing
> weapons, robust year;
> Heard your determin'd voice, launch'd forth again and again;
> Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd cannon,
> I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.
> (*LG*, II: 466-7)

In this year of fratricide and disenchantment, a lecture about pictures and the imagination rather than slavery, or the South, or history, seemed to Douglass's listeners almost blasphemous in its neglect of the moment's singular, "determin'd voice."

However, if we have learned anything about his speeches in the previous chapter, it is that aesthetics and politics are contiguous rather than divergent in Douglass's thought. Whether he is twisting lines from Robert Burns back beyond their origins or reclaiming the Fourth of July as an abolitionist holiday, Douglass's counter-commemorative writing fuses the literary and the political through the medium of time. The underlying thrust of his lectures, the uniting spirit of his exhortations one might even say, is that for democracy to succeed tyranny must be upended not only in law but also in ideology and metaphysics, since liberty inheres in patterns of remembrance and in the subtle machinations of the mind. As such, I would like to argue that Douglass's shift in his "Pictures and Progress" speech between the subjects of art and war is best understood not as a leaving behind but as a lyrical extension. In both parts, Douglass meditates on the same questions about perception and change but does so in different registers, and the pivot for his transition hinges, quite fundamentally, on the

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Vol. III: 453, 455, 459-60. Sarah Blackwood offers an alternative framing of this lecture's context in "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology," *American Literature* 81.1 (March 2009): 92-125.

213 The Springfield (Mass.) *Republican* and the Boston *Daily Journal*, 3 December 1861, as quoted by Blassingame in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 1, Vol. III: 452.

matter of time:

> Nothing stands to day where it stood yesterday. The choice which life presents, is ever more, between growth and decay, perfection and deterioration. There is not standing still, nor can be. Advance or recede, occupy or give place – are the stern imperative alternatives self existing and self enforcing law of life, from the cradle to the grave. He who despairs of progress despises the hope of the world – and shuts himself out from the chief significance of existence – and is dead while he lives. Great nature herself – whether viewed in connection or a part from man, is in its manifold operations, a picture of progress & a constant rebuke to moral stagnation of conservatism. Conceive of life without progress and sun[,] moon and stars instantly halt in their courses. The restless ocean no longer heaves on high his proud dashing billows. The lightening hides itself in somber sky. The tempest dies on the mountains, – and silent night, dark, shapeless, sightless, voiceless settles down upon the mind, in a ghastly as frightful as bloom as the darkness of Byron's painting. ("Pictures and Progress," 471-2)

Douglass offers a philosophy of history here that is also a philosophy of aesthetics. He contends that two principles structure any development: one tending toward perpetual upheaval, and another geared toward regression and stagnation. In any memory, or nation, or work of art, these two forces collide and re-collide. One should not mistake this antagonistic structure, despite its patent duality, as somehow dialectical. For Douglass, there is no *Aufhebung*, or terminating sublation; there is only the continuation of these crashes and collisions. Moreover, and more importantly for Douglass's own concerns, these two opposing forces are neither even nor even adequate to one another: "progress" – returning, like "freedom" in *The Giaour*, to seal its own deliverance – is ultimately the superior principle because its regenerative power derives from nature itself.

To illustrate this philosophy of conflict, Douglass turns, once again, to Byron. But in this case it is Byron's bodily image and artistic legacy rather than his verse that intervene in Douglass's speech. For a visual example of "life without progress," Douglass offers Joseph-Denis Odevaere's 1826 oil painting of Byron on his deathbed[214]:

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214 Melville may have had this same painting in mind when, in part three of *Clarel* (3.21.295-301), Derwent describes the modern era as at once peculiarly accelerated and markedly post-Romantic:

> Interpretations so unfold –
> New finding, happy gloss or key,
> A decade's now a century.
> Byron's storm-cloud away has rolled –
> Joined Werther's; Shelley's drowned; and – why,
> Perverse were now e'en Hamlet's sigh:
> Perverse? – indecorous indeed!

Douglass is struck by this painting's representation of "decay" as a type of temporal depletion: the "sun[,] moon and stars instantly halt in their courses"; the "restless ocean" is suddenly frozen in place; the lightning hides itself, and the "tempest dies on the mountains"; while night, "shapeless" and "sightless," drains everything in the painting of life and motion. Progress, by implication, is not simply the *advance* of time or its linear unfolding. It is, rather, time itself. Such an understanding of worldly development would seem to recall the notion of "progress" promulgated by figures like William Seward, George William Curtis, and *Clarel*'s Margoth. Based on this homology, one could interpret Douglass's philosophy of history as a slightly adjusted expression of this underlying ideology, an articulation in a different key, as it were, which despite its nuances ultimately reiterates dominant Northern conceptions of time. Douglass's return to Byron here, through Odevaere's painting, nonetheless complicates any such claim. He is attempting to conceptualize and describe a sense of time that is far more complex and layered than a liberal, secular, Euro-American model of historical progression. Progress may be time's kernel for Douglass, but it is also erratic and unstable.

For this reason, Douglass identifies this life-principle with a poet who sacrificed himself for others' freedom. In the painting, dark colors predominate, and the world outside the window is frozen, but Byron's body – like his broken harp – is still illuminated. Odevaere, and Douglass after him, is not interested solely in the poet's corpse but in the bard's strange, immaterial afterlife – the way that it continues to signify through its glow, producing a presence even after the voice is gone. Reading out from this image to meditate on the idea of "progress," Douglass generates a model of time that certainly resembles familiar schemas of historical teleology, but his philosophy of history and its aesthetics also contains an important difference: his chronopoetics are not divorced from the past but are instead conscious of its returns; indeed, his speeches and poetic acts seek to *reactivate* a revolutionary heritage – latent and subterranean, but all the more powerful in this partial absence – in order to liberate, and remake, the future.

