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# Communities of death: Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, and the nineteenth-century American culture of mourning and memorializing

Adam Cunliffe Bradford University of Iowa

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# COMMUNITIES OF DEATH: WALT WHITMAN, EDGAR ALLAN POE, AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN CULTURE OF MOURNING AND MEMORIALIZING

by

Adam Cunliffe Bradford

## An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

July 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Ed Folsom

This dissertation examines the way the work of two nineteenth-century American authors, Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe, borrowed from, challenged, and even worked to support prevailing cultural attitudes, conventions, and ideas regarding death, mourning and memorializing as they produced their poems and tales, articulated their thoughts regarding the purpose and act of producing and reading literature, and designed their material book or magazine objects. Using both new historicist and book studies methodologies, it exposes how these writers drew upon literary, ritual, and material practices of this culture, and how, in turn, this culture provided an interpretive framework for understanding such work.

In its initial three chapters, which focus largely on Edgar Allan Poe, this dissertation revisits Poe's aesthetic philosophies ("The Poetic Principle" and "The Philosophy of Composition"), much of his most notable Gothic work (such as "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven"), readers' responses to this work, and his own attempts or designs to mass-produce his personal script (in "A Chapter on Autography," "Anastatic Printing," and his cover for *The Stylus*) in order to revise our understanding of his relationship to this culture and its literary work, exposing a more sympathetic and less subversive relationship than is usually assumed. It illumines how Poe's aesthetic philosophies were aligned with those that undergird many of the contemporary mourning objects of the day, how his otherwise Gothic and macabre literature nevertheless served rather conventional and even recuperative ends by exposing the necessity of and inviting readers to participate in culturally sanctioned acts of mourning, and how he sought to confirm the harmony between his work and more conventional "consolation" or mourning literature by actively seeking to bring that work (and the "self" that produced it) visibly before his readership in a medium that this culture held was a reliable indicator of the nature and intent of both that work and its producer – namely his own personal script.

In its latter three chapters, this dissertation illuminates Whitman's own extensive use of mourning and memorial conventions in his work, disclosing the way his 1855 *Leaves of Grass* relied, in both its literary and physical construction, upon the conventions of mourning and memorial literature, detailing the way his 1865 book of Civil War poetry *Drum-Taps* sought to unite a national body politic by creating a poetic and material text capable of allowing a grieving public readership to reconnect with and successfully mourn their dead, and how his 1876 *Two Rivulets*, overtly conceived of as a memorial volume, made use of the conventions associated with mourning and memorializing to bring readers to a more democratic understanding of "self" that Whitman believed would transform America into the democratic utopia it was destined to become.

In revealing the way in which these authors' works reflect and reflect upon this culture, its ideologies, rituals, and practices, the dissertation also illumines an otherwise critically underexplored connection between these two writers. It details the influence of Poe's work on Whitman's poetic project, and borrows from Whitman's critical response to Poe in order to recast our understanding of Poe's literature in the manner detailed above. Thus, this dissertation offers new interpretations of some of the period's most canonical literature, alters our thinking about the relationship of these authors to each other and to nineteenth-century sentimental culture, and, finally, exposes a curious interdependence between Gothic and more transcendental literature that has implications not only for reading the work of Whitman and Poe, but for interpreting these literatures more generally.

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## Graduate College The University of Iowa Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

	PH.D. THESIS
This is to certify	that the Ph.D. thesis of
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has been approve Doctor of Philoso	d by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the ophy degree in English at the July 2010 graduation.
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To Tiffany, Noah, Isa	ac, Lucy, and Ja	mes – with my away	y apologies fo	or too many ho	ours spent

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the way the work of two nineteenth-century American authors, Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe, borrowed from, challenged, and even worked to support prevailing cultural attitudes, conventions, and ideas regarding death, mourning and memorializing as they produced their poems and tales, articulated their thoughts regarding the purpose and act of producing and reading literature, and designed their material book or magazine objects. Using both new historicist and book studies methodologies, it exposes how these writers drew upon literary, ritual, and material practices of this culture, and how, in turn, this culture provided an interpretive framework for understanding such work.

In its initial three chapters, which focus largely on Edgar Allan Poe, this dissertation revisits Poe's aesthetic philosophies ("The Poetic Principle" and "The Philosophy of Composition"), much of his most notable Gothic work (such as "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven"), readers' responses to this work, and his own attempts or designs to mass-produce his personal script (in "A Chapter on Autography," "Anastatic Printing," and his cover for *The Stylus*) in order to revise our understanding of his relationship to this culture and its literary work, exposing a more sympathetic and less subversive relationship than is usually assumed. It illumines how Poe's aesthetic philosophies were aligned with those that undergird many of the contemporary mourning objects of the day, how his otherwise Gothic and macabre literature nevertheless served rather conventional and even recuperative ends by exposing the necessity of and inviting readers to participate in culturally sanctioned acts of mourning, and how he sought to confirm the harmony between his work and more conventional "consolation" or mourning literature by actively seeking to bring that work (and the "self" that produced it) visibly before his readership in a medium that this culture held was a reliable indicator of the nature and intent of both that work and its producer – namely his own personal script.

In its latter three chapters, this dissertation illuminates Whitman's own extensive use of mourning and memorial conventions in his work, disclosing the way his 1855 *Leaves of Grass* relied, in both its literary and physical construction, upon the conventions of mourning and memorial literature, detailing the way his 1865 book of Civil War poetry *Drum-Taps* sought to unite a national body politic by creating a poetic and material text capable of allowing a grieving public readership to reconnect with and successfully mourn their dead, and how his 1876 *Two Rivulets*, overtly conceived of as a memorial volume, made use of the conventions associated with mourning and memorializing to bring readers to a more democratic understanding of "self" that Whitman believed would transform America into the democratic utopia it was destined to become.

In revealing the way in which these authors' works reflect and reflect upon this culture, its ideologies, rituals, and practices, the dissertation also illumines an otherwise critically underexplored connection between these two writers. It details the influence of Poe's work on Whitman's poetic project, and borrows from Whitman's critical response to Poe in order to recast our understanding of Poe's literature in the manner detailed above. Thus, this dissertation offers new interpretations of some of the period's most canonical literature, alters our thinking about the relationship of these authors to each other and to nineteenth-century sentimental culture, and, finally, exposes a curious interdependence between Gothic and more transcendental literature that has implications not only for reading the work of Whitman and Poe, but for interpreting these literatures more generally.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Sometime in the early morning hours of Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe died of unknown causes in Baltimore's Washington University Hospital.<sup>1</sup> His body was washed by the attendants there and most likely wrapped in a death shroud donated by his attending physician's wife, Mrs. J. J. Moran.<sup>2</sup> His cousin, Neilson Poe, and an uncle, Henry Herring, began making preparations for the funeral which was to take place the next day. They may have visited the hospital to view Edgar's remains and procure locks of his hair – a custom quite common during the time period – but this is, unfortunately, speculative.<sup>3</sup> What is certain is that on October 8, 1849, Poe's body was placed in a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>There are three main theories regarding the death of Poe. The "alcohol" theory which claims that Poe died from the effects of a drinking spree, the "disease" theory which claims that Poe must have been suffering from some sort of "brain fever" or tumor, and the "cooping" theory which claims that Poe was probably plied with liquor and pressed into voting multiple times throughout the area as local elections were taking place the day he was found incapacitated outside Ryan's Tavern – site of Baltimore's Fourth Ward Polls – on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1849.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Unfortunately we have few reliable accounts of what occurred at the time of Poe's death and in the hours immediately following until Neilson Poe, Edgar's cousin, arrived at the hospital some time that morning and began making preparations for disposal of the body. Moran asserted that his wife produced Edgar's shroud – an assertion that was never countered by Neilson Poe who was alive when it was made. Moran's various accounts are contradictory and become seemingly less and less impartial as they are told. See "Official Memoranda of the Death of Edgar A. Poe," *A Defense of Edgar Allan Poe*, and "[Letter to Maria Clemm]."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A lock of Poe's hair that belonged to the Herring family eventually came into the possession of the Poe Society of Baltimore and is currently kept at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. Other locks of hair are known to reside in the Richard Gimbel collection of the Philadephia Free Library, the Poe Foundation in Richmond Virginia and a second lock again in the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Others are known to exist but these lie in private collections. In his later narratives of Poe's death, Moran claims that after Poe died he was "placed in state in the large rotunda of the college building, where hundreds of friends and admirers came in crowds to pay their last tribute of respect to the deceased. Not less than fifty ladies were each furnished, at their earnest solicitations, with a small lock of his beautiful black hair. His body was kept in the rotunda for one whole day. On the morning of the 9th he was buried in the Westminster buryingground, corner of Fayette and Green Streets, Baltimore, it being the old family burial ground of the Poes. A large number of our citizens, many of the most distinguished and prominent literary and professional men, followed the remains to their sepulture" (Moran, "Official Memoranda," 4). Unfortunately, this account is in err in many regards. Poe could not have possibly lain in state on the 8th, as this was the day he was buried – the day immediately following his death. No record of any crowds visiting the hospital exist in the rather reliable records of Neilson Poe, or those of the others who helped make arrangements to dispose of the body. Certainly, the assertion that "a large number of citizens, many of the most distinguished and

simple mahogany coffin purchased by his uncle, loaded into a black hearse contracted by his cousin for the occasion, and driven to the burial grounds of Baltimore's Westminster Presbyterian Church, where he was interred. The late fall day was described by one as somewhat "raw and threatening" (Phillips 1510), and this, combined with the few numbers present, may be why the Reverend W.T.D. Clemm deferred from preaching a funeral sermon, opting merely to pronounce the burial rights instead (Silverman 436). Those in attendance were remarkably few, consisting of Neilson Poe, Henry and Elizabeth Herring, Reverend Clemm (Virginia's cousin), Z. Collins Lee (a University of Virginia classmate), Dr. J.D. Snodgrass (a business associate), and Joseph Clarke (one of Poe's old schoolmasters). The cemetery sexton and the gravedigger stood nearby. According to one account, the services themselves lasted no more than a few minutes and the coffin was covered over with dirt directly afterward (Clark, 2). It was a funeral "utterly without ostentation," as the good Reverend Clemm put it, and was marked more by practicality than performance – focused largely, so it seems, on the necessity of getting Poe's body underground (as qtd. in Thomas, "Poe" 849).

While Poe's funeral and the preparation of his body which preceded it seem rather plain and unremarkable, they are, nevertheless, significant in many regards – most particularly for the way in which they fail to embrace many of the common practices associated with death, mourning, and memorializing that marked the time period. The fact that Poe was taken to Washington University Hospital instead of to the home of one of his Baltimore relatives foreshadows this. When Poe's uncle, Henry Herring, was summoned to the tavern and polling place where Poe was ostensibly incapacitated, he decided to convey Poe not to his own dwelling, but rather to a public hospital – something which raised feelings of "resentment" in Poe's business associate J.D.

Snodgrass.<sup>4</sup> The likely reason for the resentment is that, as Gary Laderman has noted, during the antebellum era "many of the poor died in the street, in almshouses or public hospitals," where they were generally without the "attention...[of a] living network of friends or relatives who could afford to care" for them in more conventional ways and circumstances (41). Comforting those members of one's family that were sick or dying within the walls of one's own home was an obligation, if not a welcome duty, in the antebellum era, but it was one that Herring declined to accept.

Herring's failure to adhere more closely to the social conventions surrounding the nursing of family when sick was seemingly perpetuated once Poe died; and opportunities to care for his body in more conventional ways were left untaken as well. For example, Dr. Moran's assertion that the hospital staff laid out the body and that his wife made Poe's shroud is remarkable in that "preparing the body [for burial] was a duty for the close living relations of the deceased, and they rarely hesitated to participate in these activities. The intimacy that survivors maintained with the corpse preserved it, at least until the actual interment, as evidence of a valuable, and vital, social relation" (Laderman 29). In other words, burial shrouds were usually "made by friends and relatives" as a means of demonstrating fidelity and expressing love – something testified to during the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Snodgrass claimed that on hearing Herring's suggestion that Poe should be taken from the tavern to a public hospital instead of his own dwelling he "must confess, he felt resentful towards [Poe's] friend" (Snodgrass 284). The only explanation we have for Poe not being taken to the home of Henry Herring or Neilson Poe is in the just quoted account of J.D. Snodgrass who was not shy about using Poe's death as temperance propaganda. In his version of the story, he claims that Herring suggested that perhaps a hospital was a better location than a tavern given Poe's condition. Snodgrass asserts that, "I admitted the correctness of this suggestion. But, some remark of mine having caused his relative to explain why he had not suggested a still better place – his own dwelling – he stated the reason to be, that Mr. Poe had 'so frequently abused his hospitality by the rudeness as well as vulgarity of his bearing while drunk, toward the ladies of his household,' that he 'couldn't think, for a moment, of taking him to his house in his present besotted condition" (Snodgrass, 284). Despite Snodgrass's political use of Poe's death to propagandize the cause of temperance, I see no reason to doubt his sincerity when he states that sending Poe to a public hospital caused him to feel resentment. Even should the statement be false, it is a telling one nonetheless, for it indexes a sentiment widely held by its readership, that the sick or injured are best nursed and cared for in the home-space, surrounded by loving relatives. Something unquestionably, and still unaccountably, denied to Poe.

process of "laying out" the body as well. It was generally friends or loved ones that "ritually washed, shaved if necessary, then dressed the corpse...and finally placed it in a coffin" as a means of testifying to the value of the deceased (29). Neither Henry Herring, nor Neilson Poe, nor either of their wives participated in such conventions when Edgar died, leaving them to be carried out by those who were associated with the hospital.

The rather hasty burial of Poe's remains is also remarkable, and ironic, for it was customary at this time period for the body of the deceased "to remain in the home for a period of one to three days under constant surveillance, especially at night....Close relatives, friends, volunteers, or sometimes hired help participated in the vigil over the dead....This type of activity allowed the survivors to be sure that death had definitely occurred, thus erasing the possibility of live burial, a prevalent concern at the time....
[But it also created a] bond and sense of togetherness to counteract the fissure created by the death of a community member" (Laderman 31). Although such a "wake" could presumably have been held in the home of either Henry Herring or Neilson Poe, for reasons unknown or unclear it simply wasn't, and the man who had fueled the cultural fear of premature burial was himself not afforded the customary three days wake to ensure that he was not – as he depicted so vividly in his literature – prematurely buried.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that if such a wake had occurred, there might have been more mourners at Poe's funeral. He had lived much of his adult life in the public eye and was a known figure in Baltimore, but, given the hastiness with which he was buried, most of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> I do not wish to raise the possibility that Poe was prematurely interred. He was, after all, pronounced dead by a professional physician. Conducting a "wake" for medical reasons was therefore probably unnecessary, but conducting one for social reasons seems as if it would have been appropriate under the circumstances. Poe's work is rife with references to premature burial which appear in some form or another in stories such as "Loss of Breath," "The Cask of Amontillado," "Berenice," "Ligeia," "Morella," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Black Cat," "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket," and of course, "The Premature Burial."

newspapers announced his death only after his burial had occurred.<sup>6</sup> A few days delay might have made the funeral into a more respectably attended affair.

It is difficult to know the precise reasons why the Herrings and the Poes declined to house Edgar during his illness, care for his body in more conventional ways after death, and take advantage of the full range of social rituals and conventions available to them for mourning and memorializing their nephew and cousin. And any attempt to assign reasons would only inject more speculation into a series of events already rife with them. What appears certain, however, is that for one of the nineteenth-century's most prolific authors, the social conventions that surrounded death and dying – those which the larger culture believed could aid in the process of mourning and ensure a proper memorializing of the dead – were employed meagerly at best in the moments following his death. Neither death masks nor casts of the writer's hand were made, no post-mortem photos or portraits were taken, no grave markers lovingly commissioned. Instead, in what seems a rather surreptitious manner for the day, Poe's body was interred with "the clods and stones resounding off the coffin lid" (Snodgrass 284). Without a tomb, or so much as even a headstone, Poe's remains lay virtually unmarked for nearly twenty-six years, "bequeath[ed]...to the dirt to grow from the grass" that eventually covered that grave in its entirety (Whitman, *Poetry*, 88).<sup>7</sup>

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The only newspaper that I have been able to locate which announces Poe's death prior to his funeral (and this is still a somewhat speculative assertion as I have been unable to confirm when this paper was actually distributed to the public) is the Baltimore *Sun*'s article which is quoted in full in Arthur Quinn's *Edgar Allan Poe*. However, it appears that this article contains no reference as to the place of his death, the arrangements for the funeral or any other announcement that might aid one who desired to attend the funeral to do so. Other notices quickly followed with the Baltimore *Clipper* and the New York *Journal of Commerce* as well as Philadelphia's *Public Ledger* and *Pennsylvanian* publishing their accounts on the 9<sup>th</sup>. This was also, of course, the day when Horace Greeley's New York *Daily Tribune* published Rufus Griswold's notorious obituary under the pseudonym "Ludwig." For further reference see Quinn, pg. 644-647.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Hereafter *PP*. I do not wish to indict either Neilson Poe or Henry Herring for the manner in which Poe's original funeral was carried out, or to imply, as Snodgrass did, that harsh feelings led to Poe's treatment. Poe and Neilson had quarreled in the past, with Poe calling him his "bitterest enemy" at one point, but this

It is, perhaps, ironic to be able to invoke one of the most powerful and familiar images of another of the nineteenth-century's poets, Walt Whitman, in order to describe the burial of Edgar Allan Poe. However, it is an invocation both appropriate and perhaps necessary – especially when one pauses to consider that Whitman never did "bequeath" himself "to the dirt to grow from the grass [he] love[d]" (88). Despite lacing his poetry with images of bodies, including his own, being deposited within the earth and transmuting into "the beautiful hair of uncut graves," Whitman had himself entombed above ground, in a large granite crypt. The story of Whitman's own death and burial thus becomes as equally compelling and remarkable as the story of Poe's but for virtually opposite reasons. If Poe's death, funeral, and burial are remarkable for their scanty reliance upon contemporary social conventions and rituals surrounding death, mourning, and memorializing, then Whitman's are all the more remarkable for the way in which they did rely on the very conventions that he seemed to scoff at.

As early as 1855, Whitman's writing privileges what might be termed a transcendental and naturalist approach to death and burial that seemingly has little to do with social convention and ritual. Throughout his 1855 edition of *Leaves* Whitman strikes

apparent breach had been seemingly rectified. Snodgrass's comment that Herring had deferred to care more conventionally for Poe due to past abuses cannot, unfortunately, be totally trusted (for reasons explained in the previous footnote). To Neilson Poe's credit, he did attempt, some years later to procure a headstone to mark Poe's grave when it was brought to his attention that it was overgrown with grass and weeds and in danger of being virtually forgotten. Unfortunately this headstone was destroyed in a railway accident before being installed and Neilson Poe refrained from having another one made. However, none of this detracts from the point that Poe's care during his final illness and the preparations made for his funeral seemingly maintained the minimum social conventions necessary to conform to propriety (and according to some, such as Snodgrass and Colonel J. Alden Weston - who, as a young man had watched the funeral from outside the gates and later claimed that "the burial ceremony, which did not occupy more than three minutes, was so cold-blooded and unchristianlike as to provoke on my part a sense of anger difficult to suppress" – seemingly failed to do even this) (Clark, 2). Certainly those involved deferred from taking advantage of the full range of rituals and mourning practices that were intended not only to aid mourners in their grief, but to ensure proper respect, veneration, and memorialization of the dead. For more info about Neilson Poe's attempt to procure a headstone for Poe's grave in 1860 see J.C. Miller, Building Poe Biography. For more information about Snodgrass's response to Poe's funeral please see Snodgrass.

a tone towards death, corpses, and burial that is remarkably different from more conventional attitudes. However, when Whitman began making plans for his own corpse and burial, those plans were in many ways surprisingly conventional ones. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1889, Whitman was approached by associates from Camden's Harleigh Cemetery and offered a plot in exchange for a poem. The poem was apparently never written, but the plot was given to Whitman anyway, probably in hopes of raising the cemetery's public profile. On Christmas Eve of that year Whitman, escorted by one of the cemetery's engineers, Ralph Moore, selected a plot on a wooded hillside (eschewing the surrounding lawns), and began making plans for his tomb. He selected a design based upon William Blake's drawing *Death's Door* (fig. 39) – a massive set of granite posts with a heavy lintel atop. Whitman added to this a triangular granite pediment. He chose to have the granite on the exterior left rough-hewn, and the ponderous crypt emerged, standing approximately twelve feet at its apex, looking something like a primitive Greek temple cast in miniature. The crypt was spacious enough for eight vaults arranged in two rows. On its frieze was to be carved in bas relief, "Walt Whitman." Its mass, its color, its architecture, and its wooded location all make it into something that could easily appear in one of Poe's gothic tales, but it would not have found a place in any of Whitman's poems (fig. 38). The final bill for the tomb was something in the

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While for most, "the corpse had a sacred quality greatly determined by its liminality" and was seen as "an irreducible object that evoked feelings of dread, fear, and resignation, as well as reverence, respect, and hope" for Whitman it was, most succinctly, "good manure, but that does not offend me" (Laderman 27, *PP* 86). In Whitman's conceptualization of death and burial, the natural processes of dying and decomposition inevitably begets life, and the corpse signifies to the infinite progression and recirculation of matter. The soul seemingly "depart[s] as air" while the flesh in "effuse[d]...in eddies and drift[s] in lacy jags" (88). Whitman's literary representations of death and dying, and his attitudes towards the corpse in particular are obviously radical in relation to more conventional nineteenth century attitudes which treated the corpse as a liminal object to be venerated, but also to some extent feared. For more information see Laderman *Sacred Remains* ("Introduction").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See WWWC 6:175.

neighborhood of four-thousand dollars, and Whitman was "criticized for its ostentation" (Canby, 350). For the man whose "barbaric yawp" had seemingly defied such conventions, the tomb seemed at the very least uncharacteristic, prompting one of Whitman's disciples, John Townsend Trowbridge, to voice what many were likely thinking, "That such a man should have cared about his tomb, anyway, or have hoarded money for it ... is something heart-sickening" (as qtd. in Kaplan, 50). <sup>11</sup>

While many of Whitman's disciples debated the "consistency and wisdom" of his tomb given the principles they felt were at the core of his writing, to Whitman the tomb had "a specific purpose—a purpose clear in my own mind, however it may have been mysterious to other people" (WWWC 9:1, 142). As explained to Traubel, "I had no view but this: that a few of us—my father, mother, some very dear friends—should be put there together. A plan persisted in, whatever the hesitations, doubts" (WWWC 9:1, 142). While Whitman never again mentioned the idea of having "friends" buried in his vault, he did set about making plans to gather together his family – uniting them in death in ways they never really were while living. While the crypt had vaults for at least eight occupants, only six were eventually put to use. Whitman gave specific directions for occupancy, "the first is to be my father's, the ultimate my mother's, and I am to be between...it may be [the] upper or lower [set of vaults] either way, but that arrangement"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See also WWWC 9:94, 140, 322, 399, 410.

<sup>11</sup> Traubel commented on the fact that Whitman's tomb was rankling his friends, recording in late 1891 that Walt "rarely speaks of the tomb nowadays. Is conscious, I think in a way, that his friends suspect its consistency and wisdom" (WWWC 9:1, also see 9:86, 123, 391 for other examples of this). In all fairness to Whitman it should be said that the final bill for the tomb staggered him, and he professed that no such cost was represented to him when he signed the contract to have it built (the contract later produced by Ralph Moore for Horace Traubel showed an agreed upon cost of \$ 4,678) (see WWWC 8:290). Feeling he had been cheated, and that the cost was tipped in to the document after being signed, Whitman employed the help of friends such as Horace Traubel and Thomas Harned in order to renegotiate the terms of the contract. For more information see WWWC 9:25,146-7, 149,164,165, 168, 173, 181, 208-9, 259-60, 490-91, 506 and of especial note is 9:142-144. See also Loving, 479.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Justin Kaplan makes a similar point. See Kaplan (Chapter 2, "Burial House").

(WWWC, 8:245). The others he left for his brother Eddie, his brother George, and George's wife Louisa and their infant son Walt who were to share a coffin and vault.

On Saturday March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1892, at 6:43 in the evening, after a protracted and painful wasting due to tuberculosis, Whitman died, his hand in that of Horace Traubel. The image is apropos, for Whitman left much in the hands of Traubel and the other Whitman disciples. Whitman had tried to oversee what was important to him, reuniting his family after death, but the funeral he left to them. He told Traubel, "This [the plot and tomb] I deliberately select, with a serious end in view," as for the rest, "What comes then is not to be worried over" (WWWC 6:212).

Horace Traubel, Maurice Bucke, and others of Whitman's friends took control after Whitman's death. They brought in Whitman's friend and renowned artist Thomas Eakins to make a memorial death-mask and a plaster cast of Whitman's hand. In a curious twist, they also had an autopsy performed and donated Whitman's brain to the American Anthropometric Society. They laid out Whitman's body and held vigil for the traditional three days wake period until at about 10:40 on the morning of Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, when they opened Whitman's home at 328 Mickle Street for a public viewing. The turn-out gives evidence not only of Whitman's notoriety in and around Camden, but reveals the facility with which local society could use the death of one of its conspicuous members to bring together the community and foster a sense of social cohesion – something Whitman would very much have enjoyed despite the conventionality that precipitated it:

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Whitman had approved of this detail prior to his death, most likely granting a request made by Daniel Longaker to have his brain removed, mapped, and analyzed after death. This was the goal of the American Anthropometric Society – to create a catalogue of brains of the great thinkers of the nineteenth century in order to see if there was a scientific basis for their exceptionality. Whitman understood that by donating his brain to the society it would effectively be hardened, embalmed and preserved indefinitely – another instance of deferring bequeathing his body to the earth. While no one is precisely sure what the final state of Whitman's brain is, it was most likely mishandled and destroyed by Henry Cattel sometime after he removed the brain and before hardening had completed. For more information see Burrell.

This [first] group [of mourners and visitors] was followed by another, and these by others....The line grew longer and longer—it was silent, sympathetic, curious, expressive. It stretched out and up the street and then north through Fourth to the railroad—and it continued its reach and play for three hours till, at 1:50, we were compelled to stem and refuse it, in order to prepare for the cortege. Between twelve and one it took the simpler aspect of the laborers, off for their dinner hour. Letter carriers, policemen, railroadmen, ferrymen, school children, merchants—who was not included? I caught glimpses of tradesmen and familiar faces in all walks—men whom W. had known well and seen often and those to whom his kindness and gifts had added and stored precious affections. Said a ferryman out of the line to me, as I stood there, "I have a picture—a portrait—at home, just in the frame he gave it me in." Really spoken in eloquent tones of pride....several wreaths had been placed on or near the head of the coffin...and several other sprays, from persons known and unknown, one or two with touching notes attached... (WWWC 9:615-16)

The funeral service itself was a curious mix of the conventional and the radical. It was held under a covered pavilion and the speakers sat on a raised platform. People stood all around the tomb listening. Frances Howard Williams read the words of Confucius, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Isaiah, Plato, and also from the *Koran*, the *Book of Revelation*, the *Zend-Avesta*, and *Leaves of Grass*. Thomas Harned, Daniel Brinton, Maurice Bucke, and the famous atheist Robert Ingersoll spoke. Following the speakers, the pall bearers lifted his coffin and carried it into the tomb resting it on small trestles placed on the floor. <sup>14</sup> Two weeks later, on April 13<sup>th</sup>, the cemetery officials and undertaker re-entered the tomb, slid Whitman's coffin into the long narrow lower middle vault of the granite crypt according to his wishes, then mortared into place the polished granite plaque that denominated this particular vault as his – hermetically sealing away his remains as they did so ("Walt Whitman," *The Critic*). Whitman would never "grow into the grass" that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> For more information about Whitman's funeral see Traubel's "At Whitman's Grave" in *In Re Walt Whitman*. Many contemporary local newspapers and journals published accounts of Whitman's funeral as well. Please see "Walt Whitman" in *The Open Court, a Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea.* 6.241 (Apr 7, 1892) p. 1, "The Funeral" in *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 17.529 (Apr 9, 1892), p. 215, "Walt Whitman" in *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 17.531 (Apr 23, 1892), p. 245, "Personal" in *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* 5 (May 1892), p. 242., and "Personalia" in *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 17.530 (Apr 16, 1892), p. 231.

he loved, and so we "look for [him] under [our] bootsoles" in vain (*PP* 88); his promise that ended "Song of Myself" turned out literally to be a hollow one.

Given literary pronouncements such as my "corpse is good manure, / but that does not offend me" (86), one wonders if certain aspects of a burial such as Poe's, with the "clods and stones resounding off the coffin lid," might not have displayed the sort of "consistency and wisdom" that would have pleased Whitman's disciples, silenced his critics, and conformed to the depictions of death in *Leaves* (WWWC 9:1). But Whitman, as another of his famous poetic statements testified to, was not one to shy away from such contradictions. His desire to make use of such social conventions as securing burial in a family tomb testifies to his willingness to embrace the tensions that might exist between radical literary pronouncement and social convention in order to give shape and significance to his death, to ensure a sense of family connectedness after death, and to effectively preserve and protect his identity from an otherwise facile dissolution. On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1891, Whitman acknowledged the tension between his literary challenges to convention and his simultaneous belief in the necessity of his tomb, telling Traubel, "It will justify itself—the tomb is one of the institutions of this earth: little by little the reason will eke out. Yes, it is 'for reasons'" (WWWC 8:428).

Whitman's "reasons" for building himself a tomb may also have had something to do with Edgar Allan Poe. For twenty-six years, Poe's body had lain virtually unmarked in the burying ground at Westminster Presbyterian Cemetery. But on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1875, in the afternoon of a crisp, clear late autumn day in Baltimore, the decade-long work of Mrs. Sara Sigourney Rice, a local elocution teacher, reached its culmination.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> One also wonders if Whitman's tomb would not have been a more aproPo[e]s place for Edgar given the preponderance of tombs in his literature.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> As Whitman has famously proclaimed, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" (Whitman, *PP*, 67).

Rice, along with the help of the children of Baltimore and many donors from both the U.S. and abroad, had gathered enough money for a proper monument to be erected in a new and more conspicuous location within the burying grounds. These loyal supporters had Poe's body, along with those of his wife and cousin Virginia and her mother and his aunt Maria, placed beneath it. Although the bodies had lain there for a few days already, the 17<sup>th</sup> marked the day of the monument's dedication. Many public figures attended, mostly Baltimore dignitaries and professional men, but also the now "Judge" Neilson Poe. All the literary elites – Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Bryant, Swinburne, and Tennyson – were invited, and while all sent their kindest regards and fondest thoughts all declined to attend. The only American literatus there was the partially paralyzed Walt Whitman, still suffering the effects of his second stroke. He "consented to hobble up and silently take a seat on the platform" of speakers and dignitaries who had gathered to pay homage to Edgar Allan Poe (Specimen Days, 230). Whitman, though ailing, had taken the ferry from Washington to Baltimore, claiming that he had "felt a strong impulse to come over and be here to-day myself in memory of Poe, which I have obey'd, but not the slightest impulse to make a speech, which, my dear friends, must also be obeyed" (230). Certainly Whitman heard the story that day of how Poe's body had been "bequeath[ed]...to the dirt," how it had lain in obscurity for decades, and how it was now reclaimed and fittingly reunited with the remains of his loved ones under the large marble monument standing prominently in the front corner of the burial grounds – bringing his final resting place more into line not only with his literary reputation, but with contemporary burial conventions. Perhaps this experience got Whitman thinking of how he would like to shape his own burial – and of how he could make use of the social conventions surrounding death, mourning, and memorializing in ways that appealed to him.

What is certain is that shortly after attending Poe's reburial Whitman began to articulate publically the connections between his work and Poe's. Indeed, the day after Poe's reburial Whitman penned an article for the Washington *Evening Star* in which he investigated that relationship. It was an article that he would expand upon later in a piece of journalism for a New York literary magazine, *The Critic*, and finally include in *Specimen Days and Collect*. In the article as written for the *Evening Star*, Whitman claimed "I wanted, and still want for poetry, the clear sun shining, and fresh air blowing – the strength and power of health, not of delirium, even amid the stormiest passions – with always the background of the eternal moralities. Non-complying with these requirements, Poe's genius has yet conquer'd a special recognition for itself, and I too have come to fully admit it, and appreciate it and him. Even my own objections draw me to him at last; and those very points, with his sad fate, will make him dearer to young and fervid minds." ("Walt Whitman at the Funeral").

The reasons for Whitman's "appreciation," and the meaning of his otherwise strange claim that it was his "objections" to Poe's work that drew "me to him at last," became clearer in the 1882 article he wrote for *The Critic*. In this article, Whitman overtly acknowledged that what tied the two poets together was the way each of their projects grappled with what he called a "culture" of "morbidity" – a cultural preoccupation that he felt defined both the "age's matter and malady" (*Specimen Days* 158, 156). Whitman claimed that his and Poe's work, growing out of an antebellum culture obsessed with death, mourning, and memorializing, symptomatically reflects and reflects upon (or in Whitman's terms "present[s] the most mark'd indications of") "this disease" – this cultural "tendency... to morbidity" (158). In other words, Whitman believed that both his and Poe's work, as disparate as such work might otherwise appear

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Rollo Silver was the first to suggest that the style and the nature of the otherwise anonymous article were so Whitmanesque that it should be attributed to him. See Silver.

to be, was nevertheless marked by and intimately involved in responding to this "tendency...towards" or cultural preoccupation with "morbidity" (158). As Whitman went on to indicate, however, his favored literary response to such a cultural preoccupation was the creative depiction of "perfect and noble life, morally without flaw, happily balanced in activity, physically sound and pure, giving its due proportion, and no more, to the sympathetic, the human emotional element – a life, in all these, unhasting, unresting, untiring to the end," an apt description of the life-long project of *Leaves*, while Poe's response to such a culture of "morbidity" was a kind of excessive literary embracing of it according to Whitman, one nevertheless as equally valuable. As Whitman said, "to the character...[I have] outlined" (the depiction of life as "perfect and noble," "happily balanced," "sympathetic,...unhasting, unresting, untiring to the end"), "the service [that] Poe renders [in his work] is certainly that entire contrast and contradiction which is next best to fully exemplifying it? (157 emphasis mine). In short, despite the fact that Whitman had come to believe that Poe's work represented a complete contrast to his own, this very contrast – or as Whitman stated it in the *Evening* Star article, his "own objections" to Poe's work – were ultimately responsible for "draw[ing] me to him at last," because they indicated the ability of Poe's literature to form a kind of dark backdrop – a "contrast and contradiction" – against which Whitman felt he could better perceive the nature or character of the more beautiful, "perfect," perhaps even "transcendent" life that he was concerned with in his own writing ("Walt Whitman at the Funeral").