It is this revised notion of progress, according to which past and present are conjoined through

internal breaks and deferred promises, that provides a bridge between the two sections of Douglass's speech. The transition from a commentary on pictures to a lecture on anti-slavery violence occurs precisely by way of this antagonistic schema in which "[t]he choice is ever between growth and decay" (464). If, despite having "grown immensely and rapidly," the United States has nonetheless "fallen asunder at the centre," he asks, "[t]o what cause may we trace this dreadful calamity?" He would continue to pose this question again and again throughout his career, providing variations of the same reply: slavery and its political sympathizers. But here in 1862, after delivering his remarks about Byron and progress, Douglass offers what is probably his most nuanced answer. Declaring his intention to probe beneath all the "secondary cause[s]" and discover "the grand original cause," he eschews the very interpretations of the war that prevailed in the Union, beginning with the North-South divide:

> Some say to sectionalism. But there is nothing in the geographical divisions of a country which should cause trouble.
>
> Lands intersected by a narrow frith abhor each other
> And mountains interposed make enemies of nations
> Which else like kindred drops had mingled into one.

Immediately after invoking these lines from William Cowper's poem *The Task* (1784), Douglass fashions his own chronometer for the war:

> But even this cause [i.e., sectionalism] does not hold here, for all our rivers and mountains point to unity and oneness [. . .] Some say, it is the slaveholders who have brought this Evil upon us. I do not assent even to this [. . .] The cause is deeper than sections, slaveholders or abolitionists. These are but the hands of the clock. The moving machinery is behind the face. The machinery moves not because of the hands, but the hands because of the machinery. To make the hands go right you must make the machinery go right. The trouble is fundamental [. . .] We have attempted to maintain a union in defiance of the moral chemistry of the universe. To join together what God has put asunder – We have thought to keep one end of the chain on the limbs of the bondman without having the other on our own necks. (465)

Douglass's metaphor of the universe's gigantic clock, inside of which the "machinery" obeys its own "fundamental" laws, effectively reroutes agency (and by extension, blame) from regions and classes to institutions and historical tendencies. The battles at Bull Run, Fort Sumter, and Ball's Bluff have occurred not because the nation's geographical divisions engendered conflicting modes of production, but because the country's originary contract was conceived in sin. A "union" thus founded in limited rather than universal liberty and aligned with the forces of "decay" is doomed from the start, since "the moral chemistry of the universe" is a progressive mixture that eventually destroys anything that is stagnant or debased, including governments. According to Douglass's chronometrics, the war is not the tragic result of political or regional antagonism but the consequence of a rupture in time itself – one that can be mended only through a collective blood sacrifice that corrects the underlying "machinery." If Americans can "have done, forever, with the wild and guilty fantasy that man can hold property in man," then, he suggests, the war will become nothing less than another revolution, a belated second founding capable of extending this renunciation into people's hearts and minds (469). And herein lies the significance of Byron's dead body, lifeless but inexplicably animate, lit up in the darkness: even in the midst of history's arrests, there remains a possibility for radical renewal. The clock's hands cannot

stop, but each rotation holds a promise of rebirth.

"LEVIATHAN IS NOT SO TAMED": DOUGLASS, COWPER, AND THE POWER OF VERSE

Douglass's effort to measure the war's historical duration culminates in this description of a universal "moral chemistry," but to get there he must go through verse. The "Time-Piece" section of *The Task* from which Douglass's quote derives (and here, as elsewhere, he is quite strategic when he wrests lines from others) is about the relationship between consciousness and action. Cowper's cosmopolitan narrator, ensconced in England, tries to comprehend the pain he experiences when he reads about New World slavery:

> My soul is sick with every day's report
> Of wrong and outrage with which earth is ill.
> There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart –
> It does not feel for man; the natural bond
> Of brotherhood is sever'd as the flax
> That falls asunder at the touch of fire.
> He finds his fellow guilty of a skin
> Not colour'd like his own, and having power
> To enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause
> Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey.
> Lands intersected by a narrow frith
> Abhor each other. Mountains interposed,
> Make enemies of nations, who had else
> Like kindred drops been mingled into one.
> Thus man devotes his brother, and destroys;
> And worse than all, and most to be deplored,
> As human nature's broadest, foulest blot,
> Chains him, and tasks him, and exacts his sweat
> With stripes, that mercy with a bleeding heart
> Weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast.[215]

This verse speaks to modernity's betrayal of its principles: the humanists' dream of a global "brotherhood" has given way to slavery, and "nature" itself is "blot[ted]" by this bondage. Rereading Cowper through Douglass, we find that the lines which follow Douglass's quote ("Thus man devotes

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215 William Cowper, *The Task: A Poem in Five Books* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1852), book II: "The Time-Piece," 62. It is likely that Melville was also drawn to these same lines only a few years later. "Misgivings (1860)," the first listed poem in *Battle-Pieces*, begins, like this passage from "The Time-Piece," with a consideration of the world's "ills" and then transitions into irony and antagonism:

> I muse upon my country's ills –
> The tempest bursting from the waste of Time
> On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest
> crime.

his brother, and destroys") offer an interpretation of war that is remarkably aligned with the one provided by the clock metaphor. Today's fratricidal violence is portrayed as neither unprecedented nor anomalous, but as the recurrence of a civil war that began with slavery's inception: an initial conflict between black and white brothers has become an abiding historical pattern, and "nations" which should be bonded together in sympathy are, because of their differing "skin," rendered "enemies." Both Cowper (in the above stanza) and Douglass (in his quotation and in his clock metaphor) offer an account of racial violence that opposes prevailing historical narratives by connecting a seemingly distant and obsolete past to an unfolding future. Inbetween these two poles is a ruptured present, a "now" split open by an awareness of repression and by a cycle of violence (progress's necessary other) that is currently resurfacing. By interrupting his own discourse with this verse, Douglass provides his audience with a momentary experience of temporal arrest through which they can slip outside of this cycle – and then, through the world's great chronometer, time the war in a radically new way.

These lines from *The Task* also make a crucial entry into Douglass's writing even earlier in his career. His famous description of the slave songs in the 1845 *Narrative* concludes with Cowper's words:

> The slaves [. . .] would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune [. . .] They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone [. . .] [T]hey would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do. I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, -- and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

This passage is structured through a tension between opacity and legibility, emphasizing in almost equal measure the songs' inaccessible entangledness and their immanent translatability. These dirges – which "take us back," as Sterling Stuckey writes, "to that sacred moment when the spirituals and the blues appear to have been one" – are, simultaneously it seems, unparallaled indexes of slavery's injustice ("Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance") and the

most profoundly imbricated of laments ("apparently incoherent" to the slaves themselves and not entirely legible to outsiders). Douglass tries to organize this tension around the figure of the "circle," which grants or denies access based on social, temporal, and spatial proximity. Yet Douglass's geometric metaphor is also, in certain respects, markedly Emersonian, functioning as a vehicle for interconnection as well as concealment.[216] If the warbling slaves comprise their own inner circle, there are nonetheless other circles, both on and off the plantation, that hear these sad melodies and bear a vexed relation to their choral notes. This interconnection hinges on the quotation that punctuates Douglass's remarkable description: "and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because 'there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.'" Despite the rebarbarativeness of these "wild," originary blues songs, there is a Romantic promise, enunciated in Cowper's verse, of an universality that exceeds this tension. In fact, besides Douglass himself, Cowper is the only one ostensibly outside the circle allowed to speak directly to or about these songs – and his privileged status has everything to do with his identity as a poet. What makes this invocation at once powerful and peculiar is the extent to which it offers through the singular medium of verse a different kind of relation to the slave songs, one that is at once inside and outside the plantation's hermetic enclosure.[217]

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216 Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (1845; New York: Penguin, 1986), 56-7; Stuckey, "Cheer and Gloom: Douglass and Melville on Slave Dance and Music," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Levine and Otter, 70. Emerson argues in an 1841 essay that all human action and comprehension are connected through a series of interdependent circles, to such an extent that "[t]here is no outside." The world, he contends, "may be conceived of as a system of concentric circles, and we now and then detect in nature slight dislocations, which apprize us that this surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding." Yet this sliding condition – the ineluctable fact, as Melville words it, that "all solidity's a crust" – is also profoundly generative, since it ensures the interpenetration of these "self-evolving circles": "The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul. For it is the inert effort of each thought, having formed itself into a circular wave of circumstance, [. . .] to heap itself on that ridge, and to solidify and hem in the life. But if the soul is quick and strong, it bursts over that boundary on all sides, and expands another orbit on the great deep, which also runs up into a high wave [. . .] But the heart refuses to be imprisoned; in its first and narrowest pulses, it already tends outward with a vast force, and to immense and innumerable expansions." "Circles," in *Essays: First and Second Series*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Library of America, 1990), 404-5.

217 My argument here thus offers a way to read this passage outside of Saidiya Hartman's recent, influential interpretation. Douglass "alights on slave song," Hartman contends, in order to excavate an "oppositional culture, or a symbolic analogue of Douglass's physical confrontation with Covey," but these dirges are nonetheless compromised by their entangledness with the system of slavery: "Above all, these songs are valued as [. . .] inchoate expressions of a latent political consciousness [. . .] Douglass emphasized the singularity of sorrow, thus hoping to establish an absolute line of division between diversion and the glimmerings of protest. Yet this distinction could not be sustained, for the promiscuous exchanges of culture and the fraught terms of agency muddled the lines of opposition" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 48). My contention is, on the contrary, that Douglass's invocation of Cowper works precisely by moving *beneath* such "line[s] of division" toward an aesthetic viewpoint that activates politics from an entirely different angle. Illuminating discussions of Douglass's account of the slave songs can also be found in Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 263; Fred Moten, *In the Break*, 20-1; Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 91-2; David Messmer, "'If Not in the Word, in the Sound': Frederick Douglass's Mediation of Literacy through Song," *ATQ* 21.1 (March 2007): 5-21; and Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans*, 99.