Arguably, it was this ability of Poe's otherwise dark and despondent Gothic literature to serve in this "contrast[ing] and contradict[ory]" way that accounted for the appreciative words Whitman ended his article with, claiming, as he did that the "nocturnal themes, [and] demoniac undertone behind every page" of Poe's poems and

stories nevertheless served "brilliant and dazzling" purposes, and thus "by final judgment belong among the electric lights of imaginative literature" (Specimen Days, 157). Similarly, its ability to serve in this way likely accounts for Whitman's otherwise curious inclusion of Poe among the list of those who influenced the creation of Leaves of Grass. 18 Indeed, in a late essay entitled "A Backward Glance O'er Well Traveled Roads," which first appeared in his 1888 book November Boughs (which one scholar has claimed represents "a November of the [poet's] soul, the self heading into winter and death"), Whitman set out to put on record before death silenced him the wide variety of influences that helped him create *Leaves of Grass* (Folsom, *Whitman*, 57). In the essay, Whitman claimed that prior to embarking on the creation of Leaves he read "Walter Scott...Shakespere, Ossian...Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, ...the Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo poems...Dante....[and] the Iliad" (Whitman, 893). He then ends this section with the following:

> Toward the last I had among much else look'd over Edgar Poe's poems – of which I was not an admirer, tho' I always saw that beyond their limited range of melody (like perpetual chimes of music bells, ringing from lower b flat up to g) they were melodious expressions, and perhaps never excell'd ones, of certain pronounc'd phases of human morbidity. (The Poetic area is very spacious – has room for all – has so many mansions!) (894)

This passage is significant, coming at the end of a long line of literary influences, because, when seen in light of the earlier article appearing in the Washington Evening Star, it indicates that Poe's "melodious expressions of certain pronounc'd phases of human morbidity" helped provoke or influence the creation of *Leaves of Grass* by functioning as something like a photographic negative, the *inverse* of what Whitman

<sup>18</sup> A fact I will return to in detail in Chapter 2. Also, by way of note, Whitman's comparison of Poe's work

to an "electric" light is especially apropos when one considers the fact that the "electric light" was used in the nineteenth-century primarily as a way to see "in the dark," so to speak. In calling Poe's work an "electric light" Whitman seems to be lauding it for the way in which it allows those things wrapped in

<sup>&</sup>quot;darkness" – such as death, despair, and despondency – to be perceived.

wished to see and represent in his own poetry — although as Whitman implies, it was only after coming into contact with Poe's poetry that he was able to fully articulate his own ideas. Thus, these articles suggest that it was Poe's work, at least in part, that spurred Whitman to shape his own response to contemporary ideas, attitudes, and rituals associated with death, and to do so in ways that were remarkably transcendent rather than similarly despondent — depicting death as a "mysterious process of spiritual evolution," rather than an event associated with horror and/or despair (Aspiz 1). As such, Whitman's poetry stands as a testament to the potential for Poe's otherwise morbid work to spawn not a corresponding morbidity on the part of a reader, but rather a greater desire to understand and articulate an ideal death and post-mortem existence. As Whitman's brilliant concluding pun—"The Poetic area is very spacious"—makes clear, the initially confining nature of Poe's work can open the reader up to large imaginings.

Whitman's experience reading the work of Poe is important not only for the way in which it suggests a surprising literary influence, but also because it provides the means through which to harmonize the fuller contours of Poe's aesthetic philosophies – which are intimately concerned with inspiring a reader (as they apparently did for Whitman) to "an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – with Gothic poems and tales that depict death in horrifying, macabre, and repulsive ways (Poe, *Complete Tales and Poems* 897). Critics have long seen these aspects of Poe's aesthetic philosophy as somewhat stilted and arbitrary when it comes to Poe's Gothic work, focusing on Poe's claim that it is the "effect" of reading that is paramount – looking quickly past what functions such an effect is supposed to have for a reader, and how these "effects" are connected to contemporary cultural concerns with death, dying, and memorializing. Whitman's response indicates the potential for otherwise "horrifying" literature to act

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Hereafter CTP.

redemptively by providing a dark antithesis against which one might better construct, understand, or articulate the ideal, and calls into question the role of Gothic horror in Poe's work and, perhaps, in Gothic writing in general.<sup>20</sup>

Reading Poe's otherwise Gothic literature in such a light is the project of the first two chapters. In them, I examine Poe's role as a "subverter" of contemporary cultural ideologies surrounding death, mourning, and memorializing, seeking to nuance and add to our understanding of the way Poe's literature engaged with a contemporary culture of mourning and memorializing in surprisingly innovative and even recuperative ways. In Chapter One, "Poe's Poetic Aesthetics: Inspiring Death," I conduct a close reading of Poe's aesthetic philosophy in context of the nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, and I propose that Poe generally conceptualized his literature as functioning in very much the way that Whitman experienced it. Although Poe's literary works are generally perceived as being "subversive" with respect to the culture's attitudes towards death, this subversion was, according to Poe's aesthetic design, intended to spur readers to a greater desire for and conceptualization of those transcendent "glories beyond the grave" (Poe 547).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> An examination of whether or not Gothic work might serve such a function more generally and explain the fascination of an otherwise generally conservatively Christian nineteenth-century American society with the horrifying, prurient, and macabre cannot be conducted here, but this project should, hopefully, point the way towards making such a broader argument in the future.

My reassessment of Poe's aesthetic philosophy places this dissertation into conversation with recent works on the subject such as David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* and Monica Pelaez's dissertation entitled "Sentiment and Experiment: Poe, Dickinson, and the Culture of Death in Nineteenth-Century America" which sees them as an experiment with Orientalist themes on the way towards a larger poetic subversion of cultural norms; and Terence Whalen's *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* and Meredith McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, *1834-1853* which see Poe's aesthetics as means of ensuring inclusion in a literary and cultural driven by the need for profit (all in Works Cited). For an excellent critical history of the major interpretations of Poe's aesthetic philosophy see Voloshin.

Chapter Two, "Horrifying (Re)Inscriptions: Poe's Gothic Tales and the 'Effects' of Reading," examines several of Poe's Gothic tales to see how they conform to the aesthetic philosophy as explored in Chapter One. Through several close readings of individual tales, and through an investigation of the nature of readers' responses, this chapter investigates the possibility that Poe's Gothic tales, like his otherwise "morbid" poems, worked recuperatively for many readers, inspiring them to a greater desire for more conventional constructions, rituals, and practices by depicting the abhorrence that would be death, the afterlife, and the process of mourning without them – although as my investigation of readers' responses will show, many failed to see that inspiring such a reaction was by design.

By choosing to write literature that overtly challenges cultural constructions of death (even if such literature proves to be a valuable means of reinscribing these), the author himself risks being seen as a "subversive" individual – which certainly seems to be the case with Poe. As a person capable of constructing such images of terror, horror, and despondency, Poe was often greeted with skepticism, and sometimes with outright disdain – despite the fact that much of his work was easily appropriated by conventional readers to reinscribe their adherence to conventional dogmas regarding death, mourning, and memorializing. This disdain was given voice in many social and literary circles during Poe's lifetime, but perhaps never with more force or impact than at his death. Appearing in the New York *Tribune* on October 9<sup>th</sup>, just two days after his death, Poe's obituary, written by Rufus Griswold, would fantastically characterize Poe in terms reminiscent of the characters in his Gothic poems and tales, claiming that he "walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayers for the happiness of those who at that moment were objects of his idolatry, but never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was

already damned. He seemed, except when some fitful pursuit subjected his will and engrossed his faculties, always to bear the memory of some controlling sorrow" (Griswold "Death"). As the third chapter, "Faint Impressions:" Po(e)sing Script, 'Authorized' Technologies, and Social Acceptability," will show, Poe was crucially aware that his literary depictions of death might lead to his "self" being (mis)interpreted in this manner, and worked to counter such potential (mis)interpretations. He did this by drawing on ideas central to the nineteenth-century's culture of mourning and memorializing which held that the physical trace of an otherwise absent person was capable of testifying to the nature of his or her individuality. Through an examination of his very popular Autography series, his essay Anastatic Printing, and his prospectus for The Stylus, I show Poe actively championing the duplication of script over type as a means of testifying to the character and nature of the producer. In short, I argue that by borrowing from the nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, Poe hoped to find a way of making his script, like the deceased's lock of hair or cameo, function as a token signifying that the "real" identity of the one it represented was not defiled or decayed, even though the body – or the book – associated with it may appear to be.<sup>22</sup>

If Whitman saw the potential for Poe's "Gothic" and "morbid" work to inspire a reader to reject such horrors in favor of more transcendent ideas regarding death, then one wonders what Poe, one of the nineteenth-century's most adroit critics, would have seen in the work of Whitman. Would Poe have discerned, among the ebullience of Whitman's "barbaric yawps," any subtle harmonies between his own work and that of the author of *Leaves of Grass*? Would he have recognized Whitman's own poetic project as

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Again, this reassessment brings this dissertation into conversation with the work of scholars like Whalen and McGill who have seen Poe's embrace of such print technologies as primarily motivated by the desire for increased profits.

just as marked by and concerned with those "pronounc'd...phases of human morbidity" as his own apparently was (Leaves (1892), 433)? To what degree, if any, does the juxtaposition that marks their burials mirror a similar relationship with regards to their literary work? Unfortunately, Poe died six years prior to the production of Leaves of Grass and so answers to such questions are largely speculative. Still, the harmonies between their various projects can be traced – as they are throughout the various chapters of this study – and the way Whitman relied upon, nuanced, supported and at times challenged contemporary cultural conventions and ideas towards mourning, death, and the afterlife (personal and cultural "tendenc[ies]...towards morbidity") can be limned out as well (156). This is the work of the second section of this study, which, in its final three chapters, examines the way in which Whitman made use of contemporary rituals, practices, and attitudes towards death in the literary and material construction of three of his texts – Leaves of Grass, Drum-Taps, and Two Rivulets, charting the way in which he used these conventions and ideas to produce texts that aimed to preserve, protect, and promulgate the identities of everything from "Walt Whitman...a kosmos" to the democratic identity of the nation itself.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> The conversation I am entering with regards to Whitman is a long-standing one. And yet, while countless articles have been written on Whitman's penchant for writing about death, few monographs have been written which examine Whitman's relationship to a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing - seeking to examine the ways in which Whitman borrowed from, challenged, and embraced the cultural ideologies and rituals surrounding death that were prevalent during his time period. Perhaps the most notable among the few that have examined how Whitman responded to a nineteenthcentury culture of mourning and memorializing is Harold Aspiz, whose book, So Long! Walt Whitman's Poetry of Death (see Aspiz), seeks to define Whitman's relationship to the idea of immortality and the afterlife while taking into account contemporary contexts for such ideologies in the process. Other notable books and articles that deal with Whitman's relationship (social and material) to death are: Breitwieser's National Melancholy: Mourning and Opportunity in Classic American Literature, Folsom's "Walt Whitman and the Civil War: Making Poetry Out of Pain, Grief, and Mass Death," Lehman's "The Visionary Whitman," Farland's "Decomposing City: Walt Whitman's New York and the Science of Life and Death," Gilbert's Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Way We Grieve, Scheick's "Death and the Afterlife," Cavitch's American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman, Henderson's "Mourning America: Literature and the Politics of Death, 1765-1865," Vendler's Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery, and Pollak's "Death as Repression, Repression as Death: A Reading of Whitman's 'Calamus' Poems" (all in Works Cited).

In Chapter Four, "The Collaborative Construction of a Death-Defying Cryptext: Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*," I examine how Whitman relied extensively on a culture of mourning and memorializing to create the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a text which, like many of the period's mourning and memorial volumes, preserves and perpetuates individual identity, seeking to make the one represented therein still available despite absence or even "death." By employing many of the very same literary devices that writers of mourning poetry used, and with his physical text resembling the sentimental memorial albums of the time, Whitman thus signaled his indebtedness to the artistic practices that proliferated in this culture and sought to signal to his readership that this text, like those albums, worked as a repository for an otherwise "disembodied" entity, nevertheless reachable, vital, and vibrant.

The second chapter of the section, "Re-collecting Soldiers: Mourning for the Masses in Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps*," examines *Drum-Taps*, *Memoranda During the War*, and several pieces of journalism in order to argue that just as he had sought to preserve his own identity in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman set out in the material and poetic construction of *Drum-Taps* to preserve and protect the identities of the "Million Dead" otherwise lost to the devastating violence of the Civil War. It illumines the way in which *Drum-Taps* served to not only preserve the identities of these "Million Dead" in the face of their material annihilation, but mediate the grief experienced by soldiers' loved ones, support rituals and practices of death that were rendered increasingly ineffectual by the nature of death in the war, and, ultimately, re-unite a readership divided by political ideology into what one contemporary termed a shared "republic of suffering" (Olmsted 115). Thus, like the first chapter, it limns out a rather extensive and intimate relationship between the work of this otherwise radical poet and the conventional culture in which he was situated.

The final chapter of this section, "Aggregating Americans: The Political Immortality of Walt Whitman's *Two Rivulets*," examines how Whitman's 1876 centennial "gift" to the nation sought to bring readers to an awareness of the urgent need for democracy to be understood in light of death and immortality – something Whitman felt would rectify what he perceived as the ongoing devolution of American society and democracy – and how he relied extensively upon conventions and practices of mourning and memorializing in order to do this. In short, by once again troping upon ideas and conventions that were integral to the period's mourning and memorial volumes, Whitman sought a way to counter democratic America's post-Civil War social and political ills – expanding upon these ideas and conventions to "fuse, tie, and aggregate all" Americans together, preserve and promulgate their unique "democratic identity," and propel the nation towards the type of democratic utopia he felt it was destined to become (*Democratic Vistas* 24).

Overall, this study contributes to the scholarship on Whitman and Poe in at least two ways. One of these is that it will disclose how these authors simultaneously embraced, borrowed from, and challenged the cultural ideologies and social conventions surrounding death in the literary *and* material creation of their books (or magazine-objects), as well as in their attitudes towards print, and in the way each thought about the act and purpose of reading – arguing that their reasons for doing so were to secure a sense of personal identity and social belonging for both their readership and themselves. But given the connections spelled out in this introduction, this project is also always an investigation of how the writings of Edgar Allan Poe influenced those of Walt Whitman, and how that influence, in turn, helps us better understand the work of Poe. It thus seeks to sustain a dialogue between the two authors, and the chapters of this study are, in one sense, an attempt to bring the otherwise disparate works of these authors into

conversation with one another, to see the interconnectedness that exists between both them and their work. Thus, this study also serves to acknowledge a hitherto underexplored connection between these two writers as they tacitly dialogued with their culture and each other through their works – seeking to grapple with the material and social aspects of death.

In this sense, this study mirrors the spirit of the only interaction the two writers shared while alive. Sometime in November, 1845, a tall, robust, and (at the time) somewhat dandified New York editor and writer Walter Whitman strolled into the offices of the Broadway Journal at 304 Broadway Street in New York City. Whitman had come to collect payment for his article "Art Singing and Heart Singing," and to meet the editor who had published the piece, one Edgar Allan Poe. It was a piece in which Whitman claimed that all great singing "touches the souls and sympathies...appeals to the throbbing of the great heart of humanity itself' something which Poe, in the only existent piece of criticism ever written by him on Whitman's work, wholeheartedly endorsed when he remarked in an editorial note that "it is scarcely necessary to add that we agree with our correspondent throughout" ("Art Singing" 318). Such "agree[able]" words apparently also marked the visit itself, for when Whitman recalled the encounter later in life, he said that "[Poe] impressed me very favorably: was dark, quiet, handsome— Southern from top to toe: languid, tired out, it is true, but altogether ingratiating....we had only a brief visit: he was frankly conciliatory" (WWWC 4:23).<sup>24</sup> Certainly, when Whitman spoke these words to Horace Traubel he meant to indicate that he found Poe amiable and pleasant to do business with, but I would like to think that his words might

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Whitman also recorded this experience in *Specimen Days* where he stated, "I also remember seeing Edgar A. Poe, and having a short interview with him, (it must have been in 1845 or '6,) in his office, second story of a corner building, (Duane or Pearl street.) He was editor and owner or part owner of "the Broadway Journal." The visit was about a piece of mine he had publish'd. Poe was very cordial, in a quiet way, appear'd well in person, dress, &c. I have a distinct and pleasing remembrance of his looks, voice, manner and matter; very kindly and human, but subdued, perhaps a little jaded" (*Specimen Days*, 17).

also be a fitting description of the relationship between their otherwise disparate works as well – suggestive of an unsuspected conciliation, an "agree[able]" harmony of literary "souls and sympathies" in need of being articulated.

#### **CHAPTER I**

# INSPIRING DEATH: POE'S POETIC AESTHETICS AND THE "COMMUNITIES" OF MOURNING

On the evening of December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1811, Mr. Placide's Theater Company presented a play and a pantomime at the Richmond Theater for six hundred residents of Richmond, Virginia. By all accounts, the play, entitled *The Father, or Family Feuds*, was well-liked by those in attendance. Their appreciation was, perhaps, augmented either by the Christmas-inspired bliss of families reuniting for the holidays, or by the chance to see the "family feuds" such reunions can create satirized on stage. Applause was plentiful, and the intermission was marked by amiable conversation between Richmond regulars and those who had come for the holidays. The company was mixed, not only the usual ladies and their escorts, but a significant number of young ones as well. The second billing that evening was a pantomime entitled Raymond and Agnes or the Bleeding Nun, and it was only moments after the beginning of the second act that one of the company's actors, a Mr. Robertson, stepped out onto the stage waving his hand and crying, "The house is on fire!" Instantly, groups of family and friends leaped from their seats and surged toward the one narrow exit of the theater, while the fire – racing along the resin-covered pine-board roof – engulfed the house in a matter of minutes. When the flames finally subsided early the next morning seventy-two of the six hundred had died.<sup>1</sup>

Had Eliza Poe, mother of Edgar Allan Poe, still been a member of Mr. Placide's Theater Company, she would, perhaps, have perished that night in the blaze. Eliza, however, had passed away two weeks earlier, on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1811, most likely of tuberculosis, and as a result, this event has been seen as one of little to no importance in Poe's biography. Indeed, Arthur Quinn noted, "this tragic event could have had little

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For more information on the Richmond Theater Fire of 1811 see Shockley and Fisher.

effect on [Edgar]" (almost two years of age) because he had been taken in within a few days of Mrs. Poe's death by Mrs. John Allan, and Edgar's sister Rosalie Poe had already been taken in by Mrs. William MacKenzie (46). Both Allan and MacKenzie were of Richmond's wealthy first-families. Edgar was with Mr. and Mrs. Allan at the home of Bowler Cicke, with whom they spent the holidays at his plantation at Turkey Island, and by virtue of this circumstance, Poe and the Allans, in a very real sense, "escaped the fire [and] its aftermath" (46).

And yet, in another sense, the Richmond Theater Fire of 1811 certainly did engulf Edgar, along with the Allans, the MacKenzies, Rosalie, and all other residents of Richmond regardless of their presence at the theater that night. In the face of the staggering losses which occurred there, losses which one New York Times writer would later reflect upon as "appalling at that early day, before railroads and steam-boats or war had accustomed the people...to great slaughters" ("Other"), the city of Richmond was engulfed in the rituals and practices that surrounded the mourning and memorializing of the dead as the entire town "went into mourning" (Quinn 64). As a respectable firstfamily of Richmond, the Allans would undoubtedly have taken part. At his mother's death, the orphaned Edgar may have seen her close friends and associates don mourning clothing and participate in the rituals and practices surrounding death, but now, after only a few weeks' introduction into that world of black crepe, hat weeds, long veils, arm bands, funerals, burial grounds, and more, Edgar's entire world would seemingly have turned black as the ladies and gentlemen, the shopkeepers and artisans, most likely even children and some slaves, donned the markers of grief, attended services for the dead, and actively sought consolation and healing by collectively mourning their losses.

Arguably, the community's process of mourning and memorializing reached its denouement with the construction of the Monumental Episcopal Church, built by the

citizens of Richmond on the site of the Richmond Theater – a church whose construction the Allans aided by purchasing pew number 80. <sup>2</sup> Here, the Allans and Edgar attended church regularly during his childhood, and their attendance would have been a weekly reminder of the need to remember the dead, and the commitment of the community to do so. Walking up the front walkway, young Edgar would have had a view of the frieze above the church's portico, covered in lachrymatories. <sup>3</sup> He might have traced his hand over the names of the dead inscribed on the polished marble monument that dominated the entranceway – the dead whose bodies lay buried in the brick crypt below the church. For Edgar, as it was for all the inhabitants of Richmond who visited there, to enter the church was to immerse himself in a world of mournful remembrance – with overturned and extinguished lamps, floriated funeral wreaths, Egyptian-styled winged orbs, and darkened sarcophagi carved into the interior of the building. And yet, given the nature of the culture of which he was a part, Edgar's intimacy with death, mourning, and memorializing is most remarkable for the fact that it is unquestionably so commonplace.

Many critics have rightfully looked to Edgar's introduction to grief at so early an age as the wellspring from which so many of his later literary works are drawn. However, in focusing on the psychological impacts of Edgar Allan Poe's introduction to grief, these critics tend to overlook the fact that these experiences, while they certainly were an early initiation into a culture saturated with images, rituals, practices, and beliefs surrounding death, were also so intensely prominent at the time period that they would have been a nearly ever-present fact of life not just for Poe but for everyone else in the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> It is probably worth pausing here to note, then, that Poe went to church where his mother had regularly performed – marking this site a place associated, for Edgar at least, with not only those who were lost in the blaze, but with his deceased mother as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lachrymatories were vase shaped urns frequently used as a memorial symbol in the nineteenth-century. Popular thought held that these urns, which were frequently found among Roman dead, were used to hold the tears of those that mourned them. Modern archaeological thought does not necessarily confirm these popular nineteenth-century notions.

community as well. While many question the extent to which Poe's literature was a screen for a disturbed psyche, there is no question that his literature was constantly in dialogue with an antebellum culture that was intimately concerned with ways of conceptualizing and coping with death. In this chapter, I investigate the way Poe's aesthetic philosophy is drawn, literally and figuratively, from a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, and how these philosophies result in the production of poems that, while they have been interpreted as markedly critical of just such a culture, nevertheless function in surprisingly similar ways to the more conventional mourning poetry, or "consolation verse," that was a mainstay of the culture during the time period.

## Transcendent Material/Transcending Materiality:

### The Art of Nineteenth Century Mourning

The nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing was, in many ways, an appropriation of what James Farrell has termed the "competing cosmologies of death" found in religious and intellectual movements such as the Protestant Reformation, The Enlightenment, Unitarianism (itself a curious mixture of the preceding two), and Romanticism (Farrell 42). According to Farrell, "Americans drew on these earlier intellectual traditions to interpret the stark fact of death. In a characteristic spirit of eclecticism the American Victorians collected and combined elements of these cosmological systems to create satisfying explanations of death" (43). Such "explanations" were still characteristically Christian, and they mirrored the shift from Puritanism to the more Protestant Arminianism and Evangelicalism that marked nineteenth-century America, focusing less on the putrefaction of the body and the fear of damnation, and more on the bliss of a celestial afterlife enjoyed in the presence of family and loved ones. The rather general reconceptualization of death and the afterlife during the time period carried over into rather "generalized" mourning rituals and practices that,

in many ways, transcended religious, geographical, and, at times, even racial differences. Mourning portraits, for example, appeared in the parlors of homes from Nashville to Cambridge, and from the Ohio Valley to Long Island. Mourning poetry, or consolation verse, was written by Black male elites in Philadelphia and by middle-class women in Dover, Vermont. Mourning dress, or some variation of it, was worn by disparate classes and in surprisingly disparate locales. Mourning and memorial rituals and practices (including the establishment of rural cemeteries, conducting wakes and funerals, weaving hair, writing consolation verse, painting mourning portraiture, quilting memorial quilts, etc.) became so ubiquitous, and their promise for aiding/and or uniting otherwise disparate religious, economic, and social groups so widely understood, that by the end of the Civil War no less an entity than the federal government chose to make use of these practices in creating a "national" cemetery which would serve to memorialize the dead (both North and South) and bring together otherwise "alienated" communities.

The fact that death was an ever-present aspect of life for many nineteenth-century Americans (even before the Civil War) helped encourage the spread of such practices. People needed means to counteract the deleterious effects of grief given that, as one scholar has noted, "there were few families [during the period] that did not *frequently* renew acquaintance with the grim reaper. . . . The pall of death was omnipresent"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This is not to imply that differences did not exist depending on class, race, gender, religious affiliation or geographical or regional location. Indeed, differences did exist in the way in which mourning objects were styled, used, or produced based upon such factors, nevertheless, as the above referenced-examples show, these practices were regularly appropriated by a wide variety of individuals and shaped according to their own personal preferences and ability.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Lloyd.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Armstrong and Kete.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See Hillerman.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See Faust.

(Laderman 24, emphasis mine). Indeed, mortality figures for the time period are striking. During the antebellum era, for example, "anywhere from 8 to 10 percent of the individuals could expect to die before reaching their twenty-first birthday," and nineteenth-century Americans "commonly witnessed, or knew about, or were exposed to, the death of a relation, friend, acquaintance, or public figure at nearly every stage of life....[making death] a common experience" (Laderman 25). Death, so it seems, was rather remarkable if only for its pervasiveness, and such pervasiveness invited the widespread use of rituals and practices specifically designed to ameliorate the pain of grief and foster successful mourning.

Among the many strategies invoked in an attempt to counter their grief, nineteenth-century Americans engaged in the collaborative creation of a wide variety of mourning objects. Quilts, jewelry, portraiture, photography, hair weavings, and literature were commonly produced either by mourners or their friends and associates, and these objects marked the beds, bodies, walls and parlors of nineteenth-century America's domiciles and its populace. Such mourning aids were intended to foster certain recuperative "effects" for mourners and for the producer of the object (if not the mourner himself). As Mary Louise Kete explains, the popular mourning aids such as consolation "poems, gravestones, and hair-remembrancers...not only [worked] to preserve the memory of their lost [loved ones] but also to create a world that would deny that loss....[and worked] to prevent the alienation that the separation of death might otherwise entail" (66). The "world[s]" created in order to counter loss and alienation were both spiritual and social. For mourners a sense of loss and alienation from their dead loved ones was countered, in part, through the use of objects that fostered or inspired a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – to crib from Poe – and a sense of humanity's supposed immortality (CPT 897). In mourning portraiture and consolation

verse, the deceased were frequently depicted enjoying a glorious afterlife which included reunion and continued association with previously departed family and loved ones. These affectively charged images, as will be shown, also held out the possibility of a similar reunion for the deceased and the mourner in some future moment. At the same time, these objects – associated with or drawn from the physical body of the deceased – were intended to function restoratively. Objects like hair clippings and weavings were capable of representing the identity of the deceased even in his or her absence, essentially functioning like material synecdoches – parts that indicated the existence elsewhere of a now glorified "whole." While these material objects helped preserve and protect the identities of the deceased and spur mourners to a kind of "prescience of the glories beyond the grave," they also worked to counter those mourners' grief-inspired desire to alienate themselves from the larger community. Because many of the mourning objects produced in the nineteenth century were either given as gifts or required the participation of more than one individual in order to be created, these objects "address the seemingly local and individual problem of...grief by forging closer reciprocal ties among the larger group or the community" (Kete 9-10). These objects, by virtue of being collaboratively produced and/or distributed as gifts, were "designed to allay these feelings [of grief and alienation] and to rebind the mourner to the community" (Kete 55). Thus mourning objects became a means for not only countering grief but for testifying to the mourner

One of the prevalent fears of the nineteenth century with respect to death was that the damage done to the social fabric of the community by the permanent removal of one of its members would be perpetuated by a mourner driven to isolate herself in her grief. It was this belief, as Mary Louise Kete reminds, that lent traction to the need to create mourning objects as a "strategy for the creation of both a ground of common interest and the ties of association necessary for a community, large or small, to function" (53). In short, it was their belief "that collective action repaired the rupture in the social fabric" which spurred such object's creation and ensured "familial or communal continuity" (37). Perhaps the most popular literary testament to the ability of grief to effect just such an isolation is found in Elizabeth Stewart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar*, in which Mary Cabot – suffering the intensities of grief after the death of her brother – isolates herself and becomes a source of concern (and ultimately frustration) for the surrounding community. Through the intercession of an empathetic aunt, Mary is brought back into the community – leading Mary Louise Kete to claim that the "book functions as a mourning manual as well as a novel" (98).

that they were part of a larger community of sympathetic "mourners" who stood by ready to help, assist, and console. Grief, in short, also became a means of reinscribing the social bonds that were necessary to form and perpetuate communities.

These are the some of the primary goals of mourning objects in the nineteenth century, and they are easily perceived in an examination of the objects themselves. The three examples of mourning objects that I investigate below (hair, mourning portraits, and memorial quilts) indicate the wide variety of mourning objects that were produced, and demonstrate the "effects" that they had for those who produced and used them. As such, they form a kind of frame within which to understand a mourning poetry (or "consolation verse") equally committed to producing these types of "effects," a poetry and material culture Poe borrowed from when conceptualizing his aesthetic philosophy and which he entered into dialogue with when articulating his own rather "death-obsessed" body of poetry. It is also within such a cultural framework that those who read such poetry or heard him proclaim such a philosophy would most likely have understood it.

It is well known that many nineteenth-century individuals turned their bodies into sites serving to memorialize the dead, the characteristic black suits and armbands (such as Poe wore after the death of Virginia), and the black dresses and flowing black veils worn by women are immediately recognizable symbols of this culture (Thomas, "Poe" 685). <sup>10</sup> What is perhaps less well known is that they also used artifacts from the body of the deceased to mourn and memorialize as well. The most common way in which this was done was by clipping locks of hair. These locks of hair became a powerful means of representing the departed and, for many, a means of envisioning the deceased in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The wearing of mourning apparel has been so copiously and exhaustively studied (and lampooned), that I feel it unnecessary to contribute to such studies in any extended way here. For more information on mourning costume in the nineteenth-century see Taylor *Mourning Dress, A Costume and Social History,* Jalland *Death in the Victorian Family,* Mitchell *Daily Life in Victorian England,* and Pike and Armstrong *A Time to Mourn.* 

afterlife. Poe himself participated in such cultural practice when he clipped locks of Virginia's hair after her death and kept them bound in a sheaf of paper (Meyers 263). These locks of hair, while mourning objects in their own right, were frequently used to produce other mourning objects that could be displayed or carried with an individual, and as such became a conduit through which a kind of perpetual connection between mourner and deceased could be imagined. Brooches, watch fobs, lockets, hair ornaments, and a wide variety of other objects were all produced using the hair of loved ones, and because of this served as powerful and persistent memorial devices. These objects were produced with such regularity that the periodicals of the time published instructions for at-home hair weaving, commenting on the efficacy of such objects in aiding the process of mourning and memorializing. An article appearing in *Gleason's Pictorial-Drawing Room* in 1853 commented as follows:

We all preserve the hair of deceased or absent friends as a precious memento....We know of...mothers who thus wear bracelets of their children's hair, most ingeniously wrought, and in some instances even, of elaborate necklaces of the same. Children, too, wear the hair of departed parents....To our mind this is a very beautiful and tender idea, and we can hardly conceive of a more agreeable or interesting token or keepsake than can be produced in this manner by the skillful hands of those who have acquired this curious art of manufacture, and who now practice it in such perfection in this country. ("Specimens" 233)

A similar article appeared in *Godey's Ladies Book* in 1860 stating, "Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials and survives us like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that, with a lock of hair belonging to a child or friend, we may almost look up to heaven and compare notes with angelic nature – may

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The use of hair to ornament objects was common during the nineteenth-century and became ubiquitous during the 1850s and 60s. By this time even objects like tea-sets and decorative birds-nests were being ornamented with human hair. The ubiquity and variety of these objects is partly due to the fact that they could be used not only to as tokens of affection to be gifted among the living, but upon the death of the individual were easily transmuted into a mourning and memorial object capable of aiding in mourning. Indeed, as one cultural historian has noted, "Jewelry made from human hair was generally memorial" and therefore could be parlayed into a mourning artifact "from fashionable hair jewelry by inscription" or a change in "motif" (Pike and Armstrong 99).

almost say; 'I have a piece of thee here, not unworthy of thy being now" ("Hair Ornaments" 187). These hair clippings and weavings seemed primed not only to aid in the memorializing of departed loved ones, but granted mourners a kind of imagined access to the afterlife, encouraging them to "look up to heaven" and see the "angelic nature" of their departed in that realm.

As individuals knotted and wove the hair of their departed loved ones into larger and more complex mourning pieces, they were, in many ways, tying themselves to their dead. The finished product not only contained or represented the identity of the deceased, but something of the skill, ingenuity, and fidelity of the object's producer as well. No longer just a synecdoche for the departed loved one, the finished hair weaving now represented the bonds of love that tied the living to the dead and supposedly offered a kind of symbolic foreshadowing of the glorious (re)union of mourner and deceased as they shared immortality in the afterlife. If such an object was produced as a gift by someone other than the mourner, it still retained its ability to "bind" together individuals; however, in such a case it would arguably serve to bind together the producer and the mourner at the same time that it allowed the mourner to imagine a connection with the deceased, the "gift" of the mourning piece becoming a testament of the willingness of the producer to find ways to aid the mourner through the grieving process. In such a case, the object became a powerful means of reasserting social bonds and counteracting the mourner's tendency to alienate himself in his grief, while still functioning as a catalyst for imagining the deceased in a glorified state of existence. All told, these hair weavings became a powerful means of inspiring individuals to "look up to heaven," to feel themselves bound to their loved ones, and, in many cases, bound to a broader sympathetic community as well.