Cowper – the British bard of the quotidian, writer of hymns, translator of Homer, and possibly mad author who, late in life, penned the almost solipsistic poem "The Castaway" – is thus a kind of unwitting collaborator in Douglass's creation of an anti-slavery poetics. This coupling seems odd, and rightly so. But one of the main effects of Douglass's poetic acts is the creation of unexpected lines of political and aesthetic affiliation. In the circuitous ties between poets such as Byron, Cowper, and Douglass, we find a political art that spans across oceans and generations. Douglass's poetic improvisations situate themselves, we might say, in what Pascale Casanova terms a "world republic of letters," a semi-autonomous time-space of literary invention and reinvention that allows authors to think and feel outside, and even against, the bounds of the nation. Robert Pogue Harrison argues in a similar vein that a distinct polity of the imagination is generated through literature, one that "allows the past to reach out to us from the future and the future to meet us from out of the past, transforming human finitude into a field of historical relations rather than a flow of chronological moments."[218] Douglass's twists and usurpations of verse illuminate literature's unique temporality. In his speeches and autobiographies he remakes the poetry that he quotes by stretching its form and content beyond their origins and by imparting to each line new rhythms and meanings. While Cowper's *The Task*, for instance, certainly finds an unexpected afterlife in Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* and "Pictures and Progress" speech, these texts also improvise on the former and push our readerly gaze past the margins of Cowper's own verse. When we return, after Douglass, to Cowper once more, we find that the poem's concluding meditations on the insufficiency of irony and song possess a relevance beyond the original text's comprehension:

> Yet what can satire, whether grave or gay?
> It may correct a foible, may chastise[, . . .]
> Retrench a sword-blade, or displace a patch;
> But where are its sublimer trophies found?
> What vice has it subdued? Whose heart reclaime'd
> By rigour, or whom laugh'd into reform?
> Alas! Leviathan is not so tamed:
> Laugh'd at, he laughs again; and, stricken hard,

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218 My understanding of literature's "peculiar economy" differs slightly from Casanova's (9). While I concur with her argument about "the existence of a [distinctly] literary measure of time, of a 'tempo' peculiar to literature," her model of international aesthetic competition – based explicitly on Braudel's historical schema of the *longue durée* – focuses to such a degree on the tensions between the world's authors and movements that it often disregards the ways in which writers like Douglass also forge important transnational solidarities (4). Harrison's claim can be found in his book, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), 85. On literature's temporal heterogeneity, also see Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 1-6; Susan Gilman, "Afterword: The Times of Hemispheric Studies," in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Levine and Levander, 328-336; and Ross Posnock, "Planetary Circles: Philip Roth, Emerson, Kundera," in *Shades of the Planet*, ed. Buell and Dimock, 142-144. My argument here also takes seriously Xiomara Santamarina's assertion that, in the current post-nationalist dispensation, a renewed attention to "the specificit[ies] of temporality" may do more to contest nation-based literary categories than hemispheric or diasporic approaches. It "is wrong," she contends, "to suppose that only [. . .] internationalism can transform the field's terms and references. Indeed, one might argue than an expansion of spatial analysis could make it more difficult to do temporal analysis and might make us more susceptible to deploying [. . .] ahistorical, monolithic concept[s]." "'Are We There Yet?': Archives, History, and Specificity in African-American Literary Studies," *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 309, 307.

> Turns to stroke his adamantine scales,
> That fear no discipline of human hands.
> (*The Task*, II: 72)

These lines acquired their full meaning only generations later, after the monstrous institution of slavery had consumed millions more souls. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman described democracy in similar terms, lamenting that the "problem of the future of America" had become a problem of size and scale: "Pride, competition, segregation, vicious willfulness, and license beyond example, brood already upon us. Unwieldy and immense, who shall hold in behemoth? who bridle leviathan?" (*PP*, 1013). The political beast that we discover in Cowper's verse – through Douglass, in literature's transformed "field of historical relations" – is, however, probably more Melvillean than Whitmanian. Ungraspable yet inescapable, this "adamantine" beast (which Douglass, like Cowper and Melville before him, associated with slavery itself) cannot be subdued through mere words.[219] It is a monster slain only by other means, with immaterial weapons.

To imagine this more effective "reform" able to strike beneath slavery's "scales," Cowper turns to the pulpit:

> I say the pulpit (in the sober use
> Of its legitimate, peculiar powers)
> Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
> The most important and effectual guard
> [. . .] of truth. There stands
> The legate of the skies; his theme divine,
> His office sacred, his credentials clear.
> By him, the violated law speaks out
> Its thunders [. . .]
> He 'stablishes the strong, restores the weak,
> Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,
> And, arm'd himself in panoply complete
> Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms
> Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule
> Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
> The sacramental host of God's elect.
> (*The Task*, II: 73)

We can almost see Douglass emerging from the margins of this verse. "[A]rm'd [. . .] in panoply complete," preaching fidelity and "discipline" during this "glorious war," Douglass is, in a sense, the unacknowledged subject of Cowper's lines. Such a retroactive reading, of course, breaks from most prevailing accounts of "context," according to which a work's meaning is locatable principally within its immediate, contemporary moment. What Douglass's poetic acts show us, here in his reframing of Cowper and elsewhere in his writings, is that such an understanding of literary context cannot properly

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219 Douglass defined slavery in similarly monstrous terms in an 1860 speech: "Who has measured its vast extent, found its limits, or sounded the depths of its wickedness? Language fails to describe it, and the human mind, though winged with a fancy outflying the lightning, fails to overtake and comprehend this huge and many-headed abomination . . . [W]ho can grapple with a thing so huge as the sum of all villainies? The idea is too large and dreadful for the imagination" ("The Presidential Campaign of 1860," *FD*, 404).

appreciate the degree to which the present and the future make significant and necessary claims on the past. The most famous – or infamous – version of this idea is Theodor Adorno's assertion, delivered in the aftermath of World War II, that poetry after Auschwitz was no longer possible.[220] Adorno was not claiming that the hyper-rational, coordinated destruction of the Third Reich's camps had somehow literally *destroyed* poetry as a viable artistic medium. His point, rather, was that art would henceforth always bear a scar and that the verse written prior to the Holocaust could never be read in quite the same way again. I would like to suggest that the history of slavery presents a similar interpretive pressure: the innumerable – and, more importantly, inestimable – violences of the slave system render a certain proleptic reading unavoidable. To limit our framing of this pressure to Douglass: his reappropriations of poems by Burns, Whittier, Byron, Cowper, Longfellow and others stretch those texts far beyond their immediate historical contexts and oblige us to recognize, perhaps in violation of our own interpretive impulses, literature's radical and unexpected layeredness.

Douglass's deployment of Cowper's lines, for instance, inject them with a new meaning that cannot be erased. Douglass's pulpit is, of course, at once more public and more secular than Cowper's, since its covenant ultimately has less in common with the Calvinist conception of "God's elect" than with the mission of poetry. It is here, I would argue, that Shelley – singer of "Liberty" and of a "Defence of Poetry" – returns to Douglass's thought, establishing a third point in the relation between Douglass and Cowper. "The legate of the skies" through whom, in Cowper's words, "the violated law speaks out / Its thunders" is none other than Shelley's poet, who alone makes us re-perceive the world and its history. According to Shelley, verse "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions." Poets are therefore "the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, [. . .] and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves" (505). The makers of verse – whether in London, England or in Rochester, New York – are "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (508).

Douglass, too, like the poets before him, shatters the determinacy of "surrounding impressions." His seizures of poetry make their own thunders and mirrors, legislating for and against a world in which leviathans thrive. And then there is that blessed image of Byron, lying prostrate by his busted harp with the Greek word for nowhere (aetopia) etched above his head. Accidental law-giver, martyred bard, mover of worlds: Is it any wonder that his lifeless body stands in for regression? What is decay, after all, but the absconding of poetry? And what is history but the surprising returns of the repressed and unredeemed?

"THE PATHWAY OF TYRANTS LIES OVER VOLCANOES": DOUGLASS'S ERUPTIVE VERSE

In poetry, Douglass discovers time's arrest and rebirth. His poetic acts, we have seen, tend to unfold intertextually by reappropriating existing verse. But at moments in his long career, and especially in its antebellum phase, Douglass also experimented with poetry by composing verse that was entirely his own. The most powerful exemplum of this other side of Douglass's poetics is "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," a 29-stanza tour de force that Douglass penned in 1857 in response to a series of slave rebellions that were violently suppressed the previous year.

Only recently brought to critics' attention by William Gleason, "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" is the

220 Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967/1981), 17-34.

extended monologue of a Southern slaveholder who, prompted by the discovery of these conspiracies and revolts, expatiates on the nature of freedom, violence, and history. In its form and content, Douglass's poem contains some of his most fascinating engagements with questions of temporality and its connections to politics and art. This chapter will thus end by following Douglass's own argumentative method and conclude, as he did in countless speeches, with a poem – but in this case it is Douglass's own.

"The Tyrants' Jubilee!" commences with an expression of relief. Now delivered from the threat of upheaval, the slaveholder celebrates his recovered power:

> Those black, portentous clouds, overcasting our blue sky,
> For a brief period, have swept harmlessly by,
> And now quietly sleep beneath the horizon,
> Confirming, anew, our power and oppression.
>
> Tranquility now smiles on the plains of the South,
> And Liberty stands mute, with a gag in her mouth;
> Her sons die in silence by the axe and the rope,
> And sweet peace is born of the slave's murdered hope.
> ("TTJ," 127)

The "I" – or, as is more often the case, the "we" or "us" – in Douglass's poem constitutes a lyric-subjectivity. But we are a far cry from the poetic self hatched in most kinds of lyric verse. Ironizing the distance between the slaveholding orator and poem's fugitive author, Douglass undermines the oppressor's language from the inside, as it were, by revealing the rhetoric of the American Revolution to be a grammar for bondage. Raising "scorching irony" (which, after his conversion to Constitutionalism, he claimed was the anti-slavery literary mode *par excellence*) to the level of poetic form also enables Douglass to maintain a rigid distinction between this tyrant's class and Douglass's own aesthetic autonomy, his space not only apart but *beyond* the tyrant's murderous reach. "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" thereby offers a fundamentally different representation of subjectivity than one finds, for instance, in Whitman's "Song of Myself," wherein the separation between writer, speaker, and reader is persistently closed off rather than embraced. Douglass, we might say, deploys the *form* of the lyric while distancing himself from its generic promise of self-liberated speech. This is a lyric not of transcendence but of undoing, wherein the artist's power resides precisely in his removal from and control over the speaker's ignoble eloquence.

In the following stanzas, the poem juxtaposes anxious acknowledgments of slavery's volatility with assertions about slaveholders' natural rights. The loquacious tyrant draws from the rhetorics of law and religion to chastise the South's rebellious slaves. But then, two thirds of the way through his monologue, something curious happens to Douglass's speaker: he hears "a strange sound" and begins to imagine a coming "storm of wrath and blood." This vision of an impending "murderous surprise" produces a kind of conversion, and the subsequent reflections of the tyrant suggest that he has acquired some unanticipated insight:

> Our negroes are chaffing to burst asunder their bands;
> They have given us fair warning of danger to come,
> By sternly resolving to fight for their freedom.
>
> No! brother oppressors, We must not deny it,
> We have crushed and suppressed a right noble spirit;

There was much in those fellows all men must admire,
Sable forms illumined with great Liberty's fire.