Hair was thought to memorialize so effectively that its use became ubiquitous and was frequently incorporated into another of the common mourning objects of the time, the mourning picture. The "embroidered and/or painted mourning picture on silk," paper, or ivory was "a new art form taught at academies for young females [which] flourished" in the first few decades of the nineteenth century before giving way to printed mourning pictures, as well as post-mortem portraiture and photography only slightly later (Lloyd 70). These visual mourning aids were, like the hair weavings, "practical" objects in that they were not only intended to be aesthetically pleasing, but they were regularly "used" to help the bereaved successfully mourn. As one scholar has described it, visual mourning aids such as "posthumous mourning portraits functioned as an icon for the bereaved; contemplating it was part of the mourning ritual" (73). Through these images "the bereaved [had] their dead restored to them as living presences" with "the gap [between the living and the dead] bridged through art" (71).

An entry from the diary of Shepard Alonzo Mount, a nineteenth-century portraitist, testifies to this. <sup>12</sup> In 1865 Mount was at Glen Cove on Long Island when his infant niece Camille passed away. Mount made several sketches of her, and approximately a week later presented a mourning portrait of little Camille to her family. His notes are rather telling. He claimed, "All the family seemed surprised and delighted with [the painting,] and to me it was a real joy to have been the instrument in affording so much comfort to all. Joshua and Edna would sit before it for an hour together, and Mr. and Mrs. Searing are in raptures with it. I have framed it and hung it up for all to see and love – for next to the dear babe herself – it is now the idol of the family" (Pike 165). For

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Shepard Alonzo Mount (1804-1868) was the older brother of the famous nineteenth-century genre painter William Sidney Mount. While Shepard never achieved the type of international recognition that his older brother did, he was nevertheless a respected portrait painter who was active during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Given the ubiquity of mourning practices as outlined above, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that many of Mount's portraits are, in fact, posthumous mourning portraits ("Shepard").

the family, little Camille's painting certainly functioned as an "icon for the bereaved" and "contemplating it" was unquestionably a type of "mourning ritual" for her family as they sat "an hour together...in raptures with it" (73).

The nature of the ritual and the likely substance of their thoughts are suggested by the image itself. It is a bust portrait that makes use of an interesting contrast of heavenly and earthly references to connect the earthly realm and the divine (fig. 1). On the bottom left area of the picture is a grassy knoll upon which sits a golden pocketwatch, its hands depicting the time of the child's birth (approximately nine forty-five). The white of the watch face is mirrored in the swirling white clouds that seem to billow up around the center of the portrait. These clouds frame the central image of the piece, a young child "Camille," whose angelically white baby dress melds almost seamlessly into the skin of her shoulders. As a whole, the child appears to be being borne away upon fleecy clouds. Imagined as both an infant girl and angelic being simultaneously, her depiction suggests that what "enraptured" her family as they sat for "an hour at a time" was the painting's ability to help them remember physical details and personal attributes (the shape of her eyes, the fondness she had for her grandfather's watch), as well as inspire them to a greater sense of Camille's continued existence in the afterlife, an afterlife the viewer might one day share (73). Indeed, the painting encourages its viewer to imagine that there is room enough for them in such a heavenly realm. The white of the clouds, blending into two edges of the canvas itself, makes the picture appear in some ways unfinished, as if to invite the viewer to continue the project that the painter himself has only just begun. Having aided its viewer to see her as a heavenly being, the picture leaves the viewer to imagine what she might experience and who she yet might "meet" in those as yet "unarticulated spaces" of the canvas. This was likely the project that Camille's family was engaged in as they sat enrapt with image and imagination (80).

Poe himself testified to his belief in the power of such objects when he commissioned the painting of a post-mortem mourning portrait shortly after the death of Virginia (fig. 2). While attribution is unclear, it is thought that this portrait was painted by Mary Louise Shew, the benefactor of Poe and Virginia while they lived at Fordham cottage, and the individual who arranged Virginia's funeral and purchased her coffin (Silverman 327). The portrait is a compelling one for several reasons. It would be difficult to surmise, if one did not already know, that this is, in fact, a post-mortem portrait. Virginia wears what appears to be a white dress, with a piece of white cloth draping from the neck. Her head is tipped to the right, her eyes half-open; her lips are a light red and are slightly pursed. Her skin is pale white, although there is a blush to her cheeks, and her hair and eyebrows are brown. The image sits on a plain black background. The "dress" she wears and the white "cloth" that hang about her neck actually comprise her burial shroud, but in the absence of this information might just as easily be mistaken for more "celestial" garb. Furthermore, the way in which her head is turned, her lips are slightly pursed, and her eyes are half-opened certainly depicts how her head fell and her eyes and lips relaxed in the moments following her death. But on canvas – where the artist has refrained from depicting the actual background of her deathbed (thus making it unclear that she is dead and her body reclining) – it might just as easily depict the waking of a divine "Virginia" into a celestial afterlife as it does her repose at death. While the portrait's history indicates that it was clearly painted postmortem by someone from the local Fordham community, it seems likely that Poe did not see Virginia in death in this painting. Indeed, Poe evinced a marked aversion to seeing Virginia dead when, following her death and at her funeral, he refused to look on her face, saying that he preferred to remember her living (Phillips 1203). He kept and displayed this picture of her for the remainder of his life, seeming to indicate that for him,

at least, the picture was a means by which he was capable of remembering or imagining Virginia as living or, in a sense, "living on."

Like hair weavings and paintings, mourning quilts "enrapt" mourners and bound them to both their deceased and their community. Made to memorialize the death of an individual, they also successfully bound together the various quilters and mourners who oftentimes helped produce such an object as they gathered in "quilting bees" and collectively decorated and stitched the larger quilt together. Thus the elaborate patterns, vivid colors, ribbons, piping, and inscriptions that mourners and producers placed on such quilts generated a material object that at once provided physical and spiritual comfort as they memorialized the dead, inspiring visions of the deceased and the mourner reuniting in the afterlife, and serving as a physical testament to the willingness of the community to aid the mourner in the process of mourning.<sup>13</sup>

The Eliza S. Howell Quilt (1848-49) is an apt example of this. <sup>14</sup> Its owner articulated, in some detail, that the quilt's most important function was its ability to connect her to the deceased, and to serve as a conduit through which she might imagine and conceptualize a glorious reunion with them in the afterlife. The central image of the quilt shows this (fig. 3). Unlike the mourning portrait in which the deceased is depicted visually, here the image represents the mourner, Eliza Howell, in the act of mourning. She sits at a center table upon which lies her knitting, a manuscript, and an urn containing flowers. <sup>15</sup> On the floor are three objects, a basket containing sewing materials, another

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> As I will show, these squares also held to power to memorialize their producers as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Because of the nature of the quilt's production an exact date of its creation and completion is nigh impossible to determine. Most squares from this album quilt are signed and dated from the mid to late 1840s.

<sup>15</sup> This was a powerful mourning symbol which suggested that from death (the ashes of the individual within the urn) sprang forth a new and more gloriously beautiful life – as indexed by the flowers.

larger urn also containing flowers, and a tall clock with the time displayed (five-fifty). The presence of the urns and the clock are common markers among mourning portraiture of the period indicating that the pen and ink picture probably depicts a mourner in the act of grieving (with the clock denoting the time the deceased passed away). <sup>16</sup> The fact that the entire scene is encircled with what could be a funeral wreath made of "Rose of Sharon" such as commonly decorated nineteenth-century graves lends credence to such an interpretation.<sup>17</sup> The way in which the woman holds the square and the absence of any needle in her hand seems to indicate that she is contemplating the square as opposed to doing any work on it. Her thoughts seemingly form the script which proliferates throughout the square. At its top, under a spray of dropping vegetation is a verse of New Testament scripture, "John 6.12 / Gather up / the fragments that remain / that nothing be lost." The fragments the scripture refers to are the fragments of bread left over when Jesus fed the five-thousand, but in the context of quilting, the fragments bear an additional resonance, though one hardly less sacramental. Album quilts were collaborative productions, made from "gift" squares created and decorated by one's family and friends, generally in order to "confirm the importance of family and friendship...[and] commemorate rites of passage," death being, perhaps, the most monumental of "passings" such quilts frequently commemorated (Fox xi). These squares were collected over a period of time, sewn together, quilted, and bound to form the larger quilt. By gathering up the various squares (the "fragments"), Eliza worked to ensure that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Time pieces depicting the time of death were common symbols in mourning pictures (See Lloyd for more information, 81). Camille Mount's picture with its watch depicting her hour of birth instead of death arguably suggests that the child was so young that she hardly had time to live and that the hour of her birth was in some sense the hour of her death, and that her earthly birth marked only one stage of the labor necessary for delivering her into that more "divine" life that her "true" birth achieved.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The wreath depicted here is made of "chintz" – a printed material that could be cut out and appliquéd onto the square itself. The flower is suggestive of a Rose of Sharon (more commonly called a Hibiscus) and was known to be used in mourning portraiture to symbolize death (Lloyd 72).

she still had access to those loved ones memorialized thereon so that "nothing may be lost." <sup>18</sup>

The two pieces of verse inscribed on the square – written on curtains which frame the seated woman – seemingly guide Eliza through a mourning process similar to that which the Searings experienced as they looked at the picture of Camille. <sup>19</sup> The first poem serves to call up a vision of the absent friend. Entitled "Friendship," it reads: "In Vain – in different paths we tread – / And though no more mayest soothe or cheer; / Yet we have those hours of friendship shed, / A sweetness that still lingers here; / Thy form & look, in memory's glass, / I still distinctly see; / Thy voice and words, in fancy's ear / Are whispering still to me" (Fox 16). Having called up "in memory's glass" (which in this case is both the mental imagination and the quilt – for both make the absent "visible") the "form and look" of those she can no longer "see," Eliza then moves to conceptualize a shared afterlife in "Eternity" – the second piece of verse. It reads: "When the dream of life is fled, / When its wasted lamp is dead, / When in cold oblivion's shade, / Beauty, power, wealth are laid; / Where immortal spirits reign, / There may be all we meet again; / On the tree of life eternal / Man, let all the hope be staid / Which alone, for ever vernal, / Bears a leaf that shall not fade" (16).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> A mourning quilt might memorialize a single or, as is the case with Eliza's quilt, multiple individuals.

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Eliza composed these verses herself, as I have been unable to find them in contemporary periodicals or popular collections of mourning verse at the time. However, due to the voluminous amounts of such verse published during the time period, I cannot state this with complete certainty. Also, it is important to note that curtains or draperies are another common symbol in the mourning art of the time period. Borrowing from theater, the closing of the curtain symbolized the "end of the act [of life]" – complementing the other visual and linguistic symbols on the square that testify to the nature of Eliza's thoughts. It also creates an interesting visual barrier, at once inviting the viewers gaze and simultaneously making them aware that this is a scene of "private" grief and discretion is necessary. In this way it mirrors the larger modus operandi of the culture in general. Grief was a private affair, and yet at the same time not one to be carried out in strict isolation. The markers of grief, such as mourning clothing helped both mourners and community members negotiate this by acting as a constant reminder that interactions between two individuals were being mediated through a veil or curtain of grief, and that an appropriate level of discretion was therefore necessary. For more information on mourning symbolism see Burke, DeLorme, and Lloyd.

Through its verses, the quilt articulates Eliza's mourning process, which begins by remembering the deceased and ends with Eliza imagining herself bound to them in a new realm where "immortal spirits reign" and where the "tree of life" offers a kind of "shade" that covers all and gives them "hope" for continued existence and association, "ever vernal" in the afterlife. At the same time that the quilt functions as a means of collecting and imagining a spiritual community of now immortalized loved ones, it also binds together another more "worldly" community of family and friends, namely the community which produced the squares that constitute the larger quilt. Such creators usually signed their names to the squares they produced, and so the quilt binds together the mourner and the producer at the same time that it binds together the mourner and the dead. In a continuation of this same type of constitutive activity, the individuals who may have gathered together to quilt and bind the separate squares are themselves bound into the social and material fabric of the enterprise as they met together and in their own characteristic hands "stitched" and "bound" the final object. 20 Thus, on multiple levels, such an object worked to "prevent the alienation that the separation of death might otherwise entail" (66).

The quilt's power to bind together the mourner, the dead, and the larger community did not cease when the quilt itself was complete. For such quilts were then put into use. The symbols appliquéd, drawn, stenciled or embroidered continuously directed the thoughts of the user towards the afterlife, and the verses, memorials, and prayers inscribed thereon were perhaps echoed by those that came from the lips of the individual who nightly wrapped himself or herself in it. The combination of image, text, ideology, and materiality warmed individuals against the coldness of grief by wrapping them in memories of the departed, in thoughts of the afterlife, and in assurances that they

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> In another of the famous social rituals of the nineteenth century – the quilting bee.

were not alone in their pain. Thus, in their materiality, their aesthetic design, and their mode of production these objects served daily to protect producers and users from chills borne by gale or grief.

As one might guess from the verse presented on Eliza Howell's Quilt, the writing (and circulation) of poetry was an important part of the nineteenth century's culture of mourning and memorializing. Inscribed on paper, quilts, headstones, urns, memorial samplers, mourning pictures, and more, poetry became a valuable means of inspiring individuals to imagine the "glories beyond the grave" that they and their deceased might someday enjoy together. Given the ubiquity of such poetry, it is perhaps no wonder that throughout the nineteenth century mourning poetry was not only written and exchanged by mourners and sympathetic friends, but was widely published and circulated by otherwise "professional" writers. <sup>21</sup> Indeed, the career of Lydia Huntley Sigourney, the "Sweet Singer of Hartford," is a testament to the appeal of such poetry throughout the early and middle decades of the century. Consolation verse, perhaps the most common type of "mourning poetry" produced at the time, was a mainstay of Sigourney's larger oeuvre; she wrote and published it frequently, producing volumes such as "The Weeping Willow" (1847), which were designed "for those who mourn...loving them better because they have wept, pointing through the shade of the willow boughs...and breathing a prayer that 'this light affliction, which is but for a moment, may work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (Sigourney, vi). 22 Sigourney's conceptualization

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> For an excellent analysis of the way in which manuscript poetry was written and exchanged in the nineteenth-century please see Kete.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Sigourney published over fifty books in her lifetime. She was highly popular and esteemed during the nineteenth century, though her reputation (like so many female sentimental authors) declined considerably with the rise of modernism. Perhaps the most visible testament to her importance and popularity in a nineteenth century context is the fact that she was selected by one of the leading publishers of the day, Cary and Hart, as a featured poet in their series of works by American poets – joining the esteemed company of preceding authors, Bryant, Longfellow, and Willis.

of her consolation poetry as a mourning aid capable of inspiring a reader to see "through the shade" of grief and death to the "glory" that lies beyond, indicates that it was intended to work in the same way that the other material objects integral to the culture of mourning and memorializing did, something which the poetry itself bears out.<sup>23</sup>

In her poem, "The Good Son," she narrates the story of a mother whose son has died while on a voyage. The poem begins with the narrator describing the mother's mournful state, grieving not only the loss of her son, but the fact that he lies in a "foreign grave" where "tropic flowers in beauty bloom" instead of close by where she might visit him regularly. And yet, the narrator reminds her, evidence of the deceased persists all about her in "the tree he set, the vine he trained, the home he made so fair." Such things, the narrator claims, can spread a certain "sunshine o'er her woe" by reminding her of his "filial piety," a piety that has certainly claimed for him "a clime of blest repose, / A mansion whence is no remove, A life no death that knows." The narrator goes on to claim that from this state of "heavenly peace" a "beckoning hand, / The mourner's step incite[s], / To that blest home, where ties of Love / Eternally unite" (Sigourney 59-60). Sigourney's work in this poem is essentially identical to that of the other mourning and memorial objects studied so far, in that it not only seeks to aid the mourners by providing them with a means of imagining a glorious shared afterlife but provides them with a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> I do not wish to flatten the distinction between manuscript memorial verse and printed memorial verse. Manuscript verse was arguably even more powerfully primed to unite a reader to a producer because the producers' individuality was encapsulated and presented to the reader through the producer's unique individual script – something that printed texts could not do. Thus, manuscript verse was unquestionably a more "intimate" and "personal" product than printed texts, and, as they inscribed the lines of the poem, they were arguably tracing not only the connections mourners, producers and the deceased had shared, but they were limning an "imagined" and "scriptural" connection to each other made possible only through death. Therefore, script became a valuable aspect of such poems. However, the fact that printed verse was so popular arguably testifies that it enjoyed a different, although unquestionably powerful, ability to unite mourners separated by wide distances and differences (geographic, social, religious, and otherwise) in a kind of print-community (what Benedict Anderson might call an "imagined community") of mourners who shared the sentiments of the writer. Thus, the lack of script in a printed consolation poem did not necessarily limit its effectiveness, and in fact could be seen as an invitation for a larger sense of connection than might be possible in a hand-written manuscript alone.

sense of community as well. The narrator, after all, guides the grieving mother to see her son not only in the landscape all about her, but in the heavenly landscape of the beyond, assuring her that she and her son will enjoy immortality together in the afterlife and that, in the meantime, she has friends to help her grapple with her grief.

#### Aesthetics, Poetics, and the Subversive:

### Appropriating Grief

These mourning objects, whether they are hair weavings, paintings, quilts, or poems, sought to confirm the immortality of man, spur mourners to imagine a shared afterlife, and connect mourners both to their dead and to their larger community. They countered grief by reminding the bereaved that their loved ones were immortal beings who now enjoyed a glorious afterlife that the bereaved could hope to one day share. Such a recognition held the potential to translate the pain of grief into a more "pleasurable sadness" in which a mourner might grieve over his or her inability to share immediately in the glorious reunions of the afterlife, but still experience happiness at the thought of the continued existence of the deceased. Poe was unquestionably familiar with and intuited the "aesthetics" or goals of such mourning objects long before he penned his first piece of literature.<sup>24</sup> He had not only seen such objects used to combat grief and bind together the larger community of Richmond when he was a boy, but he made use of them after the death of Virginia – preserving her hair, having her post-mortem portrait taken, and wearing mourning clothing as he sought out consolation. Given the ubiquity of these mourning practices and objects in the broader culture, as well as Poe's own use of them, it should come as no surprise that Poe's borrowed extensively from this culture

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> And long before he became acquainted with the writings of Aristotle, Schlegel or Coleridge – three figures to whom many scholars have looked as a source for Poe's aesthetic philosophy.

in the conceptualization and articulation of his aesthetic philosophies, especially with regards to the "effects" that Poe felt such poetry should have for its readers.

In what is arguably the clearest and most sophisticated articulation of his aesthetic philosophy, *The Poetic Principle*, Poe claimed that any poem "deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul" (Poe, CTP, 889). 25 The poetry achieved this elevation of the "soul" by appealing to what Poe claimed was one of the "immortal instinct[s] deep within the spirit of man," namely his "sense of the Beautiful" (893). This sense of what is or is not "Beautiful" not only allows a reader to experience "delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors and sentiments amid which [he] exist[s]," but, when activated, awakens within that reader a sense of the "immortality of Man" (893). In other words, "Beauty" was recognized by a reader's "sense of the Beautiful" but, in being recognized, also brought a reader to an awareness of his own immortality. As Poe says, the reader's affective recognition of Beauty was "at once a consequence and an indication of [the reader's] perennial existence" – serving to appeal to and make a reader aware of his own immortal nature in the same moment (893). Furthermore, and perhaps even more crucially, at the same time that the reader's "immortal instinct" is awakened by coming into contact with the Beautiful, that "awakening" acted like a sign indicating to the reader that "there is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain" – a "supernal" or heavenly realm (895). This recognition incites within a reader a "wild effort to reach the beauty above," and it is this "struggle to apprehend the supernal" - incited through the reading of a "beautiful" poem - that "inspired [a reader to]...an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave" and led that reader to hope "to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to eternity alone" (895). Like Sigourney's "The Good Son," the poetry that Poe describes here is intended

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Poe first delivered this as a lecture in 1849. It was published posthumously in 1850.

to bring a reader to a recognition of man's immortal nature. And just as the painting of little Camille is intended to inspire its viewer to imagine what lies in the unarticulated spaces of the canvas just outside his view, Poe's literary philosophy works toward bringing readers to a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" and granting them "a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to eternity alone" (895).

Moreover, the experience of reading any poem which "deserves its title" not only brought readers to an awareness of their own immortality while inspiring them to an ethereal foreknowledge of the "glories beyond the grave," it also left them – much as mourning objects were designed to do – in a state of what Poe termed, "pleasurable sadness" (897). Just as Eliza Howell might have felt when wrapping herself in her quilt, or the viewer of Camille's portrait when sitting in "raptures" in front of it, Poe claimed that when by such poetry "we find ourselves melted into tears, we weep" not because we have lost something that is irreplaceable but because of "a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys of which *through* the poem we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses" (897). Just as mourners might grieve their inability to enjoy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Although the "mournful" state of the reader as described by Poe here has frequently been analyzed in a psychoanalytic framework, I refrain from employing such a framework largely because of the differences I see between the way in which Poe and Freud conceptualize what is essentially a sense of "loss." Freud's analysis of mourning essentially operates under the assumption that one mourns when facing the loss of a desired object, and that mourning ends when one is able to invest the emotional energy (or cathexes) previously invested in the lost object into a new object. Thus Freud's ideas regarding mourning operate, essentially, through the idea of replacement. Poe's readers do not mourn the loss of an object that they have previously been emotionally attached to; rather they mourn their inability to experience a state of bliss of which they have been made aware but cannot yet fully access. They mourn, in essence, their own inability to experience a more complete "experience" of beauty of which the poem simply makes them aware. In this sense, Poe's mournful readers mirror much more closely those nineteenth-century mourners who employed mourning objects such as the ones I have been investigating here. These mourners did not create these objects in order to "replace" the individuals they had lost; rather they created them as a material reminder that at some point in time the lost object (the deceased) would be "restored" (generally through a (re)union in the "celestial" realm). The differences between replacement and restoration mark

those "divine and rapturous joys" which mourning objects helped them to imagine, so Poe's poetry left his readers in a state of "pleasurable sadness" in their recognition that they were immortal but also kept by their mortality from a realm of supernal beauty whose "glories" lay "beyond the grave" and whose "very elements appertain to eternity alone."

In articulating his aesthetic philosophies in this way, Poe was modeling the "effects" of reading beautiful poetry on the "effects" produced when using mourning objects – with one exceptional difference. Poe felt that the experience of "beauty" was a key component of making any poetry – mourning or otherwise – "effective" (something which may have been much less of a concern or a reality for the producers of mourning objects). While the concern with "beauty" may largely have been Poe's own, the concern with objects whose "effects" were capable of bringing a reader (or user) to a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" were those of a deeply entrenched culture of mourning and memorializing. Nor are these "effects" the only thing that indicate Poe's reliance on such a culture in conceptualizing and articulating his aesthetics. Indeed, of the eleven poems quoted in *The Poetic Principle* to demonstrate the profoundly "elevating" effects of "beautiful" poetry, death is the main trope in at least nine, and several of them – including Bryant's "June," Thomas Hood's "Bridge of Sighs," and a selection from Tennyson's "The Princess" – could easily be described as either "mourning" or "consolation" poems. Indeed, given the narrowness of the subject matter presented in the group of poems that Poe reviews in *The Poetic Principle*, one might rightly surmise that

it is only in the context of death and mourning that Poe felt himself capable of fully articulating his aesthetic philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Poe also confirmed the idea that his goals for literature were intimately tied to a culture of mourning and memorializing when he claimed, rather (in)famously, in *The Philosophy of Composition* that "the most poetical topic in the world" is "the death of a beautiful woman" (*GSW* 567). While such a statement seems arbitrary and misogynistic to most contemporary readers, it nevertheless suggests his reliance on a culture of mourning and memorializing that frequently depicted the death of beautiful women (such as Alice Humphreys in Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World*) in hopes that others (such as Ellen Montgomery, and, perhaps the book's readers) might be inspired to a greater sense of their immortal nature, and a kind of "prescience of the glories beyond the grave."

Poe's characterization of the "effective" nature of good poetry, then, is strikingly similar to the "effective" nature of the mourning objects that were an integral part of the culture of mourning and memorializing. Both were intended to awaken their users to a sense of "immortality," both were intended to spur them to a greater awareness of heavenly glory, and both were designed to leave them in a state of "pleasurable sadness" in which they mourned their inability to experience more completely the "glory" hinted at by the poem or object. Moreover, Poe drew extensively from a wide variety of familiar mourning poetry, itself a powerful part of this culture, in order to demonstrate the way in which poetry should affect a reader, and he confirmed the power of one of that culture's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> The only other "theme" prevalent in the poems Poe chooses to represent is love, and even those poems which feature this theme prominently usually do so in context of the death of either the narrator or the beloved subject.

most important images – a deceased beautiful woman – claiming it to be "the most poetical...in the world" (567).

Poe not only relied extensively on a culture of mourning and memorializing in conceptualizing and articulating his aesthetic philosophies, but he showed a rather remarkable propensity for creating literature which, as will be shown, actively participated in aiding mourners according to the logic of mourning embraced by the larger culture – although he did this in somewhat unconventional ways. Given that Poe's aesthetic philosophies and his foremost choice of poetic topics seem to reflect the ideas undergirding the objects and poetry integral to a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, it would seem logical to expect that his poems dealing with mourning would resemble the culture's consolation verse – and to some extent, they do. Critics such as Monica Pelaez have argued that in poems such as "Israfael," "Al Araaf," "For Annie," and "To ---" (1833), it is possible to see Poe as a rather "conventional nineteenth-century poet who often made use of sentimental tropes...[especially in] his depiction of death as a source of solace and a higher state of existence" (57). <sup>29</sup> Richard Thompson has similarly claimed that Poe's work, such as "The Lake – To –" reflects a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Even though some of the poems that Poe quotes in this section were produced before the rise of this culture, such as Byron's "Stanzas to Augusta", he nevertheless makes these poems effectively (and "affectively") a part of a culture of mourning and memorializing by making the "effects" they produce essentially analogous to those of the culture's mourning objects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Pelaez investigates the similarities between Poe's poetic oeuvre and that of the antebellum consolation literature in greater detail than perhaps any of the scholars listed above. Her dissertation, "Sentiment and Experiment: Poe, Dickinson, and the Culture of Death in Nineteenth-Century America" traces the ways in which Poe's work shows certain characteristic hallmarks of the sentimental literature of the time period. Her interpretation of the way in which Poe's work diverges from more conventional sentimental verse in order to perform "subversive" cultural work (a la David Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance*) offers a compelling counter narrative to much of what I am trace in this dissertation.

consolation poet's desire to "transmute terror and sorrow and death into loveliness," and other critics have written in a similar vein (41). 30

And yet, as such critical narratives are quick to point out, Poe used these tropes in rather unconventional ways – ways that lead many of these very same critics to see Poe's work as ultimately subversive with regards to a broader culture of mourning. As Pelaez states, in spite of Poe's use of sentimental tropes, "the defeatist tone that characterizes many of [Poe's] poems dramatizes their speakers' failure to [benefit from]...the sentimental means of consolation" espoused by this culture. Thus, according to Pelaez, Poe's poetry "subverts convention by exposing death as destructive, not regenerative" (183-184). Pelaez, like many of the critics who have adopted such a position, are following in the critical footsteps of someone like David Reynolds. For Reynolds, the fact that Poe's poems ultimately eschew the type of references to Christian salvation and redemption that marked the work of writers like Edward Cooke Pinkney, Maria Brooks, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Estelle Anna Lewis leads to the inevitable conclusion that their "main point...[is to] call attention to their own artificiality and fictionality. In Poe's hands, the visionary mode [that is an important characteristic of consolation literature] is deconstructed just as surely as the House of Usher sinks into the tarn" (Reynolds, *Beneath* 47).<sup>31</sup>

Other critics who have intuited similarities between Poe's work and a culture of mourning and memorializing are Floyd Stovall, who has observed that certain Poe poems trope upon sentimental traditions in showing a reader "how through loneliness, mystery, and terror we are led from the idea of beauty to the idea of death, the ultimate solace for pain" (Stoval 177), and Dwayne Thorpe, who has noted Poe's poetic penchant for describing death as "serenity, not cessation" (Thorpe 99) – a teloi fundamental to the broader culture of mourning and memorializing. Both Stovall and Thompson made their remarks regarding Poe's poem "The Lake – To –," while Thorpe was speaking about "For Annie." Stovall also detected strains of sentimentalism in "For Annie" (Stovall, *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, xxvii).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Other critics have written similarly. For example, Kenneth Silverman has claimed, "grief gave rise to a sizeable popular literature of consolation that included not only works on correct mourning, methods of burial, and the like, but also scores of small volumes of poetry and innumerable lachrymose magazine verses devoted to dead or dying spouses and children, reunions with departed loved ones in heaven, orphans longing to follow their parents into eternity. While this cult of memory helps account for the large

I agree with these critics that Poe's poems depict death and mourning without invoking ideas of Christian redemption and frequently do so with a sense of despair not found in more conventional consolation literature. And yet, Poe's penchant for making use of many of the rituals and practices associated with the culture of which this literature was a part (such as wearing mourning clothing, clipping Virginia's hair, having her postmortem portrait taken, and drawing on the aesthetics that were a vital part of this culture in order to produce his own aesthetic philosophies) suggests an affinity with the culture, its rituals and practices, that is in stark contrast to the subversion that these critics see displayed in his work.

One might surmise from this contradiction that Poe was disingenuous in his use of cultural rituals and practices or in the attitude that he displayed in his poetry, or that critics have grossly overestimated what they have seen as Poe's "subversiveness." None of these, however, is the case. Rather, as will be shown, Poe's subversiveness generally failed to challenge the dogmas of a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, and even his more subversive poems – such as "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven" – were rather easily assimilated into a culture of mourning and memorializing where they held the potential to function both as a source of consolation for the otherwise inconsolable as well as a literary invitation to the reader to engage in what was essentially an act of consolation. 32

number of Edgar's poems on death and the afterlife, it does not explain their special character. He neglected principal elements of the consolation literature of the time, especially its doting on the death of children, its delineation of Christian ideas of heaven, and its pervasive moralism" (73).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Bolstering the notion that many of Poe's poems found a home among the popular "consolation" literature of the time period is that fact that many of them were included in the popular gift books of the day where poetry by "consolation" poets such as Lydia Sigourney flourished. These books, according to Cindy Dickinson, were generally designed to offer their readership "refinement, sentiment, and a good read in one package" (53), and "the act of giving [them]...belonged to the economy of sentiment" that also marked the production and exchange of mourning objects (Lehuu 49). The following Poe poems appeared in the following gift books: "To Ianthe in Heaven" in American Melodies (1840/41), "The Haunted Palace" in The Gift-Leaves of American Poetry (1849), "To ---"and "To Helen" in The Lover's Gift; or, Tribute to the

To begin, it is probably fair to say that, in general, modern critics have seen these two poems as among Poe's harshest indictments of the cultural rituals and practices surrounding death. J. Gerald Kennedy, for example, has claimed that "Annabel Lee" indicts the cultural ideas surrounding death and mourning through the "narrator's compulsive return to the tomb." Kennedy asks, "Why does he try to achieve physical proximity to the corpse if his love is indeed spiritual and everlasting? His action... [constitutes an] anxiety, a reflexive acknowledgement of the very [type of] separation" that cultural rituals and practices of death sought to mend. He also claims that Poe's "The Raven" counters the "fantasy of reunion" that is the culture's "conception of future existence" as well as "disconfirm[s] the ideas associated with the Beautiful Death" (69). Monica Pelaez sees "Annabel Lee" as "Poe's refusal to glorify mourning," a poem in which he "separated [his speaker] from the predominant cultural means of coping with grief" (67) as a sign that the "culture's [forms] of mourning [were] an invalid means of coping with grief" (61). And she views "The Raven" as a poem in which the speaker "repudiate[s] rather than embrace[s] [his] status as a mourner" (102).

Many contemporary readers, however, saw "Annabel Lee" differently – despite the fact that the speaker never overtly depicts the afterlife, shuns the thought of heaven (claiming that it was "the angels, not so happy in heaven, / [that] went envying her and

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Beautiful (1849), "TO My Mother" in Leaflets of Memory, or, Illuminated Annual for MDCCCL (1849), "Annabel Lee" in The Present or a Gift for the Times (1850), and again in Roses and Holly, a Gift-Book for all the Year (1867), "The Coliseum" retitled "Ruins" in The Poets Offering of 1850 (1850), "The Raven" in The String of Diamonds, Gathered From Many Mines (1852) and Golden Leaves from America's Poets (1865), and "To Helen" in The Wreath of Beauty (1864). Poe also had several tales printed in gift books (see Thomas, "Poe" xix, for more information).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> The "Beautiful Death" was a powerful cultural and literary motif that many individuals adhered to in the very act of dying. In general, a "Beautiful Death" was one in which they dying acknowledged their sins, confessed Jesus to be their Savior, and remained conscious till the last – oftentimes expressing their anticipation of "passing on" and enjoying the "beauty" of the glorious realm which awaited them as reward for their faith and righteous doings. Such deaths were thought to prefigure the "saved" nature of the individuals who experienced them. For more information see Aries.

me -/ Yes! – that was the reason... / That the wind came out of the cloud by night / Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee"), and tries to mediate a connection to his deceased through maintaining a close physical proximity to her corpse rather than through a mourning object ("all the night tide, I lie down by the side / Of my darling – my darling – my life and my bride, / In the sepulcher there by the sea") (*CPT*, 957). Indeed, even as he mined (or fabricated) instances from Poe's life which he could use disparagingly, Poe's first editor and biographer, Rufus Griswold (a well-known literary critic, literary executor for Poe, and Baptist minister), nevertheless found nothing subversive in "Annabel Lee" that he could use against Poe, but rather claimed it as some of Poe's "best poetry" owing to the "allusions of [that] ... beautiful poem" (Ludwig 2).