There were brave men among them, heroic, daring;
Neither axe, rope, nor whip wrought change in their bearing –
Grimly turning towards us their iron-like faces,
Defying alike our glance and our gashes.
("TTJ," 129)

Commemorating the slaves' "daring," masculinist insurrection in a manner redolent of Douglass's own fictional portrayal of Madison Washington in "The Heroic Slave" (1853), these stanzas stage an important poetic transition. Through the medium of his imagination, this tyrant-speaker is able to reexperience the past from a different perspective and re-perceive the revolting slaves not as irrational actors removed from history but as "Sable forms illumined with great Liberty's fire." The slaveholder's shift from fearful derision to begrudging sympathy transforms the genre of the poem from lyric to elegy. What we find in "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" is, then, a unique variant in the tradition of antebellum African American elegy that, as Max Cavitch has shown, developed as a poetic "challenge to dominance written under the sign of lamentation."[221] An elegy hatched from the form of the lyric and traced from the lips of a slaveholder, Douglass's is a poem of and about surprises and their consequences.

This nameless tyrant's conversion, however, is hardly complete. He can recognize the slaves' "heroic" deeds and praise their "iron-like" defiance, but their subjectivity is still alien to him. The slaves in the tyrant's monologue, whose physical actions oversignify but whose psyches remain relatively opaque, resemble the African rebels in Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855), particularly Babo, the leader whose "hive of subtlety" can be surmised but never truly grasped by Amasa Delano (*The Piazza Tales*, 116). The literary contiguity between Melville and Douglass also goes much deeper. "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" shares with *Battle-Pieces* a certain "insurrectional poetics," as Gleason puts it, which ties verse to the experience of disruption. Indeed, like "The Apparition (A Retrospect)," Douglass's poem responds to the experience of upheaval by suggesting that "violent insurrection remains not only inevitable but also natural: a volcanic eruption akin to the 'lightning, whirlwind, and earthquake' of God's millennial justice" (111). "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," however, was published not as an independent collection of poems (as were *Battle-Pieces* and *Leaves of Grass*) but presented, in excerpted form, in May of 1857 as part of a speech about the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford,* in which Judge Taney denied the existence of social or civil rights for African Americans. And this context is pivotal to the poem's meaning. Douglass argued in his lecture that the court's expulsion of black subjects from the United States will only generate more slave rebellions like the ones that occurred last year, when mutinous slaves from many "different localities" drew up plans "to slay their oppressors" (*FD*, 349). His speech mounts a kind of prophecy, arguing that although slaveholders will continue to react with extreme violence to these revolts, a pattern for America's impending history has already been established: "[these] insurrectionary movements have been put down, but they may break out any time, under the guidance of higher intelligence, and with a more invincible spirit." And this is where – and how – his tyrant speaks in 1857, over and against Taney and his consorts:

The fire thus kindled, may be revived again;

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221 See chapter five ("Mourning of the Disprized: African Americans and Elegy from Wheatley to Lincoln") of Max Cavitch's *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*.

> The flames are extinguished, but the embers remain;
> One terrible blast may produce an ignition,
> Which shall wrap the whole South in wild conflagration.
>
> The pathway of tyrants lies over volcanoes;
> The very air they breathe is heavy with sorrows;
> Agonizing heart-throbs convulse them while sleeping,
> And the wind whispers death as over them sweeping.
> ("The Dred Scott Decision," *FD*, 349-50)

Like Melville, Douglass borrows from the discourses of nineteenth-century geology (especially the "Vulcanist" conception of the earth's discontinuous development) in order to make a poetic art out of incomplete knowledge. In his insistence that "slavery is a doomed system," we also find, as we did in "The Apparition (A Retrospect)," a much broader statement about time itself. "The pathway of tyrants lies over volcanoes" because history is neither a reasonless process nor an empty container but a potent force with its own shape and tendencies. "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" offers a poetic variant of the philosophy of history developed in counter-commemorative speeches like "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," "The Revolution of 1848," and "Pictures and "Progress": future "ignition[s]" will be "revived again" since time is propelled by two antagonistic motive-forces, one tending toward change and "conflagration," and another – like the wind in Douglass's concluding line – "whisper[ing] death" and stagnation. One can intervene in this conflictual development and reignite time's smoldering "embers," Douglass insinuates, by carrying out some insurrection, whether on the page, the platform, or the plantation itself. It is, therefore, precisely in his own lyrical reconstellation of America's history, woven through the intertext of his speech and "The Tyrants' Jubilee!," that Douglass asserts his solidarity with the very slaves against whom his tyrant-speaker declaims. By cracking open the slaveholder's psyche and by undermining his words and ideas from the inside, this poem redoubles these slaves' efforts at self-emancipation.

The freedom drive in Douglass's poem extends into the most minute elements of its structure. The meter in "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" tends to reflect on and subtly revise the poem's content, sublating the tyrant's meditations on revolt and reprisal into a drama played out among iambs, trochees, and broken beats. The poem's rhymes enact a similar kind of formal violence: recalling the *aabb* pattern of a Rendondilla, they crash into one another, spiraling out in a series of off-rhymes and para-rhymes (desolation/destruction; horizon/oppression; daughters/disclosures; good/gratitude; gallows/malice). Critics may be tempted to attribute this structural instability to Douglass's relative inexperience with writing verse, but if we have learned anything from his literary entanglements it is that Douglass was an unusually rigorous and careful reader of poetry. Additionally, when we follow the aesthetics of the "living issue" and look at the *effects* of his formal improvisations, we find that Douglass's manipulations of rhyme and meter are also intimately related to his overarching concerns regarding history and politics.

For Douglass the poet, form and conflict are inseparable. This interdependence coheres not only around and between the poem's stanzas but within the lines themselves. Douglass's most original poetic technique is a kind of metrical inversion, through which, at the end of certain lines, he suddenly and unexpectedly reverses the meter that has already been imposed. What is at stake in this technique, which fuses poetry's formal gaps to the event of upheaval, is the very thing at stake in Douglass's speeches and autobiographies: the usability of a given past (whether it's a life story, a founding document, or a metrical pattern) in the creation of an oppositional politics. "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" offers a poetic version of the revisionary impulse evident in his lectures: in his verse as in his oratory, Douglass repeats an established tradition only to reconstitute it from the inside out. Consider the stanza

from the poem's outset:

> This horrible plot these frightful disclosures!
> To murder the fathers and capture the daughters!
> With Liberty to Death as the watchword of all,
> Would have sunk the whole South in a murderous thrall.
> ("TTJ," 127)

Douglass's rattled tyrant is bemoaning the possible event of slavery's overturning, a prospect that continued to haunt the South's planter-capitalists throughout the antebellum era because of the uprisings led by slaves such as Nat Turner and Denmark Vessey. But he is also reacting quite specifically to a set of "frightful disclosures" from the fall and winter of 1856. According to newspaper reports, circulated rumors, and trial transcripts, a massive number of slaves across the South and the Mid-Atlantic – from Texas to Virginia, and from Florida up through Maryland – planned, and partly executed, a series of revolts designed to topple America's slave system. According to many accounts, the slaves planned on launching these rebellions on either Election Day or Christmas. In November and December, as these disclosures – and the slaveholders' reactionary violence – began to proliferate, the *New York Times* began running a regular series of articles titled "The Slave Troubles." *The Richmond Enquirer*, while refusing to acknowledge the full scope of the rebellion, asserted on December 18 that "[a]ll at once, in Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas," there are "simultaneous manifestations of an insubordinate spirit among the slave population." What worried reporters such as the *Enquirer*'s was the patent complexity of the revolts, which appeared to indicate "the prevalence of a common impulse, which is the result of some common cause": "These are not the wild and visionary projects with which Negroes may be disposed to amuse themselves in the most quiet communities, but [. . . are instead] maturely prepared, and in some instances [. . .] partially executed."[222]

In three different states, slaves managed to stockpile arms. Some drew up plans to destroy bridges and thereby impede the movement of the South's militias. Others cut telegraph wires, or attacked iron mills (which, in Kentucky, employed slaves by the thousands). And in Virginia, some slaves may have even composed a provisional Constitution that contained articles of free self-government. By January of 1857, however, almost all of these rebellions had been crushed. The suspected slaves were either executed, locked up in prisons, or punished by whipping. Considering these events and their aftermath, Herbert Aptheker, in his great study of antebellum slave revolts, identifies 1856 as a year of "tremendous servile unrest" and of almost unprecedented collective action.[223] Whether these insurrections flowed chiefly from the political unconscious of the slaveholding South (distilling their collective anxieties into a conspiratorial fantasy that justified their own violent authority), or whether they were in fact the misconstrued, heroic acts of insurrectionary slaves planning on their own accord, the fact is that the *idea* of this massive revolt captured the country's imagination late in 1856, precisely when the Supreme Court was deciding the case in *Dred Scott v. Sandford.* It is this confluence between revolt and exclusion, between legal violence and its extra-legal overturning, that Douglass explores in "The Tyrants' Jubilee!"

When we return to the anxious words of Douglass's slaveholder, we find that, in reflecting on the "horrible plot[s]," he reiterates his class's most deep-seated fears. But Douglass at the same time undoes these thoughts and beliefs in the poem's form, contesting the tyrant's interpretation of these

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222 *The Richmond Enquirer*, December 18, 1856.

223 Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1993), 348-9, 345.

rebellions in and through the verse's structure. The final line of the above stanza ("Would have sunk the whole South in a murderous thrall") commences with two slow anapests, but then, in the very moment of imagined revolt (after the word "South"), speeds up with three iambic beats. Repeating a controlled pattern that then collapses, the tyrant's words are subjected to the superior "thrall" of Douglass's aesthetic power. Douglass here is positing a second degree of ironic distance from his lyric speaker: while the rhythm and the content of the lines reiterate the slaveholder's anxiety, the metric pattern of the stanza (repeated uniformly, then reversed) testifies to a greater force or agency beyond the tyrant's violent authority. The South's narrative about the slaves, according to which every slave "plot" involves unjust violence and irrational impulses, thereby gives way – at least in the space of the poem's structure, and in the philosophical content of the concluding stanzas – to a very different sense of history, according to which time is propelled through generative upheavals.

As Douglass's fiery text develops out from its initial meditations, history itself becomes the poem's chief subject. Both before and after the tyrant's subjective transformation, the revolts and conspiracies of 1856 index broader temporal laws that touch on questions about repression, reprisal, and insight:

> Our sacred firesides, beaming with affection,
> Might be sunk in a flash, by fierce insurrection;
> In one single night that fiend of desolation
> Might spread his black wings in every direction.
> ("TTJ," 130)

The slaves' struggle, the tyrant laments, is both unceasing and intermittent: just as their desire for liberty cannot be expunged, their periodic acts of "fierce insurrection" cannot be predicted. The plantation is thus akin to a volcanic crater, which "[m]ight be sunk in a flash." Douglass's eruptive sense of time recalls, of course, the geologic figures for upheaval in Melville's poems: the crust in "The Apparition" that gives lie to one's assumptions; the gorges in "Misgivings" that swallow up the nation's plaintive "shouts"; and the mountains and valleys of *Clarel*, which register history's dispassionate, destructive spirit. As political poets, both Melville and Douglass are simultaneously fascinated and troubled by the links between violence and tragic knowledge. Through the medium of their unstable verse, they both discern in past rebellions and in the changes of the earth evidence of time's "core of fire below."