The "allusions" that Griswold remarks upon somewhat cryptically are more overtly treated by a reviewer in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, who stated that "[t]he Pathos of Annabel Lee would touch even the hardest hearted man, even if he were ignorant of the circumstances under which it was written. But its tenderness seems still more exquisite when it is considered, as it really was, a tribute to his dear wife." For this reviewer, the poem was evidence of Poe's desire to "hold sweet and unceasing communion" with "the soul of the departed" (INCOG, 344). Similarly, A. J. Fauste, Jr., writing in *The Ladies' Repository*, claimed that "Annabel Lee' is a lyric of great affection... [that displays] the deepest emotion of conjugal love" (Fauste, 737). Frances Sargent Osgood, an intimate of Poe's, called it "the most natural, simple, tender, and touchingly beautiful of all his songs" (as qtd. in "American Literature," 289). Finally, an unsigned article on Poe's life and career appearing in *Graham's Magazine* remarkably proclaimed the poem a ballad of "sweet and gentle sadness…delicate and touching grace…conspicuously marked by the helplessness and despondent gloom of a distracted and despairing soul" ("The Genius," 23). What seems most remarkable in each of these

reviews is the way in which the various reviewers failed to see anything "subversive" about this poem despite the fact that it takes a rather skeptical view of heaven and refuses to mourn according to custom. Rather, each of these reviewers seemingly understood the negative articulations of the speaker as the voice of one suffering from an otherwise remarkably despondent grief or "pathos" arising in response to the death of his wife, a grief that would "touch even the hardest hearted man." What these reviewers perceived as articulations born out of the intensities of grief seemingly excused their otherwise remarkable unconventionality. These reviewers were arguably prone to do this because, as Gary Laderman notes, antebellum individuals within the culture of mourning and memorializing understood that "the immediate, individualized emotional response to the death and physical remains of a close relation did not always conform to standard, acceptable forms of behavior....[P]rivatized expressions of grief and sadness allowed individuals an opportunity to improvise, act on spontaneous impulses, and develop unique ways of mourning...[including] a fixation the body of the deceased" (Laderman 73). Indeed, by interpreting Poe's poem as an articulation inspired by the grief of losing Virginia, these readers were capable of harmonizing its unorthodoxy with a larger culture of mourning and memorializing. In short, if it was, as more modern readers have suggested, Poe's hope to pen a poem in "Annabel Lee" that "subverts convention by exposing death as destructive, not regenerative," it was a subversion that was itself subverted by the culture's dominant ideas and practices regarding death, mourning and memorializing (Pelaez 183). Such "re-subversion" was made possible through the culture's understanding of grief which, as Laderman points out, was capable of inspiring otherwise unconventional behavior, behavior which would seemingly invite the community to intervene in hope of mitigating such intense suffering.

Moreover, these reviewers would have had the added impetus to interpret the poem as a rather "natural... tender...[and] beautiful" expression of "conjugal love," given that the speaker's grief-stricken desire to return to the tomb and "lay down by the side / ... of my life and my bride" was one of those "immediate, individualized emotional responses" for many bereaved individuals whose grief had yet to be ameliorated through the normal cultural means – bereaved who included, remarkably enough, even Rev. Rufus W. Griswold (who called Poe's poem "beautiful" for the "allusions" it contained). Griswold's wife, Caroline Searles died November 9th, 1842, after giving birth to a son. Griswold, who had been in Philadelphia, rushed back to New York and kept vigil, embracing her body for some thirty hours. Later, after Caroline's funeral, Griswold refused to depart from the cemetery, only leaving when his relatives forced him to do so. Some forty days after the funeral, Griswold went back to the cemetery and persuaded the Sexton to open Caroline's vault. There he removed the lid to her coffin along with the shroud covering her face before kissing her "cold black forehead" and clipping a memento of hair "damp with death dews" (as qtd. in Silverman 218). Griswold apparently collapsed onto the body of his wife where a friend from the city found him that evening "his face still resting on his wife's" (Silverman 218).

Griswold's behavior is intriguing not only for the way in which it mirrors the actions of Poe's speaker in "Annabel Lee" but because Griswold was, with respect to a culture of mourning and memorializing, a decidedly "non-subversive" character. Not only was he a Baptist minister, he was the writer or editor of such texts as "Scenes in the Life of Our Savior," "The Sacred Poets of England and America," and perhaps most tellingly, "The Cypress Wreath: A Book of Consolation." What business did he have trying "to achieve physical proximity to the corpse" if he adhered to the idea that "his love [was] indeed spiritual and everlasting?" Does this "action... [constitute an] anxiety,

a reflexive acknowledgement" of the reality "of the very [type of] separation" that cultural rituals and practices of death defied (Kennedy 69)? The preface to Griswold's book of "consolation verse" provides the answers to these questions and demonstrates precisely the type of "immediate, individualized" and otherwise unorthodox response to grief that (as Laderman notes) was tolerated during the time period:

Besides the Scriptures...our literature embraces many admirable discourses and 'poesies with a spiritual harmony,' addressed to the heart-broken and the desponding who linger among the tombs. This little volume, the fruit of the editor's desultory reading while he was himself a mourner, it is hoped will leave upon the minds of others in like circumstances, some portion of that happy influence which its preparation had upon his own; leading them to view the Father's dispensations with resignation, and to look more and more to the future life as the scene and source of blessedness (Griswold, *Mourner* 4)

Apparently, for Griswold, his otherwise unconventional actions at the death of his wife were part of a grieving process which began in such intensities of grief as to inspire him to seek out a continued association with her corpse, but over time and through the intercession of family, friends, and consolation literature eventually ended with him "view[ing] the Father's dispensations with resignation, and...look[ing] more and more to the future life as the scene and source of blessedness." Certainly, then, his reading of "Annabel Lee" was tempered by the lens of his own experience, and even as he wrote disparagingly of Poe he could nevertheless see this poem as a rather beautiful expression of love.

What may seem to us remarkable actions by Griswold after the death of his wife were in fact engaged in by many others. After the death of his first wife Ellen, on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1829, Emerson began regular visits to her grave, sitting in contemplation. On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1831, some two years after her death, Emerson was still making regular visits, and in his journal entry of that day he noted that he "visited Ellen's tomb and opened the coffin" (Baker 11). His grief inspired him to a continued connection with her

physical remains long after putrefaction had set in.<sup>34</sup> Other instances, though none so famous, exist as well. William Peabody, a full-time Reverend and sometime writer, lost his young wife in 1843. After her death, his brother recorded that Peabody, in his "grief, liked to sit by moonlight near her grave" (as qtd. in Douglas, 58). A grieving mother, Louisa Park, after being informed by some relatives that they had visited inside the tomb where her son was interred, exclaimed in her journal, "Oh what would I not have given to have kissed once more his cold cheek before it moulders to dust. What a satisfaction it would be to me – how much pleasure I should take if I could, every day, enter his gloomy mansion and there indulge in meditation and give vent to the feelings of my heart" (as qtd. in Laderman, 75). This grief-inspired desire to maintain such a proximity to the deceased even caused one Boston sexton, L.M. Sargent, to complain of the hassle of accommodating those in his area who too frequently wished "to descend into the damp and dreary tomb – to lift the lid – and look upon the changing, softening, corrupting features of a parent or child – to gaze upon the moldering bones" (76). Even Poe himself was known to have been found "at the dead hour of a winter night, sitting beside [Virginia's] tomb almost frozen in the snow" (Phillips 1206). The actions of the "heartbroken and the desponding who linger among the tombs" were seemingly not condemned, but rather understood as the product of the "anger, fear and dismay [experienced]...when such a defining relationship [was] severed" (Kete 64). Understanding this, the culture allowed for mourners to engage in actions or dialogue that "articulat[ed]...skepticism about religious teachings or even the possibility of meaning itself," and "such expression would be understood as part of the larger mourning process" (Kete 55), where mourners, aided by the community, were helped to "look more and more to the future life as the scene and source of blessedness" and reunion, and thus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Emerson would essentially repeat this action with the remains of his son some years later (see McAleer 109-382).

overcome not only their grief, but their otherwise "unconventional" mourning impulses (Griswold *Mourner* 4).

The experience of reading "Annabel Lee" would have been remarkably different for individuals such as Griswold, Emerson, Peabody, and Park than for modern readers, who are largely isolated from the bodies of their deceased. Certainly the desire to act in this manner would not have surprised or repulsed these antebellum individuals, and more likely than not, the ending of Poe's poem, where the speaker confesses to his practice of nightly visiting the sepulcher of his beloved, would likely have been viewed with a sense of empathetic commiseration instead of Gothic abhorrence or indignation at a supposed challenge to cultural ideologies, rituals and practices. In such a context the poem becomes a display of "the deepest emotion of conjugal love," and a depiction of "the helplessness and despondent gloom of a distracted and despairing soul." In short, what these readers "saw" when they looked at Poe's poem was a speaker driven towards alienation and isolation by an overwhelming grief – an alienation and isolation which the culture of mourning generally sought to ameliorate by consoling the mourner with objects that testified that the mourner was not alone in his grief – which is precisely what these readers' responses do. Whether or not Poe in fact wrote "Annabel Lee" to mourn the loss of his wife, these reviewers seemingly felt compelled to respond with a kind of compassionate acknowledgement of the extent of what they assumed was Poe's grief. In essence, their reviews acted like mourning objects, testifying to Poe that he was not alone in his grief but had sympathetic (or empathetic) friends who could see past the unconventionality of his "grief-stricken" expressions of love to see them for what they "really" must be – evidence of his desire to "hold sweet and unceasing communion" with "the soul of the departed."

The fact that someone like Griswold identified strongly with the "allusions" of Poe's poem also raises the possibility that it contained the power, as other mourning objects did, to foster a sense of empathetic community for other bereaved readers who found themselves, as Griswold once was, "heart-broken...desponding...[and] linger[ing] among the tombs." Consider that for those mourners then experiencing a grief as intense as that depicted in "Annabel Lee," the poem held the potential to begin the process of mourning by helping individuals see that they were not alone in their experience of "anger, fear and dismay" at the loss of "such a defining relationship" (Kete 64). There is someone, the poem seems to say, who feels as you do now. As such, the poem holds the potential to invoke a sense of empathetic community, a community of the otherwise currently inconsolable. The establishment of such a community would, according to the logic of contemporary cultural practice, subvert the mourner's inconsolability since establishing for the mourner the idea that he was not alone in his grief was one of the key steps towards defeating the "sense of alienation" that inhibited successful mourning and trapped a griever in his grief. As such, "Annabel Lee" could be viewed not only as an expression of intense grief in need of being mitigated, but as a poem capable of instantiating an sense of empathetic community which was itself a prelude to a more complete and successful process of mourning.

Poe's most famous poem, "The Raven," functions similarly. In this poem, Poe depicts a speaker plagued by an interminable sense of grief which he seems eager to dispel. The poem opens with the speaker "vainly... [seeking] to borrow / From my books surcease of sorrow –sorrow for the lost Lenore – / For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore" (*CPT* 943). Interrupted in his pursuit of consolation by a gentle "rapping at [his] chamber door," the speaker arises and opens it only to find an empty hallway. In his bereaved state, with the "sorrow" of losing his "Lenore" still very much

with him, he cannot help "wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming" that perhaps it is Lenore who begs "entreating entrance at [his] chamber door," and he whispers her name into the darkened hallway only to hear the echo of his own voice repeating the word back to him (943).<sup>35</sup> Perhaps disconcerted with his continued inability to "gain surcease from sorrow" he turns back into his chamber, "all [his] soul within [him] burning" and is soon surprised to hear the tapping again. This time he correctly intuits that it comes from the "window lattice" and after "letting [his] heart be still a moment" opens the shutters and inadvertently admits "a stately raven of the saintly days of yore" (943). This raven, which situates itself above the speaker's "chamber door," is immediately viewed in much the same way as the speaker's "volumes of forgotten lore" – as something which might give him "surcease from sorrow" by "beguiling my sad fancy into smiling" (944). However, when the speaker asks the bird in tones that seem almost playful, "Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!" (944), he is startled by a rather unexpected answer – an answer which, as Poe characterized it, "finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student" currently bereft in his grief, an answer which gives "utterance to certain thoughts" that have been troubling the speaker, namely that he will see Lenore "nevermore" (GSW 541). Still hoping to gain a "surcease of sorrow" and recognizing that the bird's "stock and store" answer nevertheless has the power to articulate the speaker's grief-born fears, he begins a kind of dialogue with the bird, a dialogue which now represents the speaker interrogating his own sense of grief (CPT 943-45).36

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> This echo is an important prefiguring of the of the speaker's dialogue with the Raven for while it appears as though the Raven is an altogether separate entity from the speaker, he is, in fact, merely an anthropomorphized figure capable of "echoing" back to the speaker his intense grief.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Poe described this in the "The Philosophy of Composition" as follows: "A raven, having learned by rote the single word, "Nevermore"...[is] perched on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the [speaker], who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visiter's [sic] demeanor, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word,

What he "discovers" in this dialogue (with himself) is anything but pleasant, and the speaker becomes rather angry and antagonistic towards this "creature" that is his grief. This occurs, remarkably enough, when the speaker begins to sense that the grief he is experiencing has no desire to depart, no intention of dissipating. Stanza 14 of the poem marks the beginning of the speaker's growing awareness of the persistent nature of his own grief; the speaker states, "Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer / Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor. / 'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee – by these angels he hath sent thee / Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore! / Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!' / Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'" (945).

In this stanza, the speaker, spurred by a perceived change in the density and odor of the air, claims that the "seraphim" have come to aid the suffering "wretch" whom he addresses. He invites the raven – now representing his grief – to take the consolation that "God hath *lent* thee" and to enjoy a temporary cessation, a "respite," from the intense grief he seemingly experiences. But the raven refuses to "quaff" the "nepenthe" he has been offered; his grief essentially refuses the consolation proffered to it. It is at this moment that the speaker's sympathy towards the "fowl" grief transmutes into anger, and the speaker grows somewhat desperate. He exclaims, "'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil! – / Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore, / Desolate, they all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted – / On this home by Horror haunted, – tell me truly, I implore – / Is there – *is* there balm in Gilead? – tell me – tell me, I implore!' / Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'" (945).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Nevermore" — a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled...to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him...the anticipated answer "Nevermore" (*GSW* 541).

Inspired to anger, the speaker in this stanza asks of his own obsessive and painful grief whether there is any hope for resolution or whether this insufferable state is truly to be interminable so long as the speaker is alive in this earthly "home by Horror haunted." The Raven confirms that it is a state interminable, an answer which spurs the speaker to look for consolation in the afterlife. He again queries him(self): "'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still if bird or devil! / By that heaven that bends above us – by that God we both adore – / Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore – / Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.' / Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'" (945).

With his grief telling him that his hopes for a glorious afterlife with Lenore are in vain, <sup>37</sup> the speaker, seeking to master his grief and repent of the free expression he has given it commands the raven: "Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting – / 'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore! / Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken! / Leave my loneliness unbroken! – quit the bust above my door! / Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!' / Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'" (945).

The abhorrence of the idea of spending the rest of his existence, whether temporal or eternal, without his beloved is such an anathema to the speaker that he attempts to completely reject his grief, claiming that the picture it paints is a "lie." He implores his grief to "take thy beak from out my heart" and let him enjoy a "surcease from sorrow." But the grief seemingly masters the griever, as the poem's final stanza indicates. "And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting, / On the pallid bust of Pallas just

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> It is important to note that the speaker does not necessarily discount the idea that Lenore exists in some paradisiacal afterlife, but rather his own ability to join her there. He seemingly believes that she exists there and that the angels have named her (or call her) "Lenore;" but he doubts his own ability to ever "clasp" her therein. The only thing seemingly "preventing" him from doing so in the poem is his own sense of overpowering grief. Thus, the poem seems to say, if one cannot successfully mourn one cannot qualify for re-union in the afterlife.

above my chamber door; / And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, / And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor; / And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor / Shall be lifted – Nevermore" (946).

The speaker's conflict ends with him apparently unable to move past his intense feelings of sorrow and despair, and seemingly consigned to an eternity in the "shadow" of grief. It is a battle in peril of being lost at the moment when an outside agent ("thy God") offers consolation, and the speaker's raven-plumed grief exerts a will greater than speaker's "I" and rejects that consolation. Once grief effectively articulates its dominance over the remainder of the speaker's self the poem quickly becomes an exercise in "self-torture" that locates the speaker in the throes of a "Mournful and Neverending Remembrance" with little hope of restoration or reunion with the dead (*GSW* 541). This, according to Poe, produces a "luxury of sorrow" almost incapable of being spent, pain virtually without balm (541).

Given that the poem ends with its speaker unable to indulge in a "fantasy of reunion" that would have adhered to the "conception of future existence" endorsed by the culture of mourning and memorializing, it is understandable that critics have interpreted the poem as antagonistic towards such a culture. However, such interpretations fail to take into account the fact that readers within such a culture would have had several ways of interpreting this poem that would make it appear as anything but subversive. For example, while Poe gives few explanations as to why this speaker seems unable to mourn effectively, the fact that he is depicted as a student who has turned to his studies of a "volume of forgotten lore" in order to "borrow…surcease of sorrow" instead of turning to the prevalent cultural rituals and practices of mourning would arguably not have been lost on contemporary readers (943). According to the logic of this culture, had the student

been writing consolation verse, contemplating a mourning portrait, or weaving a lock of his beloved's hair, the outcome would have been different. This is confirmed by the image of the raven, symbol of the speaker's grief and obsessive mourning, perched *above* and thus trumping or establishing mastery over Pallas, goddess of wisdom. Taken together, these images held the potential to confirm for a reader that learning cannot liberate a griever from grief, and that other more "affective" mourning objects and rituals are necessary when seeking consolation.

Perhaps more importantly, this poem offers consolation to its readers in the same way "Annabel Lee" does. If, as Mary Louise Kete asserts, antebellum Americans felt that "to grieve was to experience cynicism, discontinuity, isolation...[and] to mourn was to break down the borders of distance and death and to establish the connections through which one could understand and identify oneself" (Kete 32), then "The Raven" offers "connections" to those whose grief might have rendered them otherwise isolated. It does this, ironically, by depicting someone trapped in the "shadows" of his own intense grief whose utterance nevertheless establishes a community of speaker/poet and reader. If readers can affectively associate with the speaker of the poem – can "see" themselves in him – then by virtue of that affect they are no longer technically "isolated" in their despair, but are offered an affective kinship of grief. To "share" these feelings of grief was to begin the process of "break[ing] down the borders" erected by "distance and death." It was to begin to "establish...connections through which one could understand" that even seemingly insurmountable grief, when communicated, created an affective community, a community of the otherwise inconsolable. To establish such affective

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> This is not to imply that the speaker and the poet are to be seen as the same individual. Only that those who might have encountered the poem and interpreted it in the way that I am suggesting can imagine their connection extending not only to a fictitious speaker but also to a "real" writer whose poem essentially testifies to such readers that they do, in fact, have a "mediator" interested in helping them find a voice capable of expressing the type of grief they are currently experiencing.

community was to counter some of the deleterious effects of death, which tore at society not only by depopulating it but by rendering the living into "isolated, dysfunctional 'one[s]' or 'I[s]'" (54). Thus, while the Raven might "subversively" depict a mourner whose intense grief has rendered him essentially incapable of successfully mourning, the *telling* of that grief again subverts the subversion of the poem by inviting readers to read the poem either as a warning regarding the failure to mourn according to custom, or as an empathetic articulation of grief capable of bringing the otherwise "isolated, dysfunctional" and alienated mourner into association with another, thus forming the communal "we" that was an important step towards successful mourning. In short, "The Raven," in ways quite similar to the rest of the period's consolation poetry, worked to "allay these feelings" of grief by "rebind[ing] the mourner to...[a] community," which by its very nature countered isolation and mediated the experience of grief, opening the door to successful mourning (Kete 55).<sup>39</sup>

If Poe hoped to unite reader and speaker/poet through the articulation of intense grief, reader response seems to indicate that he was successful, for various readers responded with a powerful sense of affective connection to the speaker (and to the poet) through their experience of reading his otherwise grief-filled poetry. For one *New York* 

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While the community that I reference here is unquestionably an "imagined" one, this by no means detracts from its power. While his text focuses specifically on the creation of national identity, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* nevertheless provides a well-known example of the way in which imagining oneself as part of a community can constitute a sense of identity and social belonging. Drew Gilpin Faust has also explored the ways in which death has the power to constitute community and counter threats to personal identity (Faust "Introduction").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Much of the reader response I bring up here indexes the way in which this poem was interpreted as effectively articulating otherwise overwhelming grief, and as a means of connecting reader and speaker through a shared affect of mourning. However, there are other responses, most famously that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which are radically different than those I bring forward here. In fact, Browning claimed that "The Raven" had "produced a sensation – a 'fit horror' here in England....Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it, and some by the music." (Parini and Miller 189). The fact that many of Browning's friends saw the poem as a rather Gothic articulation might seem adequate grounds upon which to claim that Poe was, in fact, actively seeking to expose the arbitrariness and inefficacy of cultural rituals and practices of mourning. However, as my next chapter will show, Poe was vitally aware of the power that otherwise

Express writer the poem invoked grief in such profound ways that he claimed, "Nothing can be conceived more effective than the settled melancholy of the poet bordering upon sullen despair....[I]t is, psychologically, a wonder" ("The Raven," 186). And P. Pendleton Cooke claimed that the poem gifted the reader with a "wild and tender melancholy," as if its excessive despair was not a challenge or a threat to a reader, but a kind of "tender" offering (34). Another respondent wrote that Poe's work subsumed readers, and brought them into a kind of commiseration with the speaker: "No sooner does Poe enter on [his subject] than your attention is riveted, you lend him your ears – nay, that is a feeble word, you surrender your whole being to him for a season.... [Y]ou succumb, body and soul" ("Edgar A Poe," 250). Intriguingly, for at least one other reader, Poe's poem not only seemed capable of bringing speaker/poet and reader into a kind of affective union with each other – a union made possible by the articulation of intense feelings of grief – but this empathetic connection led this reader to hope for something "brighter and better than this world can give" (Thompson, "The" 695). In short, this reviewer testifies that the poetic expression of grief could not only form a sense of community, but also inspire a reader to think about and to desire "the glories beyond the grave" (CPT 894):

[Poe's words are like] the meteor, or the lightning's flash, because [the words last] only for the moment--and yet they speak the power of God, and fill our minds with the sublime more readily than does the enduring sunlight... Every moment there comes across the darkness of his style a flash of that spirit which is not of earth. You cannot analyze the feeling –

<sup>&</sup>quot;Gothic" literature might have in actually working to support a culture of mourning and memorializing and driving individuals towards a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave." Thus, while my reading here focuses largely on ways in which the culture of mourning and memorializing predisposed certain readers to see the poem other than subversive and horrifying, the next chapter will expose the way in which Poe's understanding of the culture of mourning and memorializing framed his use of the Gothic in such a way as to allow him to use this genre as a tool for reinscribing the necessity and power of the cultural rituals and practices that such Gothic work might otherwise appear to challenge. Thus, as the next chapter will show, "The Raven," whether interpreted as a work of Gothic horror or intense despair worked, in either case, to bolster the need for and spur contemporary readers towards an embrace of common cultural rituals, practices and thinking regarding death, mourning and the afterlife.

you cannot tell in what the beauty of a particular passage consists; and yet you feel that deep pathos...you feel the trembling of that melancholy chord which fills the soul with pleasant mournfulness – you feel that deep yearning for something brighter and better than this world can give – that unutterable gushing of the heart which springs up at the touch of the enchanter, as poured the stream from 'Horeb's rock, beneath the prophet's hand.' I wish I could convey to you the impression which the 'Raven' has made upon me. I had read it hastily in times gone by without appreciation; but now it is a study to me – as I go along like Sinbad in the Valley of Diamonds, I find a new jewel at every step. The beautiful rhythm, the mournful cadence, still ring in the ear for hours after a perusal – whilst the heart is bowed down by the outpourings of a soul made desolate not alone by disappointed love, but by the crushing of every hope, and every aspiration. (Thompson, "The" 695)

For this particular reader, the poem fostered a kind of empathetic community of poet/speaker and reader brought together through the "deep pathos" of the poem that both presumably "feel." Whether the reviewer suffered from a similar grief, or whether he simply felt compelled to commiserate with the speaker because cultural practice predisposed him to do so is unknown, but, regardless, the reviewer felt this affective and grief-inspired connection. For this reviewer, as for the others, Poe's "The Raven" was not an attempt to subvert or criticize the culture of mourning and memorializing (despite the fact that it depicted a speaker currently trapped in grief and seemingly incapable of overcoming his despair); rather, it was a "wild" but "tender" offering of grief, a "wonder" of "sullen despair" and "melancholy" which invited its reader into a kind of shared space of mourning. Furthermore, the poem not only granted a sense of empathetic community where speaker/poet and reader shared grief's "deep pathos," but it seemingly brought both of them to think of and desire "something brighter and better than this world" – much like contemporary mourning objects did. Part of what this reviewer senses but has an admittedly difficult time "convey[ing]" is the way in which the desperate quality of the speaker's articulations perpetuate the hope for a future reunion between mourner and deceased, and therefore future recovery from grief. Indeed, the speaker's desperate rejection of total loss and his equally desperate assertion of some future contact with

Lenore is never really relinquished in the poem (he is consistently 'at odds' with his grief throughout it), and in a sense his desire for reunion therefore "exceeds" even the poem's end where grief supposedly has the upper hand. The fact that such desire or "yearning" is never quelled in the poem but exceeds its final lines indicates that the speaker has not wholly succumbed to the blackness that is his grief despite its dark persistence.

Desperation, which is not resignation, always implies a glimmer of hope. Therefore, the poem's desperate yearning suggests that despite grief so dark that it feels as though it "Shall be lifted – nevermore!" there is still retained some hope for the "light" of a glorious shared afterlife. It is the persistence of such hope that allows speaker and reader to use the "outpourings of a soul made desolate" to nevertheless "fill [their] minds with the sublime more readily than does the enduring sunlight," and use the poem as a step towards more successful and complete mourning (Thompson, "The" 695).

Confining an investigation of poems like "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven" to the speaker's articulations alone inevitably makes these poems appear as subversive criticisms of a culture of mourning and memorializing, a culture which claimed to ameliorate the type of deleterious effects of grief that these poems forcefully depict. However, bringing them into a fuller dialogue with a culture of mourning and memorializing and examining readers' responses to them allows a new picture to emerge. The readers I have quoted demonstrate a wide variety of strategies for perceiving these otherwise "subversive" poems as anything but antagonistic towards a culture of mourning and memorializing. In fact, for many of them, these poems seemed very much in line with cultural thinking regarding the pain of grief and the process of mourning. Such readers viewed them either as invitations to come to the "aid" of the speaker or poet, or as works capable of aiding mourners to gain a sense of community when they would otherwise suffer themselves to remain in complete "alienation." Such responses, along

with the fact that Poe borrowed extensively from this culture in order to conceptualize and articulate his goals for poetry, as well as to console himself at the death of Virginia, paint a significantly different relationship between Poe and this culture than might otherwise be supposed, a relationship in which Poe's otherwise "subversive" poetry ironically indexes not only his reliance upon, but his belief in the efficacy of such a culture, its rituals and practices.

#### Conclusion

As we have seen, then, the antebellum rituals and practices surrounding death worked to counter grief by employing a series of artifacts that inspired their producers and users to recognize their immortality, contemplate the afterlife, and feel themselves bound to a larger sympathetic community. The consolation poetry of this time period, like the mourning quilts, the hair remembrancers, the mourning portraiture, and other mourning objects, all worked towards these ends. Curiously, so did the aesthetic philosophy and much of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe. Contemporary reader response testifies that even in poems that seem most at odds with an antebellum culture of mourning and memorializing – poems like "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven," in which mourners are lost in a world of despair, isolated from their communities, and unable to move past their grief – Poe's work was perceived by many in much the same way as contemporary consolation literature. These readers generally failed to perceive Poe's poems as antagonistic towards a larger sentimental culture of mourning and memorializing. For them, awash as they were in a sea of hair weavings, memorial monuments, mourning samplers, post-mortem portraits, black clothing, and memorial quilts, Poe's articulations of grief were easily assimilated into the experience of grieving for the dead, and many had no trouble harmonizing his work with the ideologies, rituals and practices of their culture. For these readers, Poe appears to be at work either giving

voice to or seeking to counter grief, simultaneously establishing a community of grievers whose affective kinship unites them not only in their feeling of pain, but in their hopes for a "brighter and better...world" than this one, and in their seemingly shared longing for "the glories beyond the grave." While it is unquestionably true that Poe's work refrained from indulging in the more conventional tropes and depictions that marked most contemporary consolation literature, his willingness to unabashedly walk "into the shadow" of grief and give it a "beautiful" voice – a voice which could itself awaken readers' "immortal instincts" and leave them with a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – meant that his truly "beautiful" "mourning" poetry was capable of consoling contemporary readers every bit as much as their hair weavings, quilts and portraits did.

#### **CHAPTER II**

# HORRIFYING (RE)INSCRIPTIONS: POE'S TRANSCENDENT GOTHIC AND THE 'EFFECTS' OF READING

[T]he question is not yet settled...whether all that is profound does not spring from disease of thought, from *moods* of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect....[through] grey visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in waking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret....They penetrate, however rudderless or compassless, into the vast ocean of the 'light ineffable.'"

-Edgar Allan Poe, "Eleanora"

[A] very large proportion of Poe's stories are filled with monstrous and appalling images... [which] oppress the reader like frightful incubi, from whose influence he vainly tries to escape....Yet, as out of mighty and terrific discords noblest harmonies are sometimes evolved, so through the purgatorial ministries of awe and terror, and through the haunting Nemesis of doubt, Poe's restless and unappeased soul was urged on...groping out blindly towards the light, and marking the approach of great spiritual truths by the very depth of the shadow it projected against them.

-Sarah Helen Whitman, Edgar Poe and His Critics

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1875, the day after Poe's reburial service at Baltimore's Westminster Hall and Burying Ground, the local area newspapers were suffused with accounts of the previous day's events. Among the various stories that were told, one, the Baltimore *Gazette*'s, reported that shortly after the conclusion of the ceremony, an aging and partially paralyzed Walt Whitman, with "long silver locks reaching to his shoulders," made his way to the newly unveiled monument marking Poe's resting place (as qtd. in Miller, "Exhumations" 46). The monument was itself, reported the *Baltimorean*, festooned with an assortment of flora, "wreathes of ivy, lilies, and evergreens" as well as a "floral tribute in the shape of a raven, made from black immortelles" (46). Whitman, so it seems, was intent upon procuring some memento, some remembrance that, like the mourning objects that proliferated throughout this culture, would allow him to perpetuate and symbolize the connection he felt to Poe. His choice was quite significant, for he

"ask[ed] for and receiv[ed]...a leaf of laurel and a half-opened bud" (46). Whitman's choice is suggestive, if not provocative, for the laurel, it should be remembered, was woven into wreaths which were used to crown the heads of the finest poets of the ancient world, and the act of picking up Poe's laurels suggests that Whitman was not only procuring a memorial token that would allow him to remember the poet, but that he was simultaneously acknowledging and claiming this "poet laureate" as an honored and influential predecessor.

The sentiments which undergirded Whitman's suggestive actions that day were more fully articulated the day following the reburial, when he published an article in Washington's *Evening Star*. Whitman explained:

For a long while, and until lately, I had a distaste for Poe's writings. I wanted, and still want, for poetry, the clear sun shining, and fresh air blowing – the strength and power of health, not delirium, even amidst the stormiest passions – with always the background of the eternal moralities. Non-complying with these requirements, Poe's genius has yet conquered a special recognition for itself, and I too have fully come to admit it, and to appreciate it and him. Even my own objections draw me to him at last; and those very points, along with his sad fate, will make him dearer to young and fervid minds. (Whitman, "Walt Whitman") <sup>2</sup>

Whitman, so it seemed, had long resisted Poe's writing – had long "objected" to what Poe had depicted there. And yet, as Whitman testifies, it was the very nature of those strong "objections" to Poe's Gothic, macabre, and morbid work, filled not with "clear sun," "fresh air," "strength and...health," but rather with horrific deaths, decaying bodies,

Whitman's choice was a good one if for no other reason than that laurel leaves dry well, and as they do so, give off a rather distinctive and pleasant aroma. The parallels between Whitman's choice of laurel leaves, aromatic as they are, to maintain his connection to Poe, calls to mind the way in which he previously used lilacs to cement his connection to President Lincoln in what is arguably the most famous elegy written in the English language "When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Laurels are probably most familiar to us now as the common culinary spice "bay leaves."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> While this newspaper clipping is copied by Whitman into *Specimen Days*, he curiously omits the final line when doing so – something that appears to have gone unnoticed until now. I would like to thank Ed Folsom for generously supplying me with the original copy of the article as it appeared in the November 18<sup>th</sup> Washington *Evening Star* which allowed this discrepancy to be identified.

"deliri[ous]" and despairing narrators, that "drew me to him at last" – as if those very "objections" marked the inestimable value of the literature which produced them. These "very points" – these "objections" – Whitman asserts, are the things that make Poe, and will continue to "make him[,] dearer to young and fervid minds" ("Walt Whitman").

This chapter investigates the nature of Whitman's claim that a reader's resistance, his or her "objection," to the dark and macabre images that fill the pages of Poe's Gothic work is central to that work's value and design. In it, I examine how the "objections" or resistance elicited when encountering Poe's Gothic literature served to spur many readers to reject the dark, macabre, and unsettling ideas found there in favor of remarkably antithetical articulations of their own – articulations which depict life, death, and the afterlife in rather recuperative and transcendent terms. Whitman, as will be seen, was one of these readers, and in his own poetry offered compelling testimony that Poe's Gothic work had an ironic ability to impel its readers towards just such transcendent conclusions about the nature of death and man's perpetual existence – a fact which makes the image of the author of *Leaves* taking at least one "leaf" from Poe not merely suggestive, but unquestionably appropriate. Spurring just such "transcendent" ideas and responses was, as will be shown, not by accident, but by Poe's design. As tales like "The Premature Burial" and "The Imp of the Perverse" suggest, Poe was intimately aware of the way in which reading dark, macabre, and Gothic literature could serve to elicit such apparently contrary reactions. Moreover, such responses, I argue, offer compelling evidence of the otherwise unexpected harmony that nevertheless exists between Poe's dark Gothic literature and his broader aesthetic philosophy which seeks to bring readers to a greater sense of the "immortality of Man," and a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – marking his Gothic literature not as somehow outside or antithetical to his

aesthetic philosophy, as investigated in the first chapter, but intimately concerned with achieving its goals (Poe, *CTP* 897).

### Repulsive Gothicism and the Transcendence of Reading:

#### The Premature Burial

If Poe's aesthetic philosophy was, as I have suggested in the last chapter, intimately concerned with bringing readers to an awareness of their own immortal nature and, in his own words, to a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave," then it is tempting to see Poe's Gothic tales as the antithesis to this philosophy. After all, given what occurs in Gothic tales and poems such as "Fall of the House of Usher," "Berenice," "Morella," the "Case of M. Valdemar," "The Haunted Palace," and "The Conqueror Worm" is at best macabre, frightening, or even gruesome, and certainly not pleasantly spiritually transcendent, one might easily assume that while Poe's work in such tales is certainly "effective," he had, for one reason or another, chosen to make such tales evoke effects that were a far cry from those he felt marked literature which "deserves its title" (CTP 889). The disparity between the Gothic horror presented in many of his tales and poems and the rather transcendent and conventional representations that mark other moments of his work has led most critics to favor an interpretation of Poe's aesthetic philosophy that centers merely on his desire to pen "effective" literature, while marginalizing the specific articulations of his philosophy concerned with man's immortal nature and the work of inspiring readers to a foreknowledge of otherworldly glory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Certainly, Poe had reasons for choosing to create literature that was "effective" in ways that appear radically different from the effects he claimed for the poetry that was his overt concern in "The Poetic Principle." For example, the burgeoning market for sensational and dark romantic fiction, a la *Blackwood's*, was a market that Poe could mine to keep himself, Virginia, and Muddy financially afloat. However, as I demonstrate in this chapter, Poe was capable of differentiating himself from many of these writers by crafting his work with an understanding of how these Gothic effects could themselves be the means of producing rather transcendent responses within a reader.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Critical overviews of the scholarship on Poe's aesthetics, such as those offered by Rachael Polonsky, David Halliburton, and Donald Barlow Stauffer demonstrate this (all in Works Cited).

However, "The Premature Burial" and "The Imp of the Perverse" suggest that Poe was keenly aware that reading dark, macabre, and Gothic literature could serve the same transcendent ends as reading more directly divinely-oriented work – something that a significant record of reader response confirms.

Poe's "The Premature Burial" is part literary satire, part Gothic tale, part journalistic account, and, whatever else it might be, is a work whose playfulness belies its simultaneously serious and insightful investigation of how the reading of Gothic literature opens up opportunities for a reader to re-articulate or reaffirm more recuperative, transcendent, and perhaps conventional ideas regarding death and the afterlife. The tale's playfulness is apparent from its opening lines which claim that there are certain subjects, certain "themes of which the interest is all-absorbing, but which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction. These the mere romanticist must eschew, if he do not wish to offend, or to disgust" (CTP 258). Given that the tale proclaims its subject a few sentences later as "the most terrific [horror]...which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality" to experience, namely "to be buried while alive," it immediately suggests itself to any astute reader as designed to do just that – offend and disgust (258). But to see the tale as merely an effort on Poe's part to shock his reader, overlooking the ways in which an "all absorbing" interest and an "offend[ing]" of the reader's sensibilities leads to an opportunity to better perceive the transcendent, would be to miss the important effects that Poe sees potentially arising from the reading of Gothic literature.

Poe's work of suggesting to readers the remarkable potential that the Gothic has for eliciting transcendent responses emerges out of the way in which the tale "shares" the experience of being prematurely interred. In fact, the tale essentially works to "bury" readers in the horror of this text in a fashion that is analogous to the narrator being

physically "prematurely interred" – making readers' acts of reading analogous to the events experienced by the narrator in the tale itself. Indeed, the distance between the experiences of the narrator and the act of reading is narrowed from the tale's beginning as readers find themselves invited "into" the text in its opening paragraphs. Much of this is achieved as Poe collapses the distance between the thinking and experience of the narrator and that of the reader by moving away from using the singular pronoun "I" and favoring instead the collective pronoun "we." Indeed, in the tale's first paragraph Poe claims a kind of shared experience for both narrator and reader when he has the narrator claim "We thrill...with the most intense of 'pleasurable pain' over the accounts of the Passage of the Beresina, of the Earthquake at Lisbon, of the Plague at London...," which he follows up with assertions of shared knowledge, claiming "We know that there are diseases in which occur the total cessations of all the apparent functions of vitality" and "we have the direct testimony of medical and ordinary experience to prove that a vast number of such [premature] interments have actually taken place" (CTP 258, emphases mine). Poe puts this stylistic effect to its most important use, however, later in the story, after bringing forth several instances of premature burial that are increasingly macabre and horrific. It is at this point, just before commencing the narrator's own experience of premature burial, that Poe again moves to ascribe the events of the text as much to the reader as to any character by having the narrator employ the same collective pronoun "we" – leading the reader to a kind of visceral, if literary, experience of premature burial clearly intended to inspire a sense of fear, despair, and horror. It begins as follows:

It were an easy matter to multiply such histories [of premature burial] as these [just brought forward] – but I forbear – for indeed, we have no need of such to establish the fact that premature interments occur. When we reflect how very rarely, from the nature of the case, we have it in our power to detect them, we must admit that they may *frequently* occur without our cognizance...[and certainly,] *no* event is so terribly well adapted to inspire the supremeness of bodily and of mental distress, as is burial before death. The unendurable oppression of the lungs – the stifling

fumes of the damp earth – the clinging to the death garments – the rigid embrace of the narrow house – the blackness of absolute Night – the silence like a sea that overwhelms – the unseen but palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm – these things, with the thoughts of the air and grass above, with memory of dear friends who would fly to save us if but informed of our fate, and with consciousness that of this fate they can *never* be informed – that our hopeless portion is that of the really dead – these considerations, I say, carry into the heart, which still palpitates, a degree of appalling and intolerable horror from which the most daring imagination must recoil. We know of nothing so agonizing upon Earth – we can dream of nothing half so hideous in the realms of the nethermost Hell. (*CTP* 263)

Through its use of collective pronouns readers, as much as the narrator, find themselves imagining existence in this state of "unendurable oppression," where "stifling fumes," "clinging...death garments," and the "palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm" afflict. Indeed, the passage is designed so that by its end, those readers who have just been led to "these considerations" find themselves with hearts "palpitat[ing with] a degree of appalling and intolerable horror from which [his or her] most daring imagination must recoil," just as the hearts and minds of the prematurely buried would. After relating a series of horrifying instances of premature burial, this, then, is where the text, in essence, seeks to "deposit" its reader – encumbered with the weight of rather "appalling," "intolerable," and "hideous" feelings of horror by a subject "all absorbing." However, as the last few words of this sentence indicate, Poe understood that bringing a reader to this point was not the end of that reader's readerly experience, indeed, as he says, it is at this point that a reader's "daring imagination *must recoil*" against the horror

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It should be noted that premature burial was a real and widespread public concern in the decades surrounding the publication of Poe's story, as the wide circulation of Joseph Taylor's 1816 pamphlet *The Dangers of Premature Burial*, the regularly reprinted 1834 treatise *On the Signs of Death* by Julia de Fontenelle, and the many newspaper articles on the subject appearing throughout the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century attest (see Kenneth Silverman's *Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Neverending Remembrance* in for more information (227-228)). Poe's detailed envisioning of what it would be like to be prematurely buried would arguably have resonated even more strongly for contemporary readers than it does for modern ones given the then-widespread public sensitivity to the issue. Perhaps one of most compelling testaments to the public's concern over premature burial is found in the innovation of Christian Eisenbrandt, of Baltimore, Maryland, who developed a coffin to prevent premature burial. It was designed to spring open if the corpse moved, and was advertised for sale in 1843 in the *New York Mirror*, just one year prior to Poe's publication of "The Premature Burial" (227-228).

that Poe has heaped upon him or her. In short, Poe suggests that the reader's response to such an "all absorbing" experience of horror was bound to exceed the moment of reading itself, and that while it would excite a "degree of appalling and intolerable horror" in the moment of reading, that "horrifying" moment would act as a kind of powerful but unsettling provocateur, inviting, if not spurring, a reader to respond with a kind of resistant "recoil" to the horror he or she had been brought to experience.

Poe's discourse in "The Premature Burial" thus discloses his interest in the way in which "appalling and intolerable horror" invites, enervates or provokes readers to actively "recoil" or resist the thoughts, ideas, and experience they have been brought to have in encountering the "horror" of the text. It is not, as he suggests in the tale, to succumb, condone, or passively accept the horrifying ideas regarding life, existence, and human experience that we are led by him to encounter the macabre and the terrifying, but rather it is with an eye towards inspiring us to actively wrestle with, resist, and even "recoil" against such horror that it is presented. Curiously, this type of "active" and "resistant" reading was also central to the literary philosophy of none other than Walt Whitman, and his thoughts on the subject not only limn a connection between the thinking of the two authors, but, through the resonance they share, lend further insight into Poe's ideas. Whitman, in language that sounds remarkably familiar, claimed that good literature is most important for what it provides a reader in terms of "impetus and effects," for what it "plants and invigorates," for what it "suggests or necessitates" rather than what it "tells" (Whitman, "Democratic" 76). As Whitman goes on to say, this means that truly "effect[ive]" literature invites "reading [which] is not a half sleep, but in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle...[in which] the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the [final] poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the

clue, the start or frame-work. Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does" (76). Thus, as Whitman declaims here and as Poe suggests in "The Premature Burial," the work of readers was not to merely accept, in a state of seeming "half-sleep" or partial syncope, the ideas and assertions heaped upon them by the author, but it was to actively grapple with and ultimately "complete" them that readers should read a piece of literature. <sup>6</sup>

In short, the "recoil" that Poe sought to elicit from his readers in response to being exposed to Gothic and macabre ideas, thoughts, or sentiments was designed to give birth to a kind of "active" readerly re-inscription of the text's ultimate meaning or significance. And, as the final paragraphs of "The Premature Burial" show, paragraphs in which the author finally relates his own experience of being prematurely interred, it is a reinscription which Poe fully expected, if not intended, would be marked by thoughts, ideas, and attitudes towards death and the afterlife that were remarkably antithetical to the ones the story itself had proffered, thoughts bordering on the transcendent even. <sup>7</sup> This

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Poe championed and spoke perhaps even more overtly about such "active" reading in his famous review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, where he claimed it was incumbent upon a reader to take every bit as "active" a role in the production of the text as the author did. In Poe's words, regardless of the "deliberate care....and skill" exercised on the part of the author, the literary "picture [that] is at length painted" and the "certain unique or single *effect*" that is derived from it can only provide "the fullest satisfaction" and benefit to "the mind of [a reader]" when that reader "contemplates it *with a kindred art*" (Poe, *Essays* 572). In short, according to Poe, any piece of literature, despite the active, creative "care and skill" that was employed on the part of writer to bring about the much desired "effect" of reading is destined to fail, to provide less than the "fullest satisfaction" and benefit to the reader, unless that reader was willing to be just as "art[ful]," active, careful, and skillful in producing the work's meaning as the author had been. (572). This kind of theoretical resonance that exists between Whitman's thinking and Poe's thinking about the work of reading literature offers at least one insight into the reason why Whitman valued and enjoyed Poe's work as much as he did – a fact that I will return to at some length later in this chapter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> In fact, the narrator is not actually prematurely buried, but suffers a kind of cataleptic episode while berthed on board a sloop which is carrying on its above decks a heavy load of soil. The narrator slowly awakens to find himself surrounded by wooden boards (the sides and top of his berth), and panics feeling that he has been prematurely interred. His panic awakens the crew and they reveal to him the true nature of his situation. Nevertheless, as the narrator states, "The tortures endured, however, were indubitably quite equal, for the time, to those of actual sepulture." Of particular note in this experience is the way in which Poe again narrates the tale without the use of any definitive pronouns, collapsing the distance between

can be seen as the narrator explains that although "the tortures endured...were fearfully—they were inconceivably hideous...out of Evil proceeded Good; for their very excess wrought in my spirit an inevitable revulsion. My soul acquired tone — acquired temper. I went abroad. I took vigorous exercise. I breathed the free air of Heaven. I thought upon other subjects than death...In short, I became a new man...[and] dismissed forever my charnel apprehensions" (*CTP* 268). Thus, Poe seems to say, experiencing horror as "excess[ive]" and "all absorbing" as that which the narrator and reader have experienced when suffering their terrifying "premature interments" in the text ironically works to elicit "an inevitable revulsion" — a revulsion which Poe suggests should lead the one experiencing it to "recoil" against or "dismiss...charnel apprehensions," "acquire tone...[and] temper" of the soul, and enjoy "the free air of Heaven." In sum, Poe believed that experiencing "horror," in "crypt" or "cryptext," could serve remarkably recuperative purposes, working to spur the one experiencing such horror not to a state of despondency or despair, but towards a greater recognition and appreciation of — if not a

narrator and reader, as if to again suggest to the reader that his or her "horrifying" reading experience is somehow analogous to the narrator's horrifying experience of being prematurely buried. The body of the experience reads as follows: "Slowly, with a tortoise gradation – approached the faint gray dawn of psychal day. A torpid uneasiness. An apathetic endurance of dull pain. No care - no hope - no effort. Then after a long interval, a ringing in the ears; then after a lapse still longer, a pricking or tingling sensation in the extremities; then a seemingly eternal period of pleasurable quiescence, during which the awakening feelings are struggling into thought; then a brief re-sinking into non-entity; then a sudden recovery. At length the slight quivering of an eyelid, and immediately thereupon, an electric shock of terror, deadly and indefinite which sends the blood in torrents from the temples to the heart" (CTP 266). Note that most sentences are passively constructed with gerunds functioning as their subjects, and at no point in this long and detailed experience does any pronoun appear to denominate the experience as solely possessed by the speaker – thus encouraging the reader to sympathetically share in the feelings and experiences that occur. Indeed, the convoluted grammar of the text seems designed to open up the experiences depicted here so that the reader, as much as the narrator, "feels" these various sensations - sensations that culminate in "an electric shock of terror which sends the blood in torrents from the temples to the heart," and thus mirrors the speaker's and reader's previously shared experience of premature burial which culminated in a similar sense "of appalling and intolerable horror" afflicting a "still palpitat[ing]" "heart."

kind of mental reinscription of – more transcendent ideas of "life," "soul," and "Heaven."

While "The Premature Burial" is perhaps Poe's most insightful treatise on the ironically recuperative "effects" derived from reading and experiencing Gothic horror, Poe's larger literary project seems, in many ways, obsessed with examining and expounding upon how individuals can be ironically, paradoxically, or, to use a word that Poe himself favored, "perversely" led to otherwise unexpected ends. "The Imp of the Perverse" discourses on this principle at length. In this treatise turned into a tale, Poe declares his interest in "a propensity which, although obviously existing as a radical, primitive, irreducible sentiment, has [nevertheless] been equally overlooked by all the moralists" (*CTP* 280). He names this inherent and universal "propensity" man's "spirit of the Perverse," and claims that, while "we might, indeed, deem this perverseness a direct instigation of the arch-fiend," it is nevertheless "known to operate in the furtherance of good" – as it does when driving the murderous narrator of this story to confess his crimes and forcibly embrace justice (*CTP* 283). 10

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ironically, the fact that "The Premature Burial" becomes as much a treatise on the role of reading the Gothic as it does a Gothic tale itself is arguably what has led to its general critical dismissal. If Poe had not been so anxious to demonstrate the way in which such experiences function recuperatively by bringing a reader to a greater appreciation for the beautiful, the lively, and the "Heaven"ly, as the above ending points out, the tale might have been a more horrifying, terrifying, and thrilling read – one which would not sacrifice its "unity of effect," to quote J. Gerald Kennedy, in order to make its broader point (Kennedy 54).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Indeed, two thirds of this "tale" is spent discoursing on the nature of "perverse" human responses, and only in the final third does it shift towards being a narration of events.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The "spirit of perversity" in this particular tale drives the murderer to confess he has killed his victim with a poisoned candle, even though he has no fear of discovery. A similar idea is also explored in "The Black Cat," where the narrator's "perverse" need to show the police the wall behind which his wife has been undetectably entombed leads the also entombed and still living black cat to yowl in despair – thus indexing the location of the wife's missing body, confirming the murderous husband's guilt, and once again ensuring justice is done. In tales such as these, Poe seems to acknowledge that the "perverse" (whether it be the narrator's "perversity" that drives him to tap on the wall behind which he buried his wife, or a reader's willingness to expose himself or herself to horrifying and unsettling images in the literature he or she reads) might nevertheless serve society by eliciting surprisingly "just," if not "recuperative" ends.

To borrow the language and ideas brought forward overtly in "The Imp of the Perverse" then, Poe's "The Premature Burial" suggests his understanding of the "perverse" way that transcendent thinking can be elicited in response to reading otherwise horrifying or macabre Gothic literature. In short, these tales disclose how Gothic literature could be used as a vehicle through which one might achieve results that are essentially analogous to those that Poe forwarded in "The Poetic Principle." If his goal in producing any literature "deserving its title" was to bring readers to recognize both their immortal nature (the "immortality of Man") and the glorious afterlife that awaited them (granting them a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave"), then his Gothic writings, by replacing conventional literary images of eternal celestial beauty with horrifying earthly decay, essentially form a dark backdrop against which readers might more clearly perceive, articulate, and then embrace these transcendent ideas.

# "Into the Light of Psychal Day:" Emerging from the Crypt(ext)

If Poe's goal in producing his Gothic literature was to unsettle his readership to such an extent that they would recoil from the depictions of death, dying, and the afterlife that he penned there and articulate and embrace more transcendent or recuperative ideas and attitudes regarding these subjects, then reader response in Poe's own time seems to confirm that he was, in many ways, successful in this regard. This can be seen in various degrees through a wide variety of responses. One anonymous review, appearing in *The North American Review* after Poe's death, essentially reported one reader's necessity to respond in precisely the way that Poe suggests in "The Premature Burial." This reader claimed as follows:

In perusing his most powerful tales, the reader feels himself surrounded by hitherto unapprehended dangers, he grows suspicious of his best friends, all good angels appear turning to demons; *God seems dead*; and on closing the book, the first impulse is to shake off the frightful incubus by rushing

out into the glad sunshine, and freely inhaling the pure fresh air of heaven, to assure himself that he is still among the living, and that nature has not been transformed, while he read, into something soul-sickening and horrible. ("The Works")

A reviewer writing in *Littell's Living Age* at about the same time responded similarly, claiming "[A]ll the horrors he describes...he sets them before his readers with such terrible graphic power that no nervous person should read his works except by broad daylight and with a whole family in the room....although the relation is almost always extravagant and impossible, one needs occasionally to pause and recollect, to avoid being carried away" ("Edgar Allan Poe" 150). And an anonymous *Graham's Magazine* reviewer of Poe's 1845 *Tales* wrote:

[Poe pens stories] of horror and gloom, in which the feeling of supernatural fear is represented with great power....Mr. Poe probes a terror to its depths and spreads it out to the reader so that it can be seen as well as felt. He is an anatomist of the horrible and ghastly, and trusts for effect, not so much in exciting a vague feeling of fear and terror, as in leading the mind through the whole framework of...perversity....[The Fall of the House of] 'Usher,' 'A Descent into the Maelstrom'...'The Black Cat'...are all effective as tales. The volume is a great stimulant to reflection. It demands intellectual activity in the reader....These [tales] 'stir and sting' the mind to such a degree, that examination and reasoning become necessary to the reader's peace. ("Review 3")

For these readers, all of whom appreciated such things as the "beauty" and "power" of Poe's work, these tales provoked reactions remarkably similar to those that Poe displayed in "The Premature Burial." For the first reader, the tales elicited a thirst for "sunshine" and "fresh air," and left that reader "assuring" himself or herself that existence wasn't something "soul-sickening and horrible." For the other, the reading of the tales spurred a similar desire for "daylight" but also the reassuring company of "family." Moreover, the tale spurred this second reader to "pause" and "recollect," and though the nature of those recollections aren't specified they most certainly counter whatever it is Poe has brought forward in the tale, for these recollections aid him or her to "avoid being carried away" by the horror of the text. The need for such "recollections" is

similarly acknowledged by the third reader who, despite also passing over their precise nature, apparently needs them in order to secure a sense of "peace" that the tale has apparently disrupted. Taken together, such reviews resonate strongly with the experience of Poe's narrator in "The Premature Burial" whose horrifying experience of being prematurely buried produced a similar "revulsion" that not only whetted his desire for light, sun and "the free air of Heaven," but spurred him to think "upon other subjects" that would allow him to "dismiss…charnel apprehensions" (*CTP* 268).

The reviews of even more notable readers, friends and associates of Poe's, testify that they, too, had similar reactions to such work. An early exchange of letters between Poe and Phillip Pendleton Cooke in 1839 suggests that Poe's tales called into question Cooke's preconceived notions of death, the immortality of the soul, and the afterlife, and they led him to respond to a reading of "Ligeia" by resisting or rejecting certain elements and ideas found there. Cooke claimed that he "appreciated every sentence as I advanced until the Lady Ligeia takes possession of the deserted quarters... of the Lady Rowena" (Harrison 50). At this moment, he says, he "was shocked by a violation of the ghostly properties... and wondered how the Lady Ligeia – a wandering essence – could, in quickening the body of Lady Rowena... become suddenly the visible, bodily, Ligeia" (50). Cooke's response discloses that the tale caused him to engage with his own expectations regarding the nature of "spiritual" existence in the afterlife. "Ligeia," for him, had violated his preconceived notions of what disembodied spirits could and could

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> This story, it will be remembered, is about a woman, the Lady Ligeia, who was something of a savant – versed in "all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science" – and who spent much time guiding her husband, the narrator, "by slow degrees…down long, gorgeous, and untrodden path[s]…[to] wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!" (CTP 657). The culmination of this otherwise "precious" and "forbidden" wisdom and knowledge was apparently an understanding on the part of Ligeia and her husband that "Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor to death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (657). After the Lady Ligeia dies of fever and the narrator marries the Lady Rowena, Ligeia's spirit begins haunting the new bride, eventually poisoning Rowena and then inhabiting and revivifying Rowena's dead corpse.

not do, and he spent the next page of his letter telling Poe how he felt the tale could have been handled in order to ensure that the "ghostly properties" were "better observed."

Nevertheless, Cooke was not at all dismissive of Poe's tale, calling it "very fine," "phenomenous" [sic], and reminiscent of a "dream" (50). In fact, Cooke seemed to prefer thinking of the story in these terms, and he compared his reading and response to the tale to "dreaming" and then "wak[ing] and "wonder[ing]" about "material omission[s] in the thread of the [dream's] events" which do not diminish its vibrancy, its "detailed minuteness", but does lead us to see the dream less "plausibly" (Harrison 51). In short, Cooke responded to this tale in ways that many individuals might respond to a vivid and unsettling dream. "Shocked" by what it proposed about the nature of spiritual existence in the afterlife, he responded by working hard to first identify it as "implausible" and then to re-write it according to his own already existent understanding.

In 1848, Cooke again articulated how he felt about Poe's work, this time in a lengthy review published in *The Southern Literary Messenger*. Here he claimed that in tales like "Ligeia," "Berenice," "The Case of M. Valdemar," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe "wholly leaves beneath and behind him the wide and happy realm of the common cheerful life of man" which, Cooke had come to suspect, made Poe's work "all the more appreciable from the difficult nature of the fields which he has principally chosen" (Cooke 34). While Cooke had apparently grown to realize that there was something "appreciable" in the "difficult" "fields" of Gothic horror traversed when reading Poe, he failed to overtly identify precisely what this "appreciable" something was. Nevertheless, the way in which Cooke chose to wrap up his review indicates that perhaps what he appreciated was the way in which the work left him with an increased desire for the enlightened, transcendent, and recuperative. He claimed:

[Poe] would be a greater favorite if he brought his singular capacity for vivid and truthlike narrative to bear on subjects nearer ordinary life, and of

a more cheerful and happy character....For my individual part, having [read] the seventy or more tales...always wonderful, often great...I would like to read one cheerful book made by his invention, with little or no aid from its twin brother imagination...a book full of homely doings, of successful toils, of ingenious shifts and contrivances, of ruddy firesides – a book healthy and happy throughout...Such a book...would be a book for the million, and if it did nothing to exalt him with the few, would yet certainly *endear* him to them. (Cooke 34)

In short, Cooke's response to reading almost the entire corpus of Poe's tales was a whetted desire for thoughts, ideas, and circumstances more "cheerful" and "happy." Moreover, his resistance to the gothic and macabre experienced in the course of that reading gave birth to an "active" desire for (and a curiously descriptive inscription of a scene of) "ruddy firesides," "homely doings" and a literature that was not only endearing, but "exalt[ing]."

Even as astute a reader and editor as Rufus W. Griswold responded similarly, if not slightly more ambiguously. In a review written for *The International Monthly Magazine* he claimed that tales like "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" were "most interesting illustrations ...masterpieces in a peculiar vein of romantic creation. They have an unquestionable stamp of genius. The analyses...and thrilling revelations of the existence of a first wife in the person of a second [in "Ligeia"]...the strange and solemn and fascinating beauty which informs the style and invests the circumstances of both, drugs the mind, and makes us forget the improbabilities" (Griswold 3). Like Cooke, Griswold apparently felt that reading a tale like "Ligeia" or "The Fall of the House of Usher" thoroughly engrossed the reader, and his curious assertion that they force or "make us forget the improbabilities" indexes what occurs both in the moment of reading and in the moments that follow. Apparently, for Griswold, this reading experience did not culminate in a kind of euphoric mental reverie, but rather, like a psychedelic crisis or "bad trip" (to invoke Griswold's drug-oriented metaphor), it was a "strange," "solemn," but nevertheless "fascinating" experience that he ultimately felt

compelled to analyze and find improbable. In short, the tales not only "fascinated" him, they provided him with opportunities to re-assert an already existing paradigm or understanding about the subject of a tale like "Ligeia" – a tale which is overtly concerned with the nature of life, death, and the afterlife. 12

Certainly, for some readers, the effects of reading such Gothic horror were so intense that they not only "recoiled" against what they saw depicted there, they revolted against it – an action which certainly exceeded but nevertheless testified to the power of Poe's design for such literature. James Heath wrote to Poe in 1839 regarding reading "The Fall of the House of Usher" and explained that he "never could experience pleasure in reading tales of horror and mystery however much the narrative should be dignified by genius. They leave a painful and melancholy impression on my mind, and I do not perceive their tendency to improve the heart" (Harrison 47). Apparently for Heath, the impressions made upon his sensitive nature by reading Poe's work were so extreme, so "painful" and "melancholy," that he rejected them in favor of literature which he felt would "improve the heart." A similar idea inhabits the thoughts of the previously quoted reviewer in *The North American Review*, who ended the review by claiming that "The

 $^{12}$  Both Griswold and Cooke's responses reveal the way in which they were drawn into the text with an interest so "all-absorbing," to use Poe's term, that it created a kind of dreamlike vraisemblence from which they emerged with a need to dismiss the "improbable" ideas presented there - a dismissal which itself discloses the challenge to conventional and already existent ideas that was brought forward by the tale. A different version of the mental resistance that Griswold and Cooke hint at is found in a review published in The New World in 1845. Here the editor claimed, "We call attention to the powerful tale in this number of our paper by Edgar A. Poe entitled 'Ligeia.' The force and boldness of the conception and the high artistic skill, with which the writer's purpose is wrought out, are equally admirable. Mark the exquisite art, which keeps constantly before the reader the ruined and spectre-haunted mind of the narrator, and so suggests a possible explanation of the marvels of the story, without in the least weakening its vigor" ("Article 3" 105). Here the editor, who had obviously read the tale, felt it necessary to aid his own readership in coming to terms with the "thesis" of the tale. Apparently, Rowena's possession by Ligeia was unfathomable to a degree that the editor, in his own reading, was left to account for it in some way. He chose to do this by understanding it within the context of human psychology (an interpretation with which many modern critical interpretations are sympathetically aligned), and yet the challenge that the tale presented to him was apparently significant enough that he felt the need to share his own "solution" of the problem with his

readership – an act which makes evident the editor's felt need to grapple with the implications of this tale.

impression which is made by Poe's writings, as a whole, is decidedly painful .... If the human brain is indeed a palimpsest...and if all the inscriptions once written there are liable to be reproduced, then most assuredly should we pray for some more potent chemistry to blot out from our brain-roll forever, beyond the future resurrection, the greater part of what has been inscribed upon it by the ghastly and charnel-hued pen of Edgar Allan Poe. Rather than remember all, we would choose to forget all that he has ever written" ("The Works"). For this reader, the impression made upon his or her mind was so extreme that it not only led the reader to wonder whether or not the haunting images would persist in the mind in the next life ("beyond the future resurrection"), but it apparently led that reader to "pray" for some balm, some "potent chemistry," that would allow him or her to "forget all that he has ever written." Certainly Poe, who made his (meager) living writing magazine fare, did not wish to shock and horrify his readers to the point that they would reject his work completely. Rather, as "The Premature Burial" intimates and as most reader's responses testify, Poe sought to provide them with images, thoughts, and ideas that would discomfort only to the point where they, like the narrator in "The Premature Burial," "recoil[ed]" against these ideas and images and were thus led to more fully embrace recuperative if not "transcendent" ideas regarding the nature and purpose of life, death, and the afterlife – something which, the vituperative response of this last reviewer notwithstanding, appears to have been achieved for many of his readers.

### Transcendent Parodies/Haunting Resonances:

## Rearticulating Poe's Aria of Death

The above readers' responses not only demonstrate the way Poe's Gothic work provided readers with an opportunity to "recoil" against the horror found there and embrace more transcendent ideas regarding death, but, in doing so, they also begin to make plain the potential harmony between Gothic horror and a "transcendently" oriented

aesthetics intimately concerned with bringing readers to a sense of the "immortality of Man" and a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" (*CTP* 897). These responses hint that Poe's work ultimately served to bring readers to a greater appreciation of or desire for more "pleasant" things than those which appeared in his Gothic work. Nowhere, however, is the tie between a reader's experience of horror and the transcendent "effects" of reading that Poe forwarded in "The Poetic Principle" more transparent than in the responses of readers who "recoiled" at the experience of reading or hearing "The Raven" – readers who, in response to Poe's poem, went on to articulate transcendent re-articulations of this same poem.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned in the last chapter, there was a significant body of readers who interpreted Poe's poem as the utterance of one suffering from a despair so extreme that it had impeded his ability to mourn successfully, and these readers reached out to him in reviews that functioned much like mourning objects – sympathetically testifying to Poe that he was not alone in his grief. However, as also mentioned, there was another

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> It is not my wish to marginalize the remainder of Poe's poetic corpus in favor of this one poem which I have examined in a previous chapter. However, since this was the most famous of all of Poe's works, and since he articulated much of his aesthetic philosophy in the context of the production of this particular poem, it seems appropriate to return to an investigation of it through reader responses here. It should be noted that other poems – like "Ulalume," "The Haunted Palace," "The Bells," and "Annabel Lee"--did tend to draw some response as well. One reviewer, writing about "Ulalume" and subsequently "The Haunted Palace," claimed that the poems' words were "like a wasted haggard face, they have no bloom or beauty; but what a tale they tell! Weir – Auber – where are they? They exist not, except in the writer's imagination, and in yours; for the instant they are uttered a misty picture, with a tarn, dark as a murderer's eye, below, and the thin yellow leaves of October fluttering above – exponents both of a misery which scorns the name of sorrow, and knows neither limit nor termination – is hung up in the chamber of your soul forever. What power too, there is in the 'Haunted Palace,' particularly in the last words, 'And laugh, but smile no more!' Dante has nothing superior in all those...fervent words of his, where 'The ground burns frore [sic], and cold performs the effect of fire." This reviewer moved on to conflate such work with the poet and ended claiming that he and his works necessarily invoke within a reader "feelings of wonder, pity, and awful sorrow"; nevertheless, the writer was left wondering if "perhaps there was even in him [and his work] some latent spark of goodness, which may even now be developing itself under a kindlier sky....where his dreams...have been tested by the searching light of Eternity's truth." This sense that perhaps there was something recuperative to all of this work was summed up nicely in the writer's final benediction (well known, and often cited without this more complete context): "we cannot but say, ere we close, peace even to the well-nigh putrid dust of Edgar Poe" ("EDGAR POE" 166).

contingency of readers, left until now to investigate, who also emerged from reading the poem, as an anonymous friend of Elizabeth Barrett Browning so famously did, with a sense of "fit horror" (Harrison 229). Browning's friend was, of course, not alone in this regard and several readers were similarly horrified by the darkness of the piece and frequently at the thought of eternal damnation in which one might be perpetually separated from a loved one.<sup>14</sup> Curiously, however, it was precisely this "horrifying" notion that held the power to call forth some remarkably transcendent articulations.

Thomas Holley Chivers, sometime friend and sometime antagonist of Poe, penned one of these. Chivers and Poe began corresponding as early as 1840 and met in 1845 in New York. A physician turned writer and man of means, Chivers was enamored with Poe's work and at one point even went so far as to promise to financially support Poe in his literary endeavors if he was willing to relocate back to the South. While Poe never accepted Chivers's proposal, he did maintain a close relationship with Chivers throughout his life and was unquestionably familiar with his writing. In an 1845 review of Chivers's "The Lost Pleiad: and Other Poems" appearing in the *Broadway Journal*, Poe characterized Chivers's work as "the honest and fervent utterance of an exquisitively sensitive heart which has suffered much and long. The poems are numerous, but the thesis is one – *death* – the death of beloved friends. The poet seems to have dwelt among the shadows of tombs until his very soul has become a shadow.... No man who has ever mourned the loss of a dear friend, can read these poems without instantly admitting the

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As one might rightly imagine, responses to "The Raven" are multiple, and not all readers responded the same way. There are, however, two relatively common responses. The first are those who interpreted the poem as the cry of someone lost in an ocean of grief and in desperate need for someone to reach out to him, and the second, those who responded, as did Browning's acquaintance, with a sense of shock and horror at the ideas of the poem – and specifically about the idea of being forever alienated from those whom we love. For these readers, a common response was one like that which appears in the same *Littell's Living Age* review quoted from in the previous note. Here the speaker claimed that "unutterable woe" accompanying thoughts of seeing a loved one "nevermore" leaves a reader feeling "that madness or misery which *sings* out its terror or grief," feeling the "burden[s] of hell, set to an air of Heaven" (Poe, "Critical Notices," 55).

palpable truth which glows upon every page. The tone of the composition is, in these latter days, a marvel, and as a marvel we recommend it to our readers" (Poe, "Critical Notices," 55). Chivers's volume, as one might guess from Poe's laudatory review, is essentially a volume of mourning verse, and it was not Chivers's only one. 15 This particular volume, however, is especially important because of one particular poem, "To Allegra in Heaven," which Chivers repeatedly insisted Poe "borrowed from" when writing "The Raven." Both works are the narrations of a bereaved male mourning the loss of a beloved female, although Chivers's poem is actually addressed to his daughter – something which is never made overtly clear in the poem, leaving a reader open to interpret it as a lover lamenting the loss of a beloved. Moreover, the speakers of both poems seem preoccupied with a fear of continual existence without their loved one, and make use of very similar, if not identical, verbiage to express these fears. For example, Chivers's poem laments that "[T]his dark heart of mine! / Which though broken, still is breaking, / And shall never more cease aching / For the sleep which has no waking – / For the sleep which now is thine!," and ends claiming "[I] will, tomorrow, / Lay thy body, with deep sorrow, / In the grave which is so narrow – / There to rest *forevermore*" (Alderman 852). Along with certain parallels in theme and verbiage, Chivers's trochaic octameter also makes a reappearance in Poe's "The Raven," although Poe's rhyme scheme (which features both internal rhyme and an abcbb pattern) is significantly more complex than Chivers's relatively straightforward (aaabaaab) rhyme scheme. While it seems likely that Chivers's mourning poem influenced "The Raven," Chivers's wellknown but inflated claim that Poe had plagiarized his work has never been (and probably should never be) given any credence. As John Wilson Townsend has put it, "Of course

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Chivers published eleven books in his lifetime, many of them elegiac in tone, as the following titles testify: *The Path of Sorrow; or, the Lament of Youth* (1832), *Conrad and Eudora; or, the Death of Alonzo* (1834), *The Lost Pleiad, and Other Poems* (1845), *Eonchs of Ruby: a Gift of Love* (which I will examine shortly) (1851), *Memoralia; or, Phials of Amber Full of the Tears of Love* (1853).

Poe read Chivers's poems and they probably influenced him as much as any other poems in the world's literature....[But] the doctor's great mistake was that he regarded plagiarism and parallelism as identical" (169).

The interesting parallels between these works disclose the ties between Poe's most famous poem and a more conventional poetic tradition of mourning, but their differences are just as provocative. Chivers's "To Allegra in Heaven," despite the fact that it continually mourns the idea of life lived without a loved one, is nevertheless framed by a series of opening epigraphs that assert the conventional idea of the continued association of the speaker and the deceased. They are drawn from Shakespeare, The Bible, and Jean Paul Richter (in that order) and appear as follows, "My life – my joy – my food – my all the world," "I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me," "But the grave is not deep – it is the shining tread of an Angel that seeks us" (Alderman 850). Taken together, these epigraphs narrate what the poem itself only obliquely hints at, that despite this present separation the speaker will one day "tread" the same "shining" path through "the grave" that his "Angel" has in order to "go to her" in the beyond. This is precisely what is missing from Poe's "The Raven" – any acknowledgement that death and the grave would function as the transcendent gateway through which one might exit the "sorrow" of this life and enter into a realm of blissful reunion with loved ones.

Apparently such an omission was anathema to Chivers, for after the appearance of "The Raven" in 1845, Chivers sought to "right" and "re-write" what Poe had put forward in "The Raven." Appearing two years after Poe's death in his 1851 text, *Eonchs of Ruby*: *A Gift of Love*, Chivers's poem "The Vigil In Aidenn" is clearly written as a response to "The Raven." If the influence of Chivers's earlier work on "The Raven" is subtle but

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The very title of the poem testifies to the author's belief in this as well – it is an apostrophic address to the dead which makes the dead, in the words of Barbara Johnson, "present, animate, and anthropomorphic" and, I might add, available for continued association (30).

perceptible, the influence of "The Raven" on this poem is obvious – something which is made clear in the poem's opening stanzas.

In the Rosy Bowers of Aiden, With her ruby-lips love-laden Dwelt the mild, the modest Maiden Whom Politian called Lenore. As the churches, with their whiteness, Clothe the earth, with her uprightness Clothed she now his soul with brightness, Breathing out her heart's love-lore.... [But] as the Morning Moon, when stricken By the God of Day, will sicken, Withering quite as Day doth quicken – Faded now the Moon Lenore! For she said to him, when dying, On the bed where she was lying, Breathing our her soul in sighing, "Kiss thy dying lost Lenore!" (5-6)

In this section, Chivers testifies to the fact that this piece is being written in response to "The Raven," when he names the dying beloved "Lenore," aurally invokes the presence of "Poe" by naming the bereaved speaker "Po[e]litian," and employs the same trochaic octameter that appeared in "The Raven" and his previous poem. The narrative of the poem confirms this, as it enacts a series of encounters between Politian, Lenore and a "demon" (which is precisely what Poe calls the raven in the final stanza of his poem) named "Lucifer." Throughout the poem, Politian is tempted to resign himself to a life of utter despair – a state that would mirror that of Poe's speaker in "The Raven" – by this "demon Lucifer." Politian repeatedly asks those he comes into contact with if he and Lenore are "not to meet... / In the Heavenly bowers of Aidenn, / On the Asphodelian shore?," and frequently suffers the "demon's" despair-inducing response, "Never – Never More!" Despite the best attempts of this "damned demon," Politian ultimately refuses to succumb to his grief and despair, and at the poem's end he is apparently rewarded by being caught up into heaven to be forever with Lenore.

Thus she came to him descending,

Holy Angels her attending, Singing of the joys unending for Politian kept in store, While the Seraphim all waited At the portals congregated Of the City Golden-gated, Crying, "Rise with thy Lenore!" When, from out his clayey prison Rose the soul of pure Politian, There to join the Heavenly Vision Glory-circled on the shore! And with life immortal gifted.... In her Chariot, Angel-lighted, Soared Politian with Lenore – Crying out, now joyful-hearted – Never more to feel deserted – Never more to be Death-parted... Entering into Heavenly Aiden, There to rest forever more. (23-24)

Chivers's "righting" and "re-writing" of "The Raven" is remarkable for several reasons. Foremost among these is the way in which it testifies to Chivers's apparent need to recuperate Poe's poem from the dark sense of despondency and despair that haunt it at its end. Chivers's work is a testimony to the idea that grief is ultimately surmountable, and perpetual association of bereaved and deceased is assured if one only "resists" the temptations of that "demon" despair. But, perhaps even more curiously, the poem testifies to the remarkably provocative power of Poe's Gothic poem to inspire a reader to assert, imagine, and embrace remarkably transcendent notions of death and the afterlife. Indeed, Chivers's first poem "To Allegra in Heaven," which is marked by a sense of despondency and despair but nevertheless asserts the idea of eternal association in addressing her directly and in its epigraphs, pales in comparison to this poem in terms of its commitment to conceptualizing death as a joyous emergence from mortal life to immortality and perpetual reunion with loved ones. Therefore, the variant successive articulations of grief that begin in "To Allegra," reappear in even darker and more desperate form in Poe's "The Raven," and then transcendentally emerge in "The Vigil in Aidenn" suggest the remarkably recuperative power that reading "The Raven" might

have for an individual in terms of "spurring" them towards an even greater embrace of conventional and transcendent notions of death, dying and the afterlife. Such a catalyzing effect, of course, brings Poe's "The Raven" squarely in line with an aesthetic philosophy principally concerned with bringing readers to a recognition of the "immortality of Man" and a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – with Chivers's poems pre- and post- his reading of "The Raven" forming a provocative narrative that demonstrates the effectiveness of Poe's work in this regard.

Given the broader concerns of this study, it should also be mentioned that in the same moment that Chivers was spurred to envision, articulate, and embrace rather remarkably transcendent ideas regarding death and the afterlife, his poem, given that it features "Po[e]litian," simultaneously attempts to recuperate Poe. By making Poe the central figure of this poem, Chivers tacitly conflates the speaker of "The Raven" with Poe himself, and his poem thus also reads as an attempt to lead Poe away from the despondency that supposedly oppresses him by providing him with a (literary) object that testifies to the glories he will one day enjoy. Like the bulk of the ubiquitous mourning objects that proliferated throughout the nineteenth-century, this poem therefore also stands as Chivers's testament to Poe that he is not alone in his grief, and, which is more, that he is part of a community that is willing to help him "right" (and "re-write") his grief in ways that move him away from abject desolation and towards a sense of heavenly joy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> There are, of course, a whole host of reasons why Chivers could have chosen to "re-write" the poem, only one of which was to "recuperate" Poe. Perhaps he was frustrated that Poe had failed to acknowledge his influence, or had "trumped" Chivers's poem when producing "The Raven," or perhaps he hoped to cash in on the success of "The Raven." However, the fact that Chivers chose to respond with a remarkably transcendent poetic vision, making death recuperative, mourning surmountable, and heavenly reunions literal and visible, suggests that, whatever other motivations he made have had, he still "recoiled" in the manner Poe suggested readers of Gothic literature should.

Chivers was not the only nineteenth-century reader to be spurred by reading "The Raven" towards embracing and articulating more conventional and transcendent ideas regarding life, death, and immortality. From the time "The Raven" appeared in 1845 through the 1880s, people continued to produce parodies of "The Raven" that were oftentimes remarkably recuperative in the sense that they replaced Poe's Gothic, dark, and despondent images and ideas with ones of bliss and beneficence. One of the most intriguing of these appeared several times in a variety of magazines and books from the late 1840s through the 1880s. Described as "suggested by Poe's 'Raven,'" to which it "is in some measure a response," the poem entitled "The Dove" was written by Miss Mary Townsend of Philadelphia, and is rather remarkable for the way in which it recasts "The Raven"'s dark and despairing imagery and tone. When reprinted in Reverend H. Harbaugh's *The Birds of the Bible*, one contemporary reader responded to it by saying, "How soothing and consoling that poem on the dove by Mary Townsend, suggested by

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Several featured Poe, as Chivers did, now enjoying eternal life in heaven at the side of his "Lenore." These "mourning verse parodies" of "The Raven" exist and have been studied as evidence of Poe's popularity, but I am unaware of any studies that have linked these parodies to mourning traditions or practices. (The closest thing to a recognition of the tie of the verses to mourning culture that I have found is Eliza Richards' statement that in Lizzie Doten's parody, which I will note shortly, "She replaces what she imagines to be the poem's temporal imperfections with a poem that is closer to eternity...[She] becomes a spiritual translator...[who] complete[s] the poem...[making 'The Raven'] the imperfect origin of a future heavenly ideal manifested through her" (Richards, "Outsourcing" 216). However, emerging in the time period and culture in which they did there can be no doubt that this is precisely what these poems are – verses that seek, albeit posthumously, to "reclaim" Poe from the grief that they all assume was his when writing the poem. The fact that none of them dissociated Poe the poet from the speaker of "The Raven" is further testimony to the way in which this unique poem made use of mourning traditions and signified as a mourning poem for readers. For many of them, it simply was unthinkable that someone could pen a poem expressing such grief and despair without actually being in a bereaved state. In other words, the utilitarian function of the genre prevented these readers from considering "The Raven" as anything other than Poe's personal expression of grief. One of the most notable early examples of these parodies is Sarah Tittle Bolton's "On the Death of Edgar Allan Poe," published in the Home Journal on November 17, 1849, which locates Poe "on the 'distant Aidenn' shore[s]" of Heaven where he can now "Rest...evermore" (Bolton "On"). The culmination of these types of poems arguably is seen in the work of Lizzie Doten, who claimed to function as a spiritualist medium for Poe. Her re-articulations of "The Raven," published in the 1870s, end even more transcendently, with Poe speaking "From the throne of life eternal, / From the home of love supernal," where he dwells with his "sinless, saintly" beloved (Hamilton 94).

'The Raven' of Edgar Poe...to which [Townsend's poem] forms a happy contrast or counterpart; his being the embodiment of dark despair, but hers that of consolation and heavenly hope" ("Review 1" 663).<sup>19</sup> Such thoughts were echoed by the editor of the *Friends' Intelligencer and Journal* who commented that the "contrast in the spirit of the two poems ['The Raven' and 'the Dove'] is very striking" ("The Dove," *Friends'*, 463). And finally, Walt Whitman, who may have been responsible for ensuring Townsend's poem's re-circulation by discovering it in one of the "exchange papers" and conspicuously reprinting it on the front page of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1847, claimed that the piece "commends itself to every reader by its graceful spirit of the Christianity": "Mr. Poe's piece was wild and mysterious: this is perhaps less poetic, but its influence, as far as it goes, will be more apt to soften, and meliorate the heart" ("The Dove," *Eagle*, 1).<sup>20</sup>

Certainly, "The Dove" reads as the antithesis of Poe's "The Raven," and yet, by doing so, it displays the ironic power that "The Raven" had for "soften[ing] and meliorat [ing] the heart[s]" of its readers. Townsend's poem begins, as Poe's poem does, at a bleak midnight hour during which a despairing speaker is startled by a surprising sound: "Twas midnight, solemn, dark and deep, / And vainly I had courted sleep, / When, worn with pain, and anguish-tossed, / Hope, faith, and patience nearly lost, / I heard a sound, a gentle sound. / Breaking the solemn stillness round. / A gentle, soft and murmuring sound, / Making the stillness more profound" ("The Dove," *Eagle*, 1). Unsure what the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Thomas Brasher located this poem some thirty years ago and proposed the possibility that Whitman himself may have written it. To my knowledge the poem has never been concretely attributed to any author until now.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Whitman's reprinting of this poem from one of the "exchange papers" is the earliest reprinting that I have been able to locate. In fact, I have been unable to locate the original printing of the poem, although several reprints appear after Whitman prints it in the *Eagle* (which he does, curiously enough, without attribution). It appears again in 1850, 1867, 1882, 1888 in a variety of publications (some mentioned above), and doubtless several other times and places as well.

sound is, the speaker "hush[es her] breath" and with her "heart beat[ing] faster" and faster waits to see what approaches. She is surprised when suddenly, "A flood of clear and single light, / Then burst upon my raptured sight, / Filling my little chamber quite. / And in that light a bird was seen, / Not 'grim and black' with stately mein, / But purely white and beautiful, / With look so mild and dutiful, / A lovely bird, with plumage white, / In that calm, still and clear moonlight" (1).

The bird, a white dove representative of the Holy Spirit, circles the sad girl's head in a kind of beneficent blessing and then rests on the dresser next to an image of Christ. At this point the speaker begins a dialogue with the bird, a dialogue which, like "The Raven," constitutes the bulk of the piece and is marked with a rather crucial refrain, although in Townsend's poem the results of this conversation are antithetical to those found in "The Raven." She asks if the bird has brought anything "my soul to cheer" and the dove responds, "God is love." She protests, saying, but "I am sad, and sick and weary, / And life is long and dark and dreary," to which the bird again answers, "God is love." This conversation continues in a similar manner with the speaker naming all the reasons why she despairs (loved ones are "far away," the world is full of "crime and misery," the speaker has "wandered from the heavenly track,") and the dove, like Poe's raven, consistently answers with the same response, "God is love." Finally, inspired by the "low and earnest tones" of this messenger, the speaker cries out, "Thou mov'st me strangely, won'drous bird / My soul is strongly deeply stirred, / My heart grows lighter.... / Shall past omission be forgiven? / And shall the weary rest in Heaven?" and apparently, in the once again repeated answer, "God is love," she finally recognizes that her "sins" are forgiven and she "feels" her misery lifted. She ends her discourse with the dove by exclaiming, "'Thanks Heavenly Messenger,' I cried, / 'Remain that picture still beside, / Surrounded by the light of truth, / Companion meet for sinless youth, / Thou

blessed type of Love and Peace, / My hope and faith thou'lt still increase, / Be ever near me, gentle dove, / I *know* I *feel* that – God is love!'" (1).

Like Chivers's poem, Townsend's discloses the remarkable way in which "The Raven" seemed capable of spurring a reader to articulate a more enlightened and recuperative idea of life, death, and the afterlife, and her response is, to some degree, perhaps even more remarkable when seen in light of her biography. Apparently, Townsend was a young lady, largely house-bound and "confined her to bed" by "a spinal complaint" that made her health "very delicate" ("The Dove," *Friends*' 60; Bremer 430). Her "protracted illness" had brought on a "long period of suffering" that apparently ended in "blindness and utter helplessness" and early death – something which for many reviewers made "the contrast in the spirit of the two poems ["The Raven" and "The Dove"] very striking" ("The Dove," *Friends*', 463). Although identifying on some level with the despair and despondency depicted in "The Raven," as the opening of her own poem shows, Townsend was nevertheless spurred by Poe's fatalistic expression of grief *not to succumb* to her own sense of grief and despair, but to reject those feelings and to assert a vision of the "love" of "God" that was remarkably recuperative and worked to console her in otherwise difficult circumstances.

As mentioned, something about Townsend's poem resonated strongly enough with Walt Whitman that, as editor of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, he deemed it worthy of reprinting as the paper's lead piece on January 11, 1847. <sup>21</sup> Whitman had long been taken with "The Raven" – he not only printed other parodies of it, but it was one of the poems he "best liked to read aloud" and he recited it regularly on public occasions (Davidson

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> A rather humorous parody appeared again in the *Eagle* exactly one year after "The Dove" (January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1848) shortly before Whitman was fired from the paper.

6).<sup>22</sup> Whitman's appreciation of "The Dove" as a kind of "meliorate[ive]" response to "The Raven" becomes even more compelling, however, when one considers that Whitman's appreciation of it prefigures his own "active" response, as he himself was one of the many nineteenth-century individuals who read the dark, despondent, and Gothic "The Raven" and "recoiled" to embrace and articulate a more "transcendent" vision of life, death, and the afterlife.

Critics have long recognized that Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" resonates with echoes of Poe's "The Raven," but this is usually where critical work on these two poems generally stops – at the point of recognition. This is because, as Ned Davidson noted, despite their similarities "Whitman and Poe display radically different temperaments and dissimilar styles in their most characteristic work" (6). Thus "Out of The Cradle Endlessly Rocking"'s homage to "The Raven," despite the "persistent similarity in symbol, diction, and episode," is seen, because of the "obviously disparate effects...achieved," as coincidental "assimilation and subsequent adaption" of Poe's poem brought about by Whitman's "repeated recitations of 'The Raven'" (Davidson 6).<sup>23</sup>

Whitman had torn a copy of "The Raven" from the *National Fifth Reader* and kept it and several other poems in his "Reading Book" which he read from at public lectures and readings such as his yearly recitation of "O Captain! My Captain!" on the anniversary of Lincoln's death. Curiously, other works he selected and included in his reading book also include Thomas Hood's "Bridge of Sighs," which Poe had used to demonstrate his poetic aesthetics in "The Poetic Principle." For a complete list of the poems contained in Whitman's "Reading Book," see Clifton Furness, *Walt Whitman's Workshop* (206-208).

The only other critical narrative that emerges in discussing these two poems which goes beyond merely noting their similarities and explaining these in terms of Whitman's unconscious assimilation of the poem he so frequently read aloud is the one offered by Joseph DeFalco in 1970 which explains the similarities in symbol, diction and episode as Whitman's "deliberate effort...to put to rest once again the themes of the 'old poetry' that he so much despised" (22). Thus DeFalco claims that Whitman uses Poe's "The Raven" "as representative of the poetic and moral ills of his age" and sees Whitman's treatment of "The Raven" in this manner as an example of him making Poe into a "likely candidate for one of the singers of 'parts' that Whitman castigated in 'Song of the Answerer'" (26). While I disagree with DeFalco's ultimate characterization of Whitman's attitude towards Poe as dismissive, I agree wholeheartedly with his idea that Whitman was intensely interested in responding to Poe and to the idea of death, mourning, and the afterlife – the "themes of the 'old poetry" – in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (which DeFalco also, curiously enough, sees as becoming progressively more optimistic and transcendent as it is rearticulated in the various editions of *Leaves*). Whitman, although he "resisted" the dark, sorrowful, and Gothic aspects of

However, it is the disparities between these two poems, seen in light of Poe's aesthetic philosophies and his understanding of the way in which Gothic literature might perversely spur a reader towards the transcendent, that point towards a relationship between these works that goes beyond coincidental "assimilation" and "adaptation" due to "repeated recitations." Indeed, these "obviously disparate effects" suggest that the poem is, at least in part, an "active" or "recoil" response not dissimilar to those penned by Chivers, Townsend, and others, something which an analysis of the poem itself bears out.

"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," which first appeared as "A Child's Reminiscence" in the *New York Saturday Press* on Christmas Eve 1859, is essentially an act of poetic remembrance in which Whitman recalls and then comes to understand the significance of an event that occurred when he was a young boy. It begins as memories, like "a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing," whirl about in Whitman's mind as he walks along the beach – memories of a boy-hood experience that leave him not only in "tears," but compel him to "sing" (*Leaves* (1860), 270). The nature of these powerful memories becomes the subject of the next section of the poem which tells how a pair of mockingbirds, a "he-bird" and a "she-bird," nest with "four light-green eggs" on the shores of "Paumanok" where they are visited by a "curious boy" who "cautiously peer[s], absorbing, [and] translating" what he sees and hears. The boy listens as the two birds sing joyfully the song of "Two together!" claiming that nothing will bother or perturb – not "night come black" or "mountains" or "winds blow[ing] South, or...North" – "If we two but keep together." However, "all of a sudden, / May-be killed, unknown to her mate / One forenoon she crouched not on the nest... / Nor ever appeared again" (271). The

Poe's work, nevertheless came to recognize that it was these very "objections which drew me to him at last."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Like virtually all of Whitman's poems, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" was written and rewritten throughout Whitman's career. I have chosen to work from the version printed in the 1860 edition of *Leaves* – the first version to be included in a printing of the book.

loss of his mate afflicts the he-bird who remains, pleading with the wind to "Blow! Blow! Blow up sea-winds along Paumonok's shore! / I wait and I wait, / Till you blow my mate to me." The boy, continually watching this "lone singer," is brought to "tears" as the hebird's song becomes a mournful lament for his lost love. He listens nightly as the bird sings, and he, "now translating the notes" many years later, hears the bird cry, "Loud I call to you my love! / High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves, / Surely you must know who is here, / You must know who I am, my love," pleading with the "sea," the "moon," the "land," and "the stars" to "give...back my mate again." Finally, the he-bird resigns himself to his grief, singing what the poet translates as "death carols," "reckless, despairing carols," claiming that he lives in "darkness," "in vain," "very sick and sorrowful" with "throbbing heart" (273).

Brought to intuit and sympathetically experience the nature of love and loss through an "aria" which leaves him with "strange tears down the cheeks coursing," the boy begins speaking to the bird. And while the lament of a bereaved lover already thematically allies the two poems, it is at this point in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" that Whitman's engagement with Poe's work becomes most evident. The boy claims, that having heard the bird's "death carols,"

Now in a moment I know what I am for – I awake,

And already, a thousand singers – a thousand songs, clearer, louder, more sorrowful than yours,

A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me,

Never to die....

O you demon, singing by yourself! Projecting me!

O solitary me, listening – never more shall I cease imitating, perpetuating you,

Never more shall I escape,

Never more shall the reverberations,

Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,

Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there, in the night,

By the sea, under the yellow and sagging moon,

The dusky demon aroused, the fire, the sweet hell within,

The unknown want, the destiny of me. (276)

It is in this moment that several obvious parallels come into view. Not only is Whitman actively conversing with a bird regarding the effects of love, death, and bereavement in a manner reminiscent of Poe's poem, but he calls that bird a "demon," a term Poe also uses to describe the raven in the final stanza of his poem. Moreover, Whitman denotes it a "dusky" bird, which describes not only the gray plumage of the mockingbird but connotes the dark plumage of Poe's raven as well. These parallels become increasingly significant when followed up by Whitman's repeated and insistent use of Poe's signature refrain "nevermore" – all of which give evidence of the ties between Whitman's poem and "The Raven." Perhaps even more significant, however, is the fact that Whitman chooses to invoke this most famous and recognizable poetic refrain when claiming that "never more will I cease imitating, perpetuating you" – a phrase whose meaning he clarifies when he goes on to say that "never more shall I escape" the "reverberations" of those "cries of unsatisfied love" that have spurred him from "peaceful child" to singer of poetic "songs" (Leaves 277). 25 In short, Whitman asserts, the song of the mockingbird, itself now twined with song of "The Raven," has spurred the emergence of his own song and, of necessity, become integral to it – their "reverberations"

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 $<sup>^{25}</sup>$  It is at this moment that the significance of the fact that the bird is a "mockingbird" becomes clear. Whitman's choice to have a "mockingbird" "sing" "The Raven"'s refrain is highly suggestive, for the mockingbird's "song" is produced as the bird weaves together the calls of others that it hears in order to produce its own unique aria. Therefore, the mockingbird can theoretically sing the song of the "raven" at the same time that it weaves that song into the larger refrains of a melody of its own design. And just as the mockingbird's song resonates with the pathos of "The Raven," Whitman's songs, spurred to life by the mockingbird's aria and sung in response to it, necessarily weaves the previous melodic elements of both of these songs into his own transcendent aria. Whitman returns to the idea that his song is, like the song of the mocking-bird, a cantabile which weaves in the strains of others when defending his work in a self-authored review appearing shortly after the poem's initial publication in the New York Saturday Press. Here Whitman states, "We are to accept those and every other literary and poetic thing from beyond the seas, thankfully, as studies, exercises...[But] listen with accumulated eagerness for those mouths that can make the vaults of America ring here to-day—those who will not only touch our case, but embody it and...sing it with varied and powerful idioms, and in the modern spirit, at least as capable, as loud and proud as the best spirit that has ever preceded." To gather together these songs, and to fuse them into a "song, free, joyous, and masterful!...composite - comprehensively Religious - Democratic....Ah!, if [I] should ever succeed in presenting such music, such a poem, an identity, emblematic...[I] would indeed do something" (Whitman, "All About a Mocking-Bird" 3).

"perpetua[lly]" echoing in the registers of Whitman's own arias. Given that it is "death carols" sung by the bereaved mockingbird that Whitman claims "awake[n]" his "songs," one might assume that the poems spurred by hearing this "bird song" would be similarly despairing, proclaiming life "dark" and "vain" like the bird does. And initially, at least, it seems as though this may be the case as Whitman, "awake[ning]" to an understanding of death, is brought to a moment of crisis where he cries out, "O a word! O What is my destination? O I fear it is henceforth chaos!" (276). But this poem, like Whitman's larger poetic corpus, testifies that the melodies spurred by this "bird song" will serve not to indulge but to transcend fear, grief and death. Indeed, Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" ends with his claim that he will not despair, but ultimately "will conquer" "Death" by "fus[ing]" it, along with the song of the he-bird (itself now suffused with the song of "The Raven"), into his own "thousand responsive songs" — "songs" such as "Passage to India," "Chanting the Square Deific," and "Assurances" (*Leaves* 277).

Each of these "thousand responsive songs" are nothing, in fact, if not remarkably transcendent assertions of the "immortality of man," songs and assertions that the narrative of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" depicts as emerging out of Whitman's active struggle to interpret and "conquer" the otherwise unsettling thoughts of "Death" which suffuse the "carols" he has heard. A poem like "Passage to India" demonstrates this clearly. In it Whitman moves from describing the progression and advancement of human civilization to the progression and advancement of the human soul as it essentially casts off the body and merges itself into what might be most easily

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> As one might expect, Whitman's understanding and articulation of man's immortal existence was rather unconventional when compared to the prevailing Christian notions endorsed (and poetically described) by individuals like Chivers and Townsend, but despite its unconventionality the "immortality of Man" these were, as the above analysis will show, unquestionably transcendent and committed to seeing "Man" as "immortal."

termed an "Oversoul" which permeates the entirety of the universe. Indeed, as Whitman depicts it in the poem, the ultimate destiny of his soul, like that of all human individuals, is to "take ship" and "launch out on trackless seas" of eternity in order to become part of the "Nameless... / Light of the light," "mightier center of the true, the good, the loving!... / motive of the stars, suns, systems," a Cosmic Oversoul or omnipresent "God" into whom he "melts in fondness" (13). Launched into a state of being where we become part of the "Nameless" "Light of the light" that permeates the universe, each of us, the poem asserts, are destined to "transcend" our own morality and enjoy an immortal afterlife. But, perhaps even more radically, by asserting that each "melts in fondness" into that Godly Oversoul, Whitman essentially narrows the distance between us and "God" to the point where we are indistinguishable from "God," we, in truth, "become" that Being – a notion whose remarkable transcendence proffers us a kind of immortal glory that arguably outshines anything forwarded by poets like Chivers and Townsend.

Other poems function similarly, such as "Chanting the Square Deific," in which Whitman claims that his destiny, like that of all living, is to become an integral component of "the light, lighter than light" the "Ethereal, pervading all," the "I, the general Soul" (62). Moreover, as Whitman goes on to say, "I" am a central component of this "general Soul," this Oversoul or "God" that permeates all – a component so central that, in his words, "without me, what were all? what were God?" (62). Like "Passage to India" then, this poem, one of the "thousand responsive songs" that Whitman sings in response to hearing the aria of the mockingbird and "The Raven," is marked by an assertion that human beings will enjoy a transcendent immortality in which we essentially

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> I will return, in detail, to investigate the particularities of Whitman's notions of the afterlife and the nature of the transcendent "immortality" that he unquestionably felt all were destined to enjoy in the final chapter.

will become the divine – a notion that is once again reinscribed in a poem like "Assurances." In it, Whitman, seeking to offer "Assurances" to readers regarding their immortality, claims that "I do not doubt I am limitless, and that the universes are limitless... / I do not doubt that the orbs, and the systems of orbs, play their swift sports through the air on purpose – and that I shall one day be eligible to do as much as they, and more than they" for, as he goes on to say, "I do not think Life provides for all, and for Time and Space – but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all" (65-66). In short, Whitman asserts, our "Heavenly Death[s]" will certainly provide a means whereby we will "transcend" the limits of our own bodies and our own mortality to become part of the divine Oversoul that permeates even the very "systems of orbs" that constitute the universe throughout all "Time and Space," and in becoming this Oversoul, the poem says, we will one day "be eligible to do as much as [these orbs], and [even] more than they" (65-66).

Such radical and transcendent assertions of the glorious immortality supposedly enjoyed by all mark not only these poems, but the vast majority of the "thousand responsive songs" that Whitman claims were "awakened" when coming to an affective understanding of grief and death – an understanding, as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" implies, that was influenced by and resonated with the sentiments contained in Poe's famous poem. In other words, Whitman's homage to Poe in the very moment that he narrates the story of his own "awakening" as a poet in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" not only suggests that there was something about the "effects" of reading Poe's work that resonated with the "effects" of hearing the song of the bereaved bird when he was a child (a resonance Whitman both recognized and appreciated), but given the kind of statements regarding the "immortality of Man" that mark poems like "Passage to India," "Chanting the Square Deific" and "Assurances," it suggests that he also

understood how dark and despondent "songs" might nevertheless provoke those that hear them to respond in remarkably transcendent ways. This understanding, which brokers a connection between the work of the two authors despite their otherwise considerable differences, was obviously appreciated by Whitman enough that he acknowledged it poetically when he produced "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" – including in it his famous homage to "The Raven" - but it was a connection that ultimately received its clearest articulation in 1875 when Whitman, attending Poe's reburial, made the provocative claim that he had finally come to understand that it was his "objections" to Poe's Gothic, macabre, and morbid work that "drew me to him at last" ("Walt Whitman"). Certainly, drawing readers to such transcendent conclusions through their "objections" to what they encountered there was Poe's hope, and was, as I have argued throughout this chapter, his design. 28 As his aesthetic philosophies and as tales like "The Premature Burial" and "Imp of the Perverse" suggest, Poe possessed a keen understanding of the way in which Gothic literature, filled with fearful, despair-inducing images and ideas, might nevertheless clear the way for his readership to "recoil" from what they found there – to actively challenge and thus "conquer it," to use Whitman's phrase – and in the process find themselves with a valuable opportunity to articulate their own transcendent ideas regarding the experience of death and the nature of the afterlife.

## Conclusion: Poe's "Eureka"

While Poe's aesthetic philosophy, overtly concerned as it is with inspiring readers to a greater appreciation of "beauty," a sense of the "immortality of Man," and a

Which, of course, brings to mind the other compelling fact which "connects" these two authors, namely the aforementioned belief shared by both as they jointly recognized the value of a literary text as a means of inciting a kind of "active" readerly response, one in which the reader worked almost "gymast[ically]" as he or she "grapple[d]" with, nuanced, or even "recoiled" against the notions, ideas, and sentiments placed there. Indeed, Whitman's admission that it was his "objections" to Poe that finally made him appreciate him seems a compelling testimony that he understood and appreciated Poe's work for the way in which it invited him to "read" as he felt any reader should.

"prescience of the glories beyond the grave," seems to value the production of literature that is the antithesis of work like "Fall of the House of Usher," or "Ligeia," or even "The Raven," the fact that these works exist as antitheses to that very aesthetic philosophy nevertheless ironically indexes the ability of these works to achieve that philosophy's goals. Like a vaccine stimulating the defenses of its recipient, Poe's work offered his readers the opportunity to use otherwise "deathly" material for strikingly "beneficent" purposes. Seeing his literature in light of these philosophies and realizing how readers' responses indicate that it worked according to this design not only suggests a kind of contrapuntal harmony between Poe's Gothic work and the period's more conventional sentimental poetry (such as that produced by Townsend and Chivers), but, between the otherwise disparate pieces of Poe's literary corpus as well. Indeed, as provocative as the many readers' responses are in testifying to the ability of Poe's Gothic tales to produce such reactions, perhaps the most transcendent vision elicited by the production of those dark, macabre and morose depictions was the one elicited from Poe himself in his last great literary work – by his own admission the dénouement of his literary career – a work which, curiously enough, also shares another remarkable resonance with that of Walt Whitman.

"Eureka: A Prose Poem" began as a lecture, originally given on a stormy winter's night, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1848, to approximately sixty people gathered inside New York's Society Library. The lecture drew mixed reviews. Evert Augustus Duyckinck denoted it "a mountainous piece of absurdity," while another reviewer, perhaps more charitably, called it "a nobler effort than any other Mr. Poe has given to the world" (Thomas, "Poe" 724, 722). <sup>29</sup> While contemporary reviewers never truly arrived at a consensus opinion of

<sup>29</sup> Critics have argued for some time how seriously to take Poe's elevation of *Eureka* to the top of his literary canon – let alone how seriously to take the work itself. Arthur Ouinn, in his seminal 1941

biography claimed that it is "the climax of Poe's creative achievement" (541), and Eric Carlson in his

<sup>&</sup>quot;Poe's Vision of Man" claimed that "a close reading of Eureka, the colloquies, and a few other statements

the lecture, when "Eureka" appeared in print in July Poe claimed "I could accomplish nothing more," for this work would, he believed, "revolutionize the world of Physical and Metaphysical Science" (Ostrom 452, as qtd. in Silverman 337). Poe's revolutionary work, the finale of his literary career, is perhaps most remarkable because it is, in the words of Stuart and Susan Levine, "a transcendental treatise" (Poe, Eureka xvii). 30 Such a moniker is certainly well-deserved, for in "Eureka" Poe discourses at length on the immortality of the human soul, and the nature of the afterlife itself – setting forth a metaphysics of the universe, similar to Whitman's, which claims that all matter, and thus all mankind, is essentially the material and spiritual diffusion of an eternal entity, God, who has literally dispersed Himself as the universe. According to "Eureka," every being, every object, every atom is God, or at least a bit of Him. Moreover, each of these "bits" of God exists only temporarily as discrete independent entities, for, as Poe envisions it, the destiny of all these discrete entities and objects is to eventually merge together again, coalescing back into the universal oneness that they constituted at some point in the distant past – a oneness that was, is and always will be the Divine. Poe describes this as follows:

There was an epoch in the Night of Time, when a still-existent Being existed – one of an absolutely infinite number of similar Beings that people the absolutely infinite domains of the absolutely infinite space...[This] Being passes his Eternity in perpetual variation of Concentrated Self and almost Infinite Self-Diffusion. What you call The

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of Poe's philosophic perspective will reveal...the quest for rebirth of mind and soul" (7), and yet others, like Harriet Holman and Harold Beaver, antithetically claim it as alternately an example of "encyclopedic satire similar to the content of Poe's other work" (Holman 55) or a "hoax [that] is no longer openly and ironically confessed as a 'lie,' but celebrated as the 'truth' of the imagination" (Beaver xvii). For a listing of contemporary reviews of Eureka, see Burton Pollin's "Contemporary Reviews of Eureka: A Checklist" (26-30), and for more on the critical heritage of the work, see Barabara Cantaloupo's "Eureka: Poe's 'Novel Universe'" (in Carlson's Companion, 323-344).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> It is important to preserve the distinction here between Emersonian Transcendentalism, as a literary and philosophical movement, and the idea that the Levines are forwarding, which is that in "Eureka" Poe is concerned with articulating his beliefs about the destiny of all individuals to "transcend" their own mortality.

Universe of Stars is but his present expansive existence....All these creatures – *all* – those whom you term animate, as well as those to which you deny life....[share] an identity with the Divine Being....[D]uring the long succession of ages...these myriads of individual Intelligences [will] become blended....[until] Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah....the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own [constitutes God]. That God may be all in all, *each* must become God. (*Eureka* 105-6)

Such remarkably transcendent thinking and prose "poetry" is, like all of Poe's poetry, unquestionably concerned with articulating the "immortality of Man," and with gaining a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" (CTP 897). Nevertheless, "Eureka" has seemed problematic to many critics because, as the Levines point out, it sits at odds with so much of Poe's literary corpus. It is, to borrow their characterization, "a strange midcentury work," "startlingly unconventional" in ways that aren't reminiscent of the other "unconventional" Gothic work he created, but rather in the way that "Thoreau's Walden, the music of Listz and Wagner...Humboldt's Kosmos" and even, as they mention in passing, "Whitman's Leaves of Grass" were (Eureka xi). Thus, this work is problematic because while readers expect to see rather dark, macabre, and morose "unconventionalities" flowing from Poe's pen, the species of transcendent unconventionality that marks "Eureka" appears to many as atypical of Poe. Nevertheless, in light of the investigation conducted here, "Eureka" seems like less of a "strange midcentury work" and more like the logical outcome of a literary corpus whose darkest and most macabre work nevertheless led Poe, as it led Whitman and others, towards a brilliantly transcendent vision of life and the beyond. To borrow the words of one of Poe's close associates, quoted in this chapter's epigraph, "Eureka" is evidence of the way in which the writing of those "stories...filled with monstrous and appalling images" were nevertheless a way in which "Poe's restless and unappeased soul was urged on...groping out blindly towards the light, and marking the approach of great spiritual truths by the

very depth of the shadow [such tales] projected against them" (Whitman, "Edgar Poe," 71). Seeing Poe's Gothic poems and tales working to produce such responses suggests that there might be a more intimate connection between Gothic and transcendental literature than is generally thought to exist – a connection which Poe and Whitman, at the very least, understood, because the dark, despondent, even macabre Gothic songs that each either penned or heard led both to ultimately articulate remarkably transcendent, and remarkably similar, ideas about the afterlife and the "immortality of Man." Such responses as Whitman's, Chivers's, Townsend's, and even Poe's suggest that perhaps the Gothic and the transcendent, disparate as they may appear to be, are thus obverses of the same coin – a coin which, regardless of whether or not it is spent heads up or down, still buys the same.

#### **CHAPTER III**

# FAINT IMPRESSIONS: SCRIPT, 'AUTHORIZED' TECHNOLOGIES, AND SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY

On April 27, 2009, an article commemorating the life and career of Edgar Allan Poe on the two-hundredth anniversary of his birth appeared in one of the United States' most popular arts, culture and literary magazines, *The New Yorker*. While the article was only one among many appearing in the country's periodicals and newspapers to celebrate the anniversary, it was significant not only because of where it appeared, but because it nevertheless rehearsed many of the stereotypical popular culture ideas about Poe that have circulated in various guises since at least the 1840s. In the article, Poe is characterized as a degenerate who "lied compulsively about his own life," a pedophile who lusted with a "love that was more than love" for his thirteen-year-old cousin, an irresponsible inebriate whose lack of discipline led to "the squalid conditions in which" Virginia "was eventually consumed...by tuberculosis," an opportunist who wrote many of his tales and poems not in accordance with any aesthetic philosophy but simply "to stave off starvation," a man who finally inhabits, much like the characters in his Gothic poems and tales, a state of "necromaniacal incoherence" (Lepore). By the article's end, Poe seems both a kind of decadent "genius" in Baudelairean style, and "a complete fraud...forever calculating" how he might turn word into coin – an ambiguity that is left

hackneyed pop-culture depictions of Poe that Whalen adroitly steers clear of in his work because they are, in the vast majority of cases, historically untenable.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Penned by historian Jill Lepore, the characterization of Poe, as will be shown, is doubly problematic because it seems, at least in part, to be based upon some of the excellent recent work done by notable Poe scholar Terence Whalen, whom she references in her article (See Whalen). Whalen's book-length exposition details the important way in which Poe's attempts to negotiate with what he terms the "Capital Reader" – both the actual publishing house approver of manuscripts submitted for publication, and a market culture which tied literary performance, literary reading, and literary value to profit more generally – shaped his literary production. But, somewhat problematically, Lepore weds this narrative with

unresolved, but summed up with the statement that perhaps we can best account for Poe if we simply think of him as "three-fifths Romantic, two-fifths poor" (Lepore).

In characterizing Poe as a morally decadent and "necromaniacal" "genius" this article essentially conflates Poe, the man, with the very types of mentally unstable and morally ambiguous characters that appear in his Gothic tales. Indeed, in reading the article, one cannot help but notice the resonances between the Poe they meet there and the narrator of a story like "The Black Cat," in which an intemperate, obsessive narrator is responsible for the death of his wife and takes a kind of perverse pleasure in parading others through the macabre scenes of his various crimes for his own narcissistic pleasure. To suggest a likeness or affinity between Poe and the characters that people his Gothic tales and poems is a perennial interpretive gesture, and the *New Yorker* article is only the most recent in a long line of articles making it.<sup>2</sup> In 1960, David Rein, like many critics committed to viewing Poe's work as a screen for his own personal pathologies and desires, conflated Poe's characters with his "self," claiming that a story like "A Cask of Amontillado" is little more than the veiled ejaculations of a bitterly jaded son fantasizing about patricide, with the vengeful Montresor representing Poe, and Fortunado representing John Allan, Poe's foster father (Rein 42).

As we cast back in time, the chorus of like-minded critics becomes stronger and stronger. In 1923 D.H. Lawrence claimed that, like the narrator of "Berenice," "the human soul in [Poe] was beside itself" (Lawrence 87). Other critics have articulated the relationship in even more direct terms. In 1901, Francis Thompson claimed that, "these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I do not wish to imply that there have been no counter-veins of critical interpretation that present a picture of Poe different from the one the litany of writers that I bring forward in this introduction paint. Indeed, the work that I do in this chapter owes debts to a similarly significant line of historicist and new historicist critics such as Thomas Mabbot, John Reilly, David Reynolds, Shawn Rosenheim, Stephen Rachman, Jonathan Elmer, Meredith McGill, Joan Dayan, Eliza Richards, Kevin Hayes, Leon Jackson and others, all of whom – to some degree – tend to favor interpretations of Poe's work that see it as a response to his situatedness within specific social and historical contexts as opposed to mental pathology.

tales of idealistic terror or beauty...constantly revolve round situations suggested by [Poe's] own history. To consider Poe is to consider these tales, to consider the tales is to consider Poe," and similar sentiments, penned by Lewis Gates at roughly the same time, claimed "Poe's work may be summed up by saying that his heroes are apt to be neuropaths and degenerates. And doubtless Poe himself was a degenerate...He had the ego-mania of a degenerate, a fact which shows itself strikingly in his art....[with its] almost entire lack of the social sympathies....When all is said, there is a something a bit inhuman in Poe" (Thompson 318, Gates 126). Robert Louis Stevenson echoed these when in 1875 – the year of Poe's reburial in Baltimore – he claimed that the "horrible images" presented by Poe in his tales could only have come from one possessed with "something of the ghoul or the furious lunatic....[one who] had ceased to be a human being. For his own sake, and out of an infinite compassion for so lost a spirit, one is glad to think of him dead" (Stevenson 9:255). And in 1854, only a few years after his death, George Gilfillan wrote that the Poe's "literary powers" were "controlled principally by his habits and circumstances" and as such "are not the productions of a healthy or happy man" but of a "confirmed debauchee" (332).

This chorus of critical interpretation finds its strongest and perhaps most significant soloist in Rufus W. Griswold.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Griswold is generally given pride of place when it comes to conflating Poe, the man, with the narrators of his Gothic tales – a dubious honor arising out of the production of Griswold's infamous "memoir," a libelous obituary which appeared in the New York *Daily Tribune* on October 9, 1849, two days after Poe's death. In it, Griswold characterized Poe as a lunatic who "walked the street, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses...or, with glances

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> As Mark Niemeyer notes, readers of Poe have "not been fascinated by his biography (and the distortions of it) in isolation from his writings"; indeed, as Neimeyer goes on to point out, the "blurring" between the two "can…be traced back at least as far as Griswold's defamatory 'Memoir'" (211).

introverted to a heart gnawed with anguish, and with face shrouded in gloom, he would brave the wildest storms; and all night, with drenched garments and arms beating the winds and rain, would speak as if to spirits" (Ludwig 2). It was a characterization pointedly working to encourage the conflation of Poe, the man, with the narrators of his Gothic poems and tales, and in its most transparent moments claimed bluntly that Poe's work was "probably much more nearly than has been supposed, even by those who were very intimate with him, a reflection and an echo of his own history" (2). Griswold's distorted biography and characterization of Poe, which itself has given rise to that vein of interpretation traced in this chapter's introduction, would not, however, have been nearly as palatable and believable to readers if Poe hadn't chosen to produce the Gothic literature for which he is best known. Indeed, if Poe had continued to produce largely Romantic and, at times, somewhat sentimental verse, as he did in his 1827 book of juvenile verse Tamerlane, his 1829 Al Aaraaf and Other Poems, and his 1831 Poems, the depiction of Poe as deranged literatus, "muttering indistinct curses" and consumed with "madness and melancholy" somewhat similar to a Roderick Usher, would likely never have resonated strongly enough with readers to have taken as firm root as it did.

Nevertheless, by the early 1830s, Poe was actively looking for ways to reach a wider readership – something the production of volumes of poetry had not allowed him to do – and, as Terence Whalen has pointed out, "his literary output in this period [accordingly] shifted dramatically from poems to tales" (9).<sup>4</sup> In making the choice to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Poe's reasons for moving to prose were unquestionably complex. Whalen, in his notable treatise, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* attributes this shift as being "expressly summoned forth by the new economic order that emerged from the Panic of 1837" (9). While I agree with Whalen that economic factors unquestionably were a motive for the poverty-stricken writer, I am nevertheless resistant to the idea that Poe, who repeatedly asserted the fundamental tenets of his aesthetic philosophy as investigated in the first chapter of this dissertation in his criticism during this very same time period, largely abandoned his broader aesthetic goals in hopes of earning a profit. Indeed, speaking specifically of the way in which tales fit into his larger aesthetic philosophy, Poe, in a review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* claimed, "were we called upon, however, to designate that class of composition which, next to such a poem as we have suggested, should best fulfill the demands of high genius – should offer it the most advantageous field

reach a wider readership through the production of Gothic works of horror which challenged or subverted contemporary ideas and articulations of death, mourning and the afterlife – even if the purpose in doing so was to provide readers with the opportunity to productively "recoil" against what they encountered there – Poe risked being seen by readers as ultimately antagonistic towards the cultural rituals, practices, and ideologies that he was, in fact, supporting. In short, like the characters that people his Gothic work, he risked being seen as embracing ideas outside prevailing social norms, an action that would place not only his writing, but potentially his "self," outside the bounds of proper society. As this chapter will show, by the late 1830s Poe had become keenly aware that penning such images of terror and horror held the potential to distort his own identity in the minds of his readership, something which, at times, both called into question his own social acceptability and masked the unique work his Gothic tales performed. In this chapter I examine how Poe worked to counter the tendency to conflate his characters with his "self" by repeatedly seeking to bring that "self" before his readership through his script – a "self" and script he hoped would assuage any anxieties over his individual character or nature, as well as the nature and character of his Gothic tales and poems, in

of exertion – we should unhesitatingly speak of the prose tale....In the brief tale...the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control....[When a] skillful literary artist has constructed a [good] tale...he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents--he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction" (Poe, "Review," 298-299). While poetry remained, and would always remain for Poe, a kind of literary zenith, a review such as this indicates that he nevertheless saw the tale as a worthy vehicle for literary expression – one which he chose to write not solely because, as Whalen and Lepore suggest, it held the potential to be a "relatively lucrative" endeavor (a claim that Poe's biography, unfortunately, attests is largely without substance), but because through it he might still, with a reader who contemplates it with a "kindred art," engender the type of singular "effect" that was so crucial to any piece of literature which "deserves its title" - namely, the way in which it brought its reader to a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" and a greater appreciation of the "immortality of Man" (Poe, CPT, 889, 897).

the very moment of reading. He did this by drawing on ideas central to the nineteenth century's culture of mourning and memorializing which held that the physical trace of an otherwise absent person was capable of testifying to the nature of his or her individuality. A person's script, maintained largely in the letters that individual wrote but also in ephemeral notebooks such as "autograph albums," was considered just such a physical trace and was an important means of preserving the identity of the absent or deceased; making samples of handwriting—or "traces" of the hand – especially cherished. In short, through an examination of his manuscript practices, his very popular *Autography* series, his prospectus and cover design for *The Stylus*, and even his essay "Anastatic Printing," I show Poe actively championing the duplication of script over type as a means of testifying to the character and nature of the producer and the produced, using these technologies of "self"-representation to assure readers that the writer – and by extension, that which he had written – was not simply to be equated with the abhorrent images and characters painted within.

# A Growing Chorus of Concern

Throughout the 1830s, as Poe began to produce Gothic tales such as "Morella," "William Wilson," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," "King Pest," "The Duc De L'Omelette" and "Berenice," he found that his choice of genre and the fact that his literature worked to challenge certain prevailing ideologies surrounding death, mourning, and the afterlife were having potentially problematic repercussions, for a significant constituent of his readership seemed preoccupied with what the writing of such work might imply about the author himself.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> It is important to recognize that it was during this time that Poe also began to enjoy a modicum of critical acclaim among other reviewers (some of whom were quoted in the last chapter), who, despite the "terrific" nature of the work, nevertheless intuited something recuperative about it. Such reviewers account, perhaps, for the praise which, to quote the *Southern Literary Messenger*, began to come from "journals on every side...[which have] rung the praises of [Poe's] uniquely original vein of imagination" (Thomas, "Poe" 179).

is seen in the response of publisher Henry Carey who responded to an 1835 query written by John Pendleton Kennedy on Poe's behalf regarding the possibility that Carey, Lea and Blanchard might act, if only nominally, as the publishers of Poe's Tales of the Folio Club (which by 1835 included pieces such as "MS. Found in a Bottle," "The Duc De L'Omelette," "King Pest," "Berenice," and "Morella"). Carey responded to this request by saying, "I do not know what to say respecting Poe. Is he not deranged? I should care nothing about aiding him as you propose, but I should like to hear that he is sane. Let me hear from you" (Campbell 198). In short, Carey, whose dealings with the young writer were largely brokered through Kennedy and who knew Poe almost exclusively "through" his writing, felt concerned, arguably because of what he had read in the very tales that he was being solicited to publish, that Poe himself might not be of sound mind and would thus be a risky individual to engage in business. Other, more public examples exist as well, appearing in the form of reviews of which Poe himself was unquestionably aware.<sup>6</sup> For example, a mid-1830s review, written by the editor of the *Richmond Compiler*, of Poe's tale "Duc De L'Omelette" – in which a morally decadent Duke plays cards with Satan for his soul – claimed that Poe had written a tale "calculated to produce effects permanently injurious to sound morals," something, the editor claimed, which "will not be doubted by those who reflect seriously." "Poe," he goes on to claim, is "too fond of the wild," an inclination the editor finds both "unnatural and horrible." He even goes so far as to plead publicly with Poe to let his "genius...soar into purer, brighter and happier regions....[and] to disenthrall himself from the spells of German enchantment and supernatural imagery," to cease "descending into the dark mysterious and unutterable

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Several of these reviews were actually reprinted in the *Southern Literary Messenger* while Poe was either contributing material to the magazine, or editing it. If Poe hadn't seen them when they appeared in the magazines in which they were originally printed, the reprinting of these reviews in the *SLM* unquestionably made him aware of what was being said about him and his writing.

creations of [his] licentious fancy" (as qtd. in Walker 87). Like many of the reviewers quoted in the previous chapter, this one recognized that there was a certain "genius" to what Poe had written, a genius the reviewer overtly recognizes in the tales' powerful "supernatural imagery" at the same time that he fails to appreciate the way it has driven him to a greater desire for the "purer, brighter, and happier regions" he urges Poe to concern himself with. This reviewer's failure to appreciate Poe's skill in energizing a kind of active desire for more transcendent literature, ideas, and "regions" through his macabre work thus leads that reviewer to wonder about Poe's own moral nature. depicting Poe as possessed of a "wild" and "licentious" fancy. Wondering if the tale isn't in fact "calculated to produce effects permanently injurious to sound morals" even as the review testifies that, in this case, it has done just the opposite (whetted the reviewer's desire for the "purer, brighter, and happier"), the reviewer urges a kind of moral and literary reform on Poe – who is essentially characterized as degenerate. Indeed, the reviewer pleads with Poe to suppress the "wild," "unnatural and horrible" parts of his "licentious fancy," begging him to "disenthrall himself from the spells of German enchantment and supernatural imagery" and cease "descending into the dark," feeling that if Poe did so, he could apparently produce something more worthy (87).

The failure to understand the way in which Poe's work invoked a greater desire for the transcendent, despite the fact that it regularly did so even for those who saw that literature as emerging from a less than sound or moral mind, led several other reviewers

This review, like several others mentioned in this section, were actively recirculated, and many were reprinted in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 and 1836, a time during which Poe was religiously reading, contributing to, and eventually even editing the *Messenger*. This particular review brings to mind, of course, the lengthy review published by Phillip Pendleton Cooke, quoted in the previous chapter, who claimed that after reading Poe's tales, a reader was left wishing for "one cheerful book made by his invention, with little or no aid from its twin brother imagination...a book full of homely doings, of successful toils, of ingenious shifts and contrivances, of ruddy firesides – a book healthy and happy throughout" (Cooke 37). Even in otherwise laudatory reviews, such as Cooke's, an undeniable pressure was being put upon Poe to identify not only his literature, but his self, with more conventional and "acceptable" ideas.

to wonder about Poe's personal character as well. A critical notice appearing in the Augusta Chronicle claimed that Poe's tales, such as "Morella" and "Berenice," are "wild and gloomy exhibitions of passion...[which belong to] the German school of romance. We cannot but think, that such over-wrought delineations of the passions are injurious to correct taste, however they may be to the erratic mood, and unnatural imaginings of a poetically vivid mind. Mr. Poe is capable of higher and more useful flights...[and he must] not suffer the current of his genius to be choked by a morbid sensibility...or a destructive freshet of a superabundant fancy" (Thomas, "Poe" 156). Analogous sentiments were found in comments made in 1835 by James Heath, assistant editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, who commented that he was similarly concerned with Poe's attraction to "German horror," something he followed up the following month when reviewing "Morella." Here he claimed that, despite "Mr. Poe['s]...great powers of imagination, and a command of language seldom surpassed," he "lament[ed]" Poe's unnatural propensity for "blend[ing] in his fancy the shadows of the tomb with the clouds of sunshine and life" ("Editorial Remarks," 4/1835, 460, italics mine). Similarly, others, while admitting the remarkable power of the tales in capturing the imagination of the readers, nevertheless began to question just precisely what type of man could produce such work. Two Charleston, South Carolina, periodicals carried notices of this nature. The Charleston Kanawha Banner claimed that Poe's work bespoke a writer "truly imaginative and possess[ing] great powers of language," who nevertheless exhibits "a fancy unrestrained by judgment and undirected by design," something which seemed enough of a cause for concern that its editor, despite the fact that the work "attracts and carries along the attention of the reader," felt required not to "accord much praise" to him as it might do him harm by encouraging him to continue indulging his "unrestrained" "fancy" (Thomas, "Poe" 156). The editor of the *Charleston Courier*, after reading "MS. Found in a Bottle," claimed rather succinctly that any author who thus "delights in the creation of strange possibilities, and in investing the most intangible romances in an air of perfect verisimilitude" must be an "eccentric genius" (Walker 84). In short, reviewers such as these, failing to intuit Poe's larger aesthetic design to elicit a desire for the transcendent (as discussed in the previous chapter), read Poe's work as a clear window to his "self" and ascribed to the author a mind of "unnatural imaginings," attracted to "German[ism] and gloom," prone to "wild and gloomy exhibitions of passion" and "choked by a morbid sensibility" – a mind exhibiting "great power" but one that seemed, based on the tales it produced, nevertheless suspicious.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the fact that several of these reviewers invoked the idea that Poe's work was uncomfortably akin to "German horror" is significant not only because it exposed these readers' inclinations to locate Poe's work within a already pre-defined genre of writing, but because such references were a sure indicator to Poe of the type of literary figure and literary work that he and his tales were being compared to. Perhaps the most widely read and important writer of "German horror" during Poe's lifetime was E.T.W. (aka E.T.A.) Hoffmann, German diplomat, musician, critic, and writer of Gothic tales such as "The Sandman" and "The Affianced Spectre." Unfortunately, by the 1820s and 1830s Hoffman's penchant for writing such "gloomy" literature had garnered him a troubled reputation both within the United States and beyond. Indeed, in 1827,

Besides the reviews of the previous chapter, which also regularly point out that readers, while appreciating the work, nevertheless were brought to wonder about the personal characteristics of the man who could pen such literature, several other responses indicate that this was a consistent source of concern for nineteenth-century readers who were constantly tempted to overlay the characteristics of the narrators onto the author himself. Even Elizabeth Barrett Browning, before becoming more acquainted with Poe, wondered what a poem like "The Raven" indicated about the man who had written it. She claimed, in a letter to a friend, "As to the 'Raven' tell me what you shall say about it! There is certainly a power - but it does not appear to me the natural expression of a sane intellect in whatever mood" (Harrison, 2:385-386). This response and those cited in the previous chapter suggest that for those readers who came to know Poe solely through the production of Gothic tales and poems, the question of his individual identity was always at stake.

magazines such as *The New England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* were reprinting Thomas Carlyle's biographical sketch of Hoffman under the title "A German Literary Character." Even a short excerpt provides purchase for understanding just what type of "character" was being connoted when Poe and his work were associated with such a label. According to Carlyle, "the tavern was [Hoffmann's] study, and his pulpit, and his throne...his wit flashed and flamed...over coarse earthly liquor,...wasting faculties which might have seasoned the nectar of the God's," and his work was nothing if not a kind of analogous embrace of "wild anarchy, [both] musical and moral" (Carlyle 1). In characterizations such as this, the kind of personal debauchery ascribed to Hoffmann was perceivable in the "musical and moral" "anarchy" of the literature that he penned – a conflation of literature and biography which would have placed Hoffmann well outside the bounds of public and social acceptability in nineteenth-century America. This is something that would have been of little concern for the German Hoffmann, but undoubtedly would become problematic for an unemployed, largely unrecognized, but nevertheless upwardly aspiring Poe, if he were to be similarly labeled.

Other than Carlyle's, perhaps the most salient and oft-repeated criticism of Hoffmann appearing during Poe's lifetime – a criticism that Poe, as an avid reader of magazines throughout the 1830s would almost assuredly have encountered – was that penned by Sir Walter Scott in the *London Foreign Quarterly* in 1827, an article reprinted in a wide variety of American periodicals throughout the 1830s and even the 1840s. Scott claimed that what allowed Hoffmann to become the "inventor, or at least first distinguished artist who exhibited the fantastic or supernatural grotesque in his compositions" was the fact that he was "so nearly on the verge of actual insanity, as to be afraid of the beings his fancy created" (Scott 290-291). Indeed, Scott claimed that his works show that he possessed "a mind so vividly accessible to the influence of the

imagination, so little under the dominion of sober reason" that "a numerous train of ideas [could] occur in which fancy had all the share and reason none at all" (Scott 291). This extravagance of fancy impeded, according to Scott, a sound and healthy "taste and temperament" and "directed [Hoffmann] too strongly to the grotesque and fantastic – carried him too far" beyond the bounds of propriety (Scott 302). Ultimately, Scott famously claimed,

[I]t is impossible to subject tales of this nature to criticism. They are not the visions of a poetical mind...[but] the hallucinations of lunacy...the feverish dreams of a light-headed patient....In fact, the inspirations of Hoffmann so often resemble the ideas produced by the immoderate use of opium, that we cannot help considering his case as one requiring the assistance of medicine rather than of criticism; and while we acknowledge that with a steadier command of his imagination he might have been an author of the first distinction, yet situated as he was, and indulging the diseased state of his own system, he appears to have been subject to [an] undue vividness of thought and perception....which we cannot help regarding as diseased. (Scott 306-307)

Given that Hoffmann's work and personal identity, conflated in the *New England Galaxy*'s term "German literary character," was being described by figures as formidable as Carlyle and Scott as marked by a "musical and moral" "anarchy" or as so like "hallucinations of lunacy" that they require "the assistance of medicine rather than of criticism," the fact that such a term as "German gloom" was being ascribed to Poe's own work would have been cause for concern. Indeed, the invocation of such a term, as well as the laments of critics who saw in his work evidence of "unnatural imaginings," "wild and gloomy exhibitions of passion," and "a morbid sensibility" certainly made Poe aware that his choice of genre was, while effectively meeting his aesthetic goals, nevertheless

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Poe's need and attempt to distance himself from writers like Hoffmann are made even more apparent when one stops to consider that it was to this exact individual, Hoffman, that Rufus W. Griswold turned when maligning Poe after his death. Indeed, Griswold, twisting Poe's own words, claimed in an 1850 article that Poe's earlier *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, which I will deal more completely with shortly, was, like the "German Fantastic Literature of which Hoffmann was Corphyeus," full of "gold in…hard ore [that] is not worth the digging for" (Griswold 185). As he goes on to say, such work marks Poe, as it appeared to mark Hoffmann, as possessing a "great defect," a "want of sympathy with, and indeed of likeness to, human kind. He could not paint men well because he did not understand them; and he did not understand them because he was not at all like them" (Griswold 185).

leading some individuals to question his personal nature, seeing him as a talented if not "genius" writer who produced morally suspect literature and was, perhaps, personally degenerate and morally suspect himself.

Poe was certainly aware of this trend of criticism as it became increasingly common throughout the mid to late 1830s, and he testified both to this awareness and to his desire to counter such misinterpretations of his character on various occasions – most notably in personal letters such as the one written to T.W. White of the Southern Literary Messenger after the 1835 publication of "Berenice," and more broadly and publicly in the preface to his 1839 first-ever compilation of tales, entitled *Tales of the Grotesque and* Arabesque. Indeed, in March, 1835, Poe, through the generous patronage of John Pendleton Kennedy, began to establish a working relationship with T.W. White, proprietor and nominal editor of the Southern Literary Messenger. Urged on by Kennedy, White had accepted for publication Poe's now famous tale "Berenice" – in which a monomaniacal husband, Egaeus, fixated on the teeth of his cataleptic wife, Berenice, forcibly removes them from her mouth as she lies incapable of protest in the coffin where he has placed her. White, through his editor Heath, had only two months prior castigated another writer of macabre tales, "Benedict," for submitting to him a Gothic and macabre tale entitled "The Doom." White, who published "Benedict's" piece as an example of how, "of all the passions which ravage the heart and destroy the peace of society, there is none more detestable than revenge," nevertheless chastised its writer publicly for what appeared to White to be a desire to conduct "war with the interests of virtue and sound morals" ("Editorial Remarks," 1/1835, 254). Apparently, White had similar reservations about the publication of "Berenice." In introducing the tale to his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Although the actual correspondence from White to Poe is lost, the nature of Poe's response and the character of White's previous castigation of the writer "Benedict" seems to strongly indicate that he had developed serious questions about Poe's sense of "taste" and "morals" from what he had penned in "Berenice," as the above investigation shows.

readers he claimed that it would be read with "interest…by patrons in this city" of Richmond because, "Mr. P. is a native…[and] he resided [here] until he reached manhood," as if this was the primary reason for its printing. Furthermore, despite claiming that there is a "force and elegance to [Poe's] style," he was careful to claim that "we confess that we think there is too much German horror in the subject" (254). Apparently White also wrote to Poe concerned with the nature of the tale he had submitted for publication, and although the contents of White's letter can only be conjectured given that White's original letter to Poe apparently does not survive, Poe's response is one of a man attempting to draw distinctions between himself and the Gothic and macabre tenor and characters appearing in the tale – something that is easily seen in Poe's attempts to depict the tale as a literary exercise meant to elicit a certain effect and not the production of a mind or personal character somehow degenerate in morals or sense of propriety. Writing to White, Poe said the following:

Your opinion of it is very just. The subject is by far too horrible, and I confess that I hesitated in sending it you especially as a specimen of my capability. The Tale originated in a bet that I could produce nothing effective on a subject so singular, provided I treated it seriously....You may say all this is bad taste. I have my doubts about it.... But whether...or not in bad taste is little to the purpose.... [Such tales take] hold upon the public mind [and] they augment the reputation of the source where they originated.... [Similar tales by Bulwer and Coleridge have appeared and the first men in Europe have not thought the writings of this nature unworthy of their talents, and I have good reason to believe that some very high names valued themselves principally upon this species of literature. To be sure originality is an essential in these things – great attention must be paid to style, and much labour spent in their composition, or they will degenerate into the turgid or the absurd. If I am not mistaken you will find Mr. Kennedy, whose writings you admire, and whose Swallow-Barn is unrivalled for purity of style and thought of my opinion in this matter.... In respect to Berenice individually I allow that it approaches the very verge of bad taste – but I will not sin quite so egregiously again. I propose to furnish you every month with a Tale of the nature which I have alluded to. The effect – if any – will be estimated better by the circulation of the Magazine than by any comments upon its contents. (Poe, Letters 58)

In this letter, Poe was clearly working to divorce his production of this tale from any intrinsic need of a "deranged fancy," depicting it as emerging not only out of a kind of literary challenge to his skills as a writer, but as a highly calculated attempt to construct an "effective" text capable of "taking hold" or captivating the mind of readers, appealing to them so "effectively" that an increased desire to read them (an increasing "circulation" of the tale and the magazine) will be one measurement. Poe acknowledges that in the absence of significant attention and skill on the part of the writer, such work would "degenerate" into something self-indulgently bloated and substanceless ("turgid or...absurd"), but argues that when carefully crafted not as a personal indulgence but in hopes of "capturing the...mind" of a reader, such work has significant aesthetic and pecuniary value. Indeed, Poe works hard to distinguish himself not as a self-indulgent melancholic whose pen reflects a kind of personal degeneracy, but rather a careful artist whose choice of genre has been appreciated by "men of talent" such as Bulwer, Coleridge, and Kennedy, and, when handled appropriately, deemed "worthy" by "the first men in Europe" (58). At the same moment, he also works to testify that he is a capable magazinist (Poe was, after all, hoping to procure employment from White at this time) who understands the financial demands that White – and all involved in the magazine's production and distribution – labor under, and his words testify that he is capable of fusing the aesthetic and economic successfully (58).<sup>11</sup> In short, Poe works to demonstrate that he, unlike Egaeus, is not morbidly and monomaniacally fixated on otherwise degenerate "ideas," but rather is a skillful and deft artist capable of understanding the strictures and opportunities inherent in both the genre in which he has chosen to write and the medium in which he knows such work will appear.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Terence Whalen's *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* conducts an extended investigation of similar moments in which Poe testifies to his awareness of the economic factors that are at work in the production of mid-century magazine fare (see Whalen).

If Poe worked hard in his personal correspondence to prevent potential publishers, like White, from conflating the dark, Gothic, and macabre nature of his work with his own personal nature or character, he made use of the opportunity of publishing a volume of these Gothic tales to prevent his wider readership from doing the same. In December 1839, Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* appeared for sale in two volumes, published by Carey and Blanchard of Philadelphia. In his introduction, Poe took the opportunity to publicly refute the idea that the "general character" of his work was somehow indicative of his own personal character, and to counter the charges that had been mounting against him that he was somehow "inordinately" or "unnatural[ly]" drawn to pen such images. In contrast, Poe, once again, worked hard to present himself as a deliberate artist with a "matured purpose," one whose "very careful elaboration[s]" were intended to elicit certain "legitimate" or recuperative "results" from readers. It warrants lengthy quotation:

The epithets "Grotesque" and "Arabesque" will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published. But from the fact that, during a period of some two or three years, I have written five-and-twenty short stories whose general character may be so briefly defined, it cannot be fairly inferred — at all events it is not truly inferred — that I have, for this species of writing, any inordinate, or indeed any peculiar taste or prepossession. I may have written with an eye to this publication in volume form, and may, therefore, have desired to preserve, as far as a certain point, a certain unity of design. This is, indeed, the fact; and it may even happen that, in this manner, I shall never compose anything again. I speak of these things here, because I am led to think it is this prevalence of the "Arabesque" in my serious tales, which has induced one or two critics to tax me...with what they have been pleased to term "Germanism" and gloom. The charge is in bad taste, and the grounds of the accusation have not been sufficiently considered. Let us admit, for the moment, that the "phantasy-pieces" now given are Germanic, or what not. Then Germanism is "the vein" for the time being. Tomorrow I may be anything but German, as yesterday I was everything else. These many pieces are yet one book. My friends would be quite as wise in taxing an astronomer with too much astronomy, or an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The text itself bears the date of 1840, and indeed many copies may have been distributed after the beginning of this year. Nevertheless, the initial copies of this text did appear in 1839 despite the 1840 dateline printed.

ethical author with treating too largely of morals. But the truth is that, with a single exception, there is no one of these stories in which the scholar should recognize the distinctive features of that species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic, for no better reason than that some of the secondary names of German literature have become identified with its folly. If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul, — that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results. There are one or two of the articles here...to which I expect no serious attention.... But for the rest I cannot conscientiously claim indulgence on the score of hasty effort. I think it best becomes me to say, therefore, that if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned. These brief compositions are, in chief part, the results of matured purpose and very careful elaboration. (Harrison, *Life* 1:150-151)

Poe begins his preface with a kind of pre-emptive strike against would be critics by openly acknowledging the fact that these tales are, in fact, Gothic tales in the "German" horror" style, choosing to use two words, "Grotesque" and "Arabesque" that, rather notably, Sir Walter Scott employed when describing the work of Hoffmann in his essay "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition," which I quoted from earlier. 13 However, after immediately acknowledging the affinity in the "prevalent tenor" of both writer's work. Poe moves quickly to distance himself from the kind of conflation of author and work that marked the critical narratives penned by individuals like Scott, claiming that despite certain similarities in tone. "it cannot be fairly inferred — at all events it is not truly inferred — that I have, for this species of writing, any inordinate, or indeed any peculiar taste or prepossession" (1:150). Indeed, Poe goes on to say, it is not a personal affinity for such work, a "peculiar taste" or an Egeaus-esque "prepossession" that leads him to produce such work, rather the "five-and-twenty short stories" were written in this "general character" or genre with the larger aesthetic design of them forming a "volume" expressing a "unity of [artistic] design." That design was, admits Poe, a kind of exploration of the "legitimate" role of fear and horror, one which, to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Poe's use of these two words in this context not only shows how he understood that his tales were be perceived in this vein of criticism, but also nicely indexes the fact that Poe was familiar with Scott's essay as well.

borrow from the discourse of the previous chapter of this study, was intended to energize or provoke a reaction from the "soul." Thus, the "thesis" of these tales, the principle upon which they operate, is one "deduced from...legitimate sources" and which serve to produce, in Poe's words, only "legitimate results," and not to sate any degenerate, "immoral," or "unnatural" compulsions. Thus, Poe says, to charge him with "Germanism' and gloom" is in "bad taste," for it ignores the fact that he is a conscious and artistic constructor of tales, uninterested in the cheap thrills and "folly" of more base "pseudo-horror." Poe insists that as an artist, it is the "legitimate results," or to borrow from his other discourses on the goals and aims of literature, it is only the much soughtafter "effects" associated with reading any piece of literature that "deserves its title" that Poe is after here – "effects" that are not degenerate but rather "legitimate," in that they seek, as all "worthy" literature did according to Poe, to urge readers to a greater appreciation of the "immortality of Man," and to grant them a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" (CPT 889, 897). As such, Poe claims, these tales reflect, if anything, a "matured purpose and very careful elaboration," and not monomaniacal preoccupation or "maniacal incoherence."

### Scripting Literary Reception

The robust defense of his artistic practice and individual nature mounted in his 1835 letter and 1840 preface clearly testifies that Poe was not only crucially aware of the propensity that certain readers had for conflating his "self" with the "unnatural" and maniacal degenerates that marked his Gothic work, but that he was actively looking for ways to counter this propensity and signify to readers the larger contours of his aesthetic designs. It is no accident then, that shortly after the publication of these tales, Poe began looking for and fantasizing about ways that he might present that "self" to a reading public in the moment of reading in such a fashion that any reader might recognize at once

the distinction between the character of the author and the character(s) of the tales he had produced. While Poe continued to insist, both publicly and privately, that such distinctions be drawn, <sup>14</sup> he also, in articles like "A Chapter on Autography," "Anastatic Printing," and in his design for a literary magazine to be called *The Stylus*, repeatedly attempted to place his personal script – itself a significant and reliable "trace" of both hand and self – into the hand of the reader, an act which suggests that Poe was turning, once again, to ideas and practices that were at the heart of a culture of mourning and memorializing in order to achieve his artistic goals.

As mentioned briefly in the opening chapter of this study, for nineteenth-century Americans, handwriting was considered an important and informative representation of one's "self" – an idea that, at the time, allowed nineteenth-century Americans to interpret script as they might other reliable signifiers of the self. Indeed, an individual's "hand"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Perhaps one of the most salient and public distinctions drawn later by Poe between the character of his self and that of his work is his 1846 "The Philosophy of Composition" (although Poe's 1848 lecture which would become "The Poetic Principle" might be said to serve a similar function). In this essay, as is wellknown, Poe debunks the idea that he is a writer driven by some psychological compulsion, some "fine frenzy," when producing literature – depicting himself rather as an artist exhibiting the aforementioned "matured purpose and very careful elaboration." He claims, "Most writers — poets in especial — prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy — an ecstatic intuition — and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought — at the true purposes seized only at the last moment — at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view — at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable — at the cautious selections and rejections — at the painful erasures and interpolations a word, at the wheels and pinions — the tackle for scene-shifting — the step-ladders and demon-traps the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio" ("Great" 529 - 530). Poe, on the other hand, claimed that in general he "prefer[red] commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view — for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest — I say to myself, in the first place, 'Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?' Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can best be wrought by incident or tone — whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone — afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect" ("Great" 529). Throughout the remainder of the essay, Poe works to give his readers a window into the process of writing "The Raven," allowing them to see at least some part of the "step-ladders and demon-traps — the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches," in other words, the rational, technical side of his artistic process that itself counters the idea of him as a monomaniacal and compulsively morbid degenerate ("Great" 529-530).

was so indicative of his or her personal identity that letters, signatures, and other handwritten documents might be scrutinized by, say, a merchant, as a trustworthy sign of one's class, credit, reliability, and business worthiness, or, in accordance with the practices of a culture of mourning and memorializing, as a steadfast "trace" of the writer's "self" capable of reliably preserving and making accessible to a reader some essential portion of that "self" despite the writer's material absence. Indeed, as Tamara Plakins Thornton has pointed out, the idea that "there is any relation between handwriting and writer...[was] established securely only in the eighteenth century...when print achieved a kind of critical cultural mass.... [P]rint endowed handwriting with its own, new set of symbolic possibilities, [and] script emerged as a medium of the self in contradistinction to print, [which was] defined as characteristically impersonal and disassociated from the writer. Handwriting thus became a level of meaning in itself, quite apart from the sense [or meaning] of the text, and the sense that it transmitted took as its subject the self' (Handwriting xiii). In other words, the "script" of an individual stood as a reliable reflection, an authentic visual embodiment, an valid "trace" of the self, a reflection of "self" whose visibility as such increased in light of the proliferation of otherwise impersonal, anonymous, "selfless" print. Indeed, as Thornton goes on to say, by about 1830, the proliferation of "anonymous" print had allowed handwriting to take on such importance as a reliable signifier of the personal "self" that Americans reading handwriting felt they were being offered a kind of "intuitive apprehension of the essence of another human being," an "intuitive apprehension" capable of brokering "an almost mystical encounter between the writer of the hand and the reader of the hand, an intimate rendezvous of one soul with another" (81). The power of handwriting to foster a sense of "intuitive...intimate rendezvous of one soul with another," to function as a reliable "trace" capable of mediating a personal connection between writer and reader, is what

allowed all things "hand-written" to gain much of their importance not only in the world of business but in the sentimental world of mourning and memorializing as well. 

Indeed, with regards to memorial culture, the vast majority of the memorial objects that served to preserve the identity of an individual and broker a sense of connection to them despite their material absence (including memorial quilts, hair remembrancers, mourning jewelry, consolation, mourning, or memorial poems, letters, etc.) carried to some degree a "trace" of the producer's skilled hand, and, arguably, in none of these was the unique nature of that individual's "trace" more apparent than in the actual physical "traces" left by the hand, i.e., handwriting, making autograph albums, along with handwritten letters,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Thornton points out, by the nineteenth century Americans "expected their handwriting to reveal something more interior, namely, the solidity and integrity of the author's character – or lack thereof. Employers, asserted writing masters vociferously, look for masterly and methodical hands and steer clear of hesitantly or sloppily executed hands as indicative of analogous character types. Nothing, remarked [one treatise on penmanship authored by J.S. Montgomery, 'so distinctly bespeaks a cultivated taste and a disciplined imagination, as correct and elegant chirography.' One penman went so far as to put a price on a good hand; it was worth, he claimed, five hundred, even a thousand, dollars per year. Conversely, a poor hand betrays 'an ill-formed mind' as well as 'an ill-trained hand' and, in the words of another professional penman, smacks of 'vulgarity and negligence.' Indeed concurred [one] Boston school principal, 'to write illegibly or badly is almost to forfeit one's respectability" (Thornton, Handwriting 53). James French, author of another treatise on penmanship, claimed that "a neat handwriting is a letter of recommendation" and "a speaking Picture" of oneself (as qtd. in Thornton, Handwriting 43). Such ideas were found in private correspondence even as early as the mid to late seventeen hundreds as exemplified by the castigation of a father to his apparently un-dexterous son who wrote, "Your handwriting is a very bad one...and would make a scurvy figure in an office-book of letters, or even in a lady's pocket-book" (36). The father's concern over his son's handwriting indexes nicely the way in which handwriting was perceived both in the sphere of business, and in the sphere of a culture of memorializing – given that a "lady's pocket-book" signifies what would essentially become, in the nineteenth-century, her memorial "book" or album carried about and passed between friends and loved ones to trace signatures and mementos of remembrance – as indicative of individual identity, nature and "character." In this case, the adolescent sons written character(s) presents an odious, "scurvy figure" – a comment on the boy's handwriting, certainly, but, given the significance of handwriting at the time period, a comment on his personal "character" as well. Even a literary figure such as Melville commented on the way in which handwriting signified in ways extraneous to any of the ideas contained within what had been written when he ruminated in *Pierre, Or the Ambiguities*, "The simplest of all things it is to write in a lady's album....[But] what could Pierre write of his own on Love or anything else that would surpass what the divine Hafiz wrote...or Anacreon...Catullus...Ovid....[even] Tom Moore? But the handwriting, Pierre, they want the sight of your hand[!]" (Melville 342).

poems, and other similarly preserved ephemera, perhaps the most ubiquitously produced and treasured memorial objects during the period.<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned, Poe understood, worked within, and took advantage of such conventions throughout his literary career. Not only was some of his earliest verse actually penned in ladies' memorial or autograph albums, where both its sentiments and its graphic representation would stand in for Poe himself, but the way in which Poe constructed his literary manuscripts – generally writing in different scripts for different genres when submitting manuscripts for publication – suggests that Poe sought to use handwriting conventions to make a rhetorical argument to his editors about the nature of the work he had produced, and the nature of the "self" that had produced them.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, although manuscripts of Poe's early work are rare, those that are extant possess some interesting characteristics. As mentioned, Poe began his career as a poet, and from

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This fact alone explains, to some degree, the popularity of the elaborate memorial "friendship albums," mourning albums, and even the more simplistic autograph albums that were so popular during the time period. It also accounts for the desire for bereaved individuals to save otherwise mundane and insignificant letters written in the "hand" of the deceased as a means of remembering and intuiting a kind of emotive or spiritual connection to them – a practice which, as chapter five of this dissertation will show, was copiously testified to during the Civil War as letters whose content was otherwise insignificant became treasured memorial objects representing, if only in the writer's script alone, a powerfully connective final expression of that soldier's "self." Other examples of handwriting connecting selves come powerfully into view when one examines a memorial album quilt like the one stitched together by Eliza Howell (discussed in chapter one) in which pen and ink drawings, dedications, and signatures were inscribed onto the fabric of the quilt which itself was stitched and bound in the distinct "hands" of its various producers, thus bringing together the various distinct marks of the hand to signify the community that was now bound together through grief.

<sup>17</sup> Poe's exposure to these conventions and ideas began when he was quite young. One of his early teachers, Joseph H. Clarke, remembered Poe writing poetic "pieces addressed to the different little girls in Richmond" – pieces that he may very well have been intended for their albums (Poe, "Life" 31). Moreover, as Kevin Hayes points out, at the same time that Poe published his first book of poetry, *Tamerlane*, in 1827, he also "continued to write verse for young women, not intended for publication, usually in the form of autograph verses written in the albums of female friends" (22). These include otherwise unpublished poems like "To Margaret" (which appears in the album of Miss Margaret Bassett and is generally credited as his earliest-known existing piece of album verse, likely 1827), "To Octavia," and two acrostic poems for Elizabeth Rebecca Harding. Such artifacts reveal Poe's personal knowledge of and investment in a cultural practice which held that to write in such an album was not merely to pen sentiments, but essentially, to inscribe a portion of one's "self" onto the page in order to testify to and maintain an affective connection between the owner of the album and the writer of the verses.

roughly 1827 when his book of juvenile verse, *Tamerlane*, was published, until 1831, he wrote and sought to publish poetry almost exclusively. The manuscripts that still exist, such as the ones he gave to his friend Lambert Wilmer after the 1829 printing of Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems (printed by Hatch and Dunning of Baltimore) and which may have served as the publisher's manuscript copy, are written in what might be termed Poe's standard Italic script – something which even a casual glance at his 1828 manuscript poem "Spirits of the Dead" in relation to his everyday correspondence shows (fig. 4). Poe appears to have continued to write in this flowing Italic script when producing poetic manuscripts throughout the 1830s and even the 1840s, as the 1835 manuscript for his play "Politian" (which itself is written in a kind of free verse), his 1841 manuscript of "The Coliseum" (as written in the album of Mary Estelle Herring), his 1840 copy of "To Zante" (written to Richard Henry Stoddard), and his 1844 manuscript of "Eulalie" (sent to Henry B. Hirst) show (fig. 5, 6, 7, 8). Perhaps even more important, however, is the 1845 "fair" copy of "Eulalie – A Song," which Poe sent to George Hooker Colton, editor of the American Review, apparently as the copy-text for Colton to use when publishing this poem in the July 1845 issue (fig. 9). Taken together, these manuscripts attest to the fact that Poe generally felt it appropriate, when composing manuscripts of poetry, to write in his usual work-a-day hand or, when submitting his work to a potential publisher (as his copy of "Eulalie" to Colton shows), to write in a more "fair" version of that hand. The differences between such manuscripts as the Colton "Eulalie" (written to an editor for potential publication) and the Hirst "Eulalie" (written to a lawyer friend) suggest that Poe understood the rhetorical valences of his script, that the graphic inscription on the page was just as likely to be read and interpreted for what it might signify as the ideas that such inscriptions stood for would. And the "fair" copy he presents to Colton, with its elegant script meticulously formatted with line

indents that balance the visual appearance of each stanza and the larger page as well as enhance the natural rhythm of the poem, not only allowed Colton to visualize how it might appear in the American Review, but suggest Poe offering up his "best self" through his manuscript, his "handiwork" – using it to represent himself to Colton on both literary and graphic levels as an individual of significant artistic sensibility. 18 If there is something elegant and lyrical about the flowing script that Poe uses to represent his work and his self when soliciting the patronage of an editor like Colton, it is a script that differs dramatically from the one Poe chose to employ when first producing and soliciting his "Grotesque" and "Arabesque" tales in the 1830s. Perhaps the most striking difference between the poetry manuscripts he produced for a publisher like Colton (or may have produced for publishers Hatch and Dunning), and the existent manuscripts for the tales that comprised Poe's first collection, Tales of the Folio Club, is that these tales were presented to potential publishers not in normal Italic script, but in a rather peculiar hand denominated by one reader connected with the Baltimore Saturday Visiter as "Roman characters." Indeed, throughout the early 1830s, as Poe solicited a publisher for what he described as "eleven tales of the Arabesque," namely the *Tales of the Folio Club*, he continually sent copies that, like the ones submitted to *The New England Magazine* and the Baltimore Saturday Visiter, were marked by this peculiar script (fig. 10). Poe may,

While Poe's work to present his "best-self" in his "best" script might, when viewed most skeptically, seem a kind of disingenuous manipulation of or presentation of that "self," such a skeptical interpretation would be a mistake. Indeed, as Thornton points out in her work, many individuals wrote in multiple "hands" depending on the individual that they were writing to and the occasion for writing, and such alterations in the style of hand did not, according to the logic of contemporary thinking, correspond to an alteration in the fundamental nature of that script any more than dressing for a day's labor or dressing for a dinner party changed the fundamental nature of the individual doing the dressing. Rather, it displayed an awareness of social norms, class status, and propriety that, once again, lent insight into the character of the producer/wearer (see Thornton, *Handwriting*, chapter 2). And while Karen Haltunnen has adroitly pointed out how such conventions, when once established, quickly became a means for "Confidence Men" to take advantage of the unwary, to make Poe into a kind of "forger" of self would be to ignore accepted conventions of handwriting during the time period in order to reinscribe or perpetuate the very type of biographical distortions that were depicted in this chapter's introduction (see Haltunnen, Introduction).

and likely did, have multiple reasons for writing in "Roman characters" that look, as John H. Latrobe suggested, like an "imitation of print" when he began to pen and submit his Gothic tales. Certainly, it made it easier for a prospective editor or publisher to imagine the appearance of such work as "printed" in a book or magazine, but the fact that Poe continued to produce poetic manuscripts during this time period that were not written in this hand suggests that there were other reasons as well. Given Poe's understanding of the way in which an individual's script acted as a "trace" of individual identity, functioning during the time period, as Thornton says, "as a medium of the self," Poe's choice to represent otherwise dark and fantastic tales "choked by a morbid sensibility," filled with "unnatural and horrible...supernatural imagery" and "wild and gloomy exhibitions of passion," in a scriptural font that itself suggested a hand (and by extension "self") that was highly controlled, precise, and calculated works visually to argue what Poe would find it necessary to articulate overtly in his 1840 preface to *Tales of the* Grotesque and Arabesque – specifically, that these were not the compulsive productions of a licentious fancy or "peculiar taste" too strongly and unnaturally attracted to "Germanism and gloom," but rather they were the "results...of very careful elaboration" and "matured purpose," unerringly and precisely calculated with "a certain unity of design" in mind (Harrison, Life 1:150-151).

Thus, the manuscripts of even his earliest tales suggest that Poe made use of contemporary handwriting conventions to reflect the deliberate and purposeful literary artist he felt he was, an artist whose script arguably testified to that which print threatened to elide – namely the tell-tale sign of the well-meaning "self" working towards producing "legitimate" literature with "legitimate" "matured" – and as the previous chapter has shown – even transcendent "effects" in mind. Such suppression of "self" by otherwise anonymous print was certainly resisted by Poe, and it was arguably in hopes of bringing

that well-meaning, artistic "self" committed to affirming and confirming the "immortality of Man" back into view – and along with it intimations of similarly "well-intentioned" texts – that Poe began, in 1836, penning articles and embracing printing technologies that focused on making script more "publicly" accessible. Perhaps the most public example of this was the work Poe did in his wildly popular "A Chapter on Autography" in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* in three installments during 1841 and 1842. In introducing his article, Poe claims that since it is a widely held

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> In this sense, Poe's manuscript practices should be seen as an integral component of his larger literary project, for the "character" of the manuscript, as Poe's practice suggests, held the ability to testify to the larger, more "transcendent" goals of his literature at the same time that the words, scenes, and depictions within that work appeared to be testifying otherwise. Because of the ability of handwriting to signify the more "transcendent" intent which Poe's Gothic tale cannot overtly disclose (or risk subverting its very ability to "spur" a reader towards an "active" reinscription of more transcendent ideas regarding death and the afterlife), it thus becomes a valuable locus of information about not only the author's self, but his aesthetic goals as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The initial version of "Autography" appeared in the Southern Literary Messenger in two installments in February and August of 1836 and mass-reproduces, using woodcuts, the signatures of twenty six famous nineteenth-century writers. In its initial form, it is presented as a humorous piece in which "Joseph Miller" brings a whole series of autographs to Poe in his offices at the Messenger and delivers them to him to analyze and publish as Poe sees fit. Poe then proceeds to publish facsimiles of the signatures contained on "Miller's manuscripts" - analyzing the handwriting and, at times, using the series as an opportunity to plant a critical barb or two. For contemporary readers, this initial installment would have been largely transparent as a kind of playful critical jest from even the initial mention of "Joe Miller" of "British" family, simply because "Joe Miller's Jest Book" was one of the most popular and widely reprinted humor books published during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain and America. Indeed, first published in 1739, and named after a famous British comic actor, "Joe Miller's Jest Book" went through several editions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, expanding until the 1865 edition which contained over 1300 "jests." While the narrative frame of "Autography" suggests itself as a kind of playful critical exercise (an idea Poe would confirm when he referenced the article in 1841 as a kind of critical "burlesque" or "joke"), the two installments only gain traction based upon the already prevalent idea that handwriting had an ability to stand in for, represent, or signify an individual's self – be it literary or personal - in significant ways. Indeed, despite the playful opening of the article, Poe's critical investigations of individual writers' handwriting are only sometimes in jest, and frequently belie what seems like an earnest attempt to show how a "weak," "bad," "crooked," "elegant" or "perfectly uniform" hand confirms either the praise or condemnation he had previously, in his reviews in the *Messenger*, heaped upon writers such as James Fennimore Cooper (whose hand and writings are, in Poe's assessment "unformed") or Lydia Sigourney (whose hand and work he called "perfectly uniform and [of a] beautiful appearance"). Thus, while the article was certainly framed in a playful, "jesting" way, it nevertheless served to further Poe's critical agenda and confirm his assessment of several American authors – something which could not have taken place through the analysis of handwriting in the absence of an already established cultural belief in the ability of handwriting to stand in for the "self" of its writer. It should be noted that the possibility also exists that Poe "coded" this work to signify to his readers the idea that print hides levels of meaning and signification that manuscript does not. This is seen as Poe ascribes to Joe

"philosophy...that a strong analogy does exist between every man's chirography and character," a philosophy that "will be denied by none, but the unreflecting," he proposes "to seriously illustrate [this] position" by reproducing "one hundred autographs," "a more accurate and a more general collection of the autographs of our *literati* than is to be found elsewhere" that will show how "the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the handwriting" (Poe, "A Chapter," 225). Such an "illustration," he claims, is certainly of "interest to all lovers of literature" for, as he goes to on to say, "[n]ext to [seeing] the person of a man-of-letters, we desire to see his portrait – next to his portrait, his autograph. In the latter, especially, there is something which seems to bring him before us in his true idiosyncrasy – in his character as *scribe*" (225). In introducing his article, Poe thus argues that as important a signifier of the "self" as a

Miller a new middle initial every time that he mentions his name, working his way through the alphabet but purposefully excluding the letters "j" and "u." While some critics have postulated how these missing letters may be Poe's way of indicating that Joe Miller is actually a Jew with the missing letters thereby forming a kind of anti-Semitic joke of Poe's own, I cannot help but wonder if it isn't much more likely that Poe, intimately concerned with the materiality and production of text as he was, wasn't commenting on the ambiguity that has always been an inherent part of print. For the two letters that he leaves out, "j" and "u," were traditionally two pieces of type absent from early printers' type cases printing largely in Latin, where "i" and "v" represented them. In calling attention to the way in which type collapses certain distinct elements of meaning, Poe thus exposes for the vigilant reader the need to return to manuscript to rightly assess a full range of "meaning." Whatever the case may be, it is important to note that the initial "jesting" quality of these first 1836 installments of "Autography" is entirely absent in the 1842 articles, which reproduce over 100 signatures, and which are wholly confined to engaging in earnest critical commentary on the way that these signatures reflect something inherent about the "mental features" of the writers that have produced them. (For more information on the missing letters as an anti-Semitic joke see Hammond.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Poe both qualifies and reinscribes this claim when he states that individuals, such as lawyers who "embody a world of heterogeneous memoranda, on scraps of paper, with the stumps of all varieties of pen, will soon find the fair characters" of his hand "degenerate into hieroglyphics...and from chirography so disturbed it is nearly impossible to decide anything. "In a similar manner, men who pass through many striking vicissitudes of life, acquire, in each change of circumstance a temporary inflection of the handwriting; the whole resulting, after many years, in an unformed or variable MS., scarcely to be recognized by themselves from one day to another" ("A Chapter" 226). Thus individuals whose individual circumstances are widely variable (in terms of their production of "heterogeneous memoranda" or in terms of their personal fortunes) have a script that while it gives evidence of the vicissitudes of their lives or careers, nevertheless finds itself covered over by these very same sets of circumstances. Thus what one reads when they encounter a script of someone of "heterogeneous" work or "striking[ly] vicissitud[inous]" life is not necessarily their individual character, but a kind of record of their professional or personal life — an idea which nevertheless confirms the notion that something about an individual's self is always apparent in their script.

writer's "person" or his "portrait" may be, his script, by virtue of his very occupation, is especially fit for representing or in*scribe*ing his "character," his "true idiosyncras[ies]," or the very essence of his differentiated, individual "self" onto the page. Certainly, Poe's entire article stands as a testimony to this, as he presents, reads, and analyzes everything having to do with the scripted autograph of the writer (down to the medium upon which that script is placed) for signs of its producer's character. The following entry for Charles Anthon, the first analyzed signature to appear in the article, serves as an adequate example. The entry begins with Anthon's signature (fig. 11), and is followed by a sketch of Anthon's "mental features" and unique character as seen through his personal biography and his script. Its significance justifies lengthy quotation:

Professor Charles Anthon, of Columbia College, New York, is well known as the most erudite of our classical scholars; and, although still a young man, there are few, if any, even in Europe, who surpass him in his peculiar path of knowledge....The chirography of Professor Anthon is the most regularly beautiful of any in our collection. We see the most scrupulous precision, finish, and neatness about every portion of it – in the formation of individual letters, as well as in the tout-ensemble. The perfect symmetry of the MS. gives it, to a casual glance, the appearance of Italic print. The lines are quite straight, and at exactly equal distances, yet written without black rules, or other artificial aid. There is not the slightest superfluity, in the way of flourish or otherwise, with the exception of the twirl in the C of the signature. Yet the whole is rather neat and graceful than forcible.... We see, accordingly, in Professor Anthon's autography, each and all of the known idiosyncrasies of his taste and intellect. We recognize at once the scrupulous precision and finish of his scholarship and of his style – the love of elegance which prompts him to surround himself, in his private study, with gems of sculptural art, and beautifully bound volumes, all arranged with elaborate attention to form, and in the very pedantry of neatness. We perceive, too, the disdain of superfluous embellishment which distinguishes his compilations.... We must not forget to observe that the "want of force" is a want as perceptible in the whole character of the man, as in that of the MS. (Poe, "A Chapter," 225-226)

In this particular entry, as in all of them, Poe works to "read" the "hand" that is presented there in order to better perceive or confirm the nature of the individual behind it. Indeed, the "regularly beautiful" chirography of Anthon's "Italic print," its "precision,

finish, and neatness," its "lack of superfluity...with the exception of the twirl...of the signature" inscribes onto the page a "neat and graceful" as opposed to "forcible" aggressive character, and such qualities of hand mirror "the known idiosyncrasies of [Anthon's] taste and intellect" – "the scrupulous precision and finish of his scholarship and of his style" of thought, the "love of elegance" and of "neatness," "the disdain of superfluous embellishment." Nor does the reader's "intimate apprehension" (to quote Thornton) end there – through the signature, Poe asserts, he or she is brought into an even more intimate association with Anthon whom is approached, if only imaginatively, in his "private study" – here a reader "sees" his "gems of sculptural art, and beautifully bound volumes all arranged with elaborate attention to form," and is encouraged to recognize how the "attention to form" and "neatness" in this space is merely one more material reflection of the character(s) embodied in Anthon's signature.<sup>22</sup>

This initial entry, which not only allows readers to gain an "intimate apprehension" of the essential qualities of Anthon's "self" but essentially primes readers to interact with the signatures of the other authors which appear in the article in a similar way, is itself followed by a litany of signatures of the most famous writers, editors, and "literati" of mid nineteenth-century America. Indeed, Poe analyzes the hand of writers like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (which gives evidence of his mental qualities —

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> In using script as a means through which to broker an almost physical connection with Anthon, Poe is unquestionably invoking the type of common memorial practices that would have been very familiar to readers and users of autograph books at the time period. This is easily seen in the way in which Poe uses the autograph of Anthon as a means of brokering an almost physical connection between its producer and its readers (the goal of virtually all memorial objects). However, given that this signature appears not in a personalized autograph album, but in a mass-produced magazine (with the signature itself being mass-produced), it seems especially apropos that Poe would virtually "conduct" his readership through a "reading" of Anthon's signature, for in doing so he essentially "reminds" his readers that they already know how to do this type of readerly "work" despite the change in material and social context. In short, by invoking reading practices that were integral to a culture of mourning and memorializing through conducting his own close reading of Anthon's signature using these reading practices, Poe provocatively suggests, if not reinforces, for his readers the idea that they already know precisely what to do with the signatures that have been placed before them, for they have a common cultural practice of "memorial reading" that can be, and should be, drawn upon.

"force, vigor, and glowing richness....rigid simplicity and proportion"), Catharine Maria Sedgwick (who writes an "excellent" hand, "well-sized, distinct, elegantly but not ostentatiously formed...with perfect freedom of manner" which indicates "strong common sense, and a masculine disdain of ornament"), and Nathaniel Parker Willis (whose "usual chirography is dashing, free, and not ungraceful, but is sadly deficient in force or picturesqueness" – a fact which gives evidence of his "high talent, often amounting to genius" while also confirming why "none...has so narrowly missed placing himself at the head of our letters" as he has) (226). As important as all of these signatures and analyses are, offering, as they do, copious testimony to the prevalent cultural belief that an individual's character signified something of the "self" in script, perhaps the most important signature, and the most glaring omission of any analysis of its producer, is Poe's own – which is displayed prominently at the head of both of the initial two installments of the 1841-42 articles (fig. 12). Indeed, Poe, rather suggestively places himself at the head of this entire bank of literati, reproducing his own signature in the space reserved for his by-line (as opposed to printing his name in type), and making it one of the largest signatures in size. Poe's placing himself at their head, however much an act of egotism as it may have been, also serves as a transparent invitation to do to his signature what he has done to the other one hundred and eight that he presents. Indeed, as if to remind readers that they have work to do themselves in interpreting his signature, Poe claims in the final installment (January 1842) of the *Graham's* series that he has not given them one hundred and eight signatures of eminent literati by which to better perceive their character, but rather "no less than one hundred and nine of the most distinguished American literati" - a figure which only makes sense if one takes into

account the signature emanating from Poe's own unique hand (Poe, "An Appendix," 44). <sup>23</sup>

Poe could most certainly rest assured that his readership would already have been predisposed to interpret his signature in the way he had the other "one hundred and eight" literati, and he could be confident that they would have taken up the exercise with a certain sense of familiarity. Arguably, this is because the only thing truly novel about the "collection of autographs" that Poe brought forward was that it was made up of celebrity literati, and not the near and dear friends whose names and characters were inscribed in the countless autograph books of the men, women, boys, and girls of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the practice of collecting "autographs" of friends and loved ones in order to preserve a memento or "trace" capable of representing the "essence" of their unique individual selves so that such individuals could be, in some sense, perpetually accessible, was, as mentioned, a ubiquitous practice throughout the time period.<sup>24</sup>

As if to make sure his readers don't miss the clue he hints at when mentioning the one hundred and ninth signature, Poe refrains from printing his own scripted signature on the by-line of the final article – an obvious omission that calls attention to the prior printing of his signature. There are forty-one signatures in the November installment of "A Chapter on Autography" and sixty-seven in the December. In the final installment – which features a printed Poe by-line instead of a reproduced signature and which claims that one hundred nine signatures have already brought forward –an additional nineteen signatures are printed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Indeed, it was this memorial practice that instructed individuals on the way in which a signature could be used as a means of preserving and accessing the inscriber's sense of "self" despite their material absence, a practice and philosophy that gave rise to the type of possibility that Poe himself is exploiting here (and which autograph seekers continue to exploit today), namely that by collecting and reading autographs they might find themselves able to discern something more personal and intimate about the individual "self" to whom that autograph belongs than they otherwise would be able to. Thus, it is no coincidence that as such memorial autograph practices spread throughout the nineteenth century, so too did the desire for celebrity autographs – a desire that Poe's article did much to encourage. In short, the cultural practice of procuring memorial autographs should not be seen as divorceable from the less intimate and yet still highly "personal" practice of collecting celebrity autographs as a means of divining something about a unique individual's personal character, especially during this time period, as it was the belief in the power of the autograph and the practice of collecting and reading them in order to preserve, perceive, and connect with the "self" of its producer that emerges in the one and creates a demand for the other (a demand which itself reinforces the strength of the memorial practices from which it emerges). Having said so, I do not wish to flatten the significant differences that do exist between Poe's collection of celebrity autographs and those personal intimate collections that individuals assembled in the ephemeral autograph books that proliferated during the time period. Certainly, Poe's work did not broker an equally strong or intimate sense of

Certainly the way in which Poe invited readers to use the signature as a means of not only intuiting, apprehending, or perceiving the true "character" of the producer through the signature, but as a means of finding themselves in some way more intimately associated with these writers, as they had done with Anthon, mirrors to a significant degree the type of ritualistic reading practices that were integral to using autograph books. Given the ubiquity of these types of albums, readers encountering Poe's article in *Graham