The manner in which these authors understand and represent this volatile "core," however, differs considerably. Whereas time in Melville's poetry tends to unfold as a series of tragic repetitions and regressive cycles, for Douglass history is, although decidedly non-teleological, at least arced towards progress, however constitutively broken and incomplete. In his poetic acts, an eruptive drive on the part of the oppressed emerges as history's inner principle, not in the Hegelian sense of a *Geist*, or unitary reason, but in the sense of a continuous improvisational impulse. This understanding of time, which draws on the chronometrics of Christian mythology but insists on the past's residues and broken claims, helps us grasp how and why Douglass first presents "The Tyrants' Jubilee!" in an 1857 lecture about the *Dred Scott* decision. Let us return, then, in these concluding remarks, to the oratorical context of Douglass's poem.

After quoting his two stanzas about the "pathway of tyrants" and time's "wild conflagrations," Douglass offers a fascinating historical assessment. "By all laws of [. . .] progress," he claimed, "slavery is a *doomed* system. Not all the skills of politicians, North and South, not all the sophistries of Judges, not all the fulminations of a corrupt press, not all the hypocritical prayers, or the hypocritical refusals to pray of a hollow-hearted priesthood, not all the devices of sin and Satan, can save the vile thing from extermination" (*FD*, 350; my emphasis). Douglass thus reacts to the Supreme Court's pro-

slavery opinion by insisting on slavery's imminent demise. While this seemingly counter-intuitive assertion was a fairly common feature of abolitionist rhetoric, in Douglass's case it springs not from some abstract faith in millenarian eschatology, or from some technocratic belief in time's even progression, but from his own sense that the world is structured by the priority of a *poiēsis* over the *ratio*. Laws and nations, he suggests in his poems, orations, and autobiographies, are – like memories – governed by a revisionary, improvisational spirit. Born from breaks that exceed reason's instruments, history's "true life principle" is that of perpetual renewal through re-creation.

In the *Dred Scott* speech, Douglass consequently challenges Judge Taney not through mere legal reasoning but by disputing the political memory upon which he bases his judgment. Taney maintained in his majority opinion that history contains the law's truth, and that African Americans "had, for more than a century, been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and unfit associates for the white race, either socially or politically, and had no rights which white men are bound to respect; and the black man might be reduced to slavery, bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise. This opinion, at that time, was fixed and universal with the civilized portion of the white race."[224] In his response, Douglass offers a powerful counter-commemorative correction to this flawed historical narrative. Reversing Taney's story, Douglass asserts that far from being codified in the nation's founding documents, slavery has from 1787 onward been "in open violation of [. . .] all the objects set forth in the Constitution" and of its ethical core. "The argument," continues Douglass, "that the Constitution comes down to us from a slaveholder period and a slaveholding people; and that, therefore, we are bound to suppose that the Constitution recognizes colored persons of African descent [. . .] as debarred forever from all participation" in the republic, neglects the real, if nonetheless hidden, history of the nation's egalitarian origins (*FD*, 355). At "the time of the adoption of the Constitution, the leading religious denominations in this land were anti-slavery, and were laboring for the emancipation of the colored people of African descent. The church of a country is often a better index of the state of opinion and feeling than is even the government itself." The Founders themselves were abolitionists without knowing it: they "looked for the gradual but certain abolition of slavery, and shaped the constitution with a view to this grant result" (*FD*, 355-6).

What Taney cannot grasp, and what Douglass insists upon, is the existence of an immaterial force – a dynamic *poiēsis* geared towards freedom – that precedes the law, and even exceeds it. History itself is propelled by this spirit of non-determination and non-coercion, which is why Douglass prefaces his challenge to Taney by quoting his own poetry. These eight lines – at once sad and triumphant, replete with the experience of trauma and of deferred redemption – enable one to feel and perceive the fall of slavery before the fact of its accomplishment. Activating what Saidiya Hartman terms "the redressive capacities of memory," Douglass's stanzas reframe the actions of these martyred slaves (either "shot," "hanged," "burned," or executed "under the lash") as central not only to the nation's story but to the shape of time itself ("The Time of Slavery," 758). Distilling the lessons of this massive revolt, the tyrant's final, elegiac lines shift from the past tense to the conditional in order to discern a pattern in history's events. And the pattern they evoke is, at heart, that of an irrepressible *poiēsis* which, in its varied and broken returns, attempts to free the future from the past's oppressions.

Long after Taney's *Dred Scott* decision, Douglass would claim that time is neither neutral nor empty but, rather, "on our side"; it "cooperates, with all honest efforts, to lift up the down-trodden and oppressed in all lands, whether the oppressed be white or black." This is not because time coheres around a single endpoint, but because it is the issue of conflict and desire. Through Douglass's political aesthetics, we find that time is counter-memory writ large: apprehended only when remade, it is the eruptive return of the forgotten, retrieving that which has either obsolesced or never came to be. His poetics is, ultimately, a poetics not only of suspension and disarray but also of positive struggle and re-

224 Taney, "Opinion of the Court," 61.

creation. And this, perhaps more than anything else, is what it means to create poetry in the service of freedom: to slip into and out of time; to shuttle both between and beyond the rigid poles of waiting and reawakening; and to give voice to a subaltern *kairos* that, like the illuminated body of a slain bard, brushes fictions of unitary time against the grain.

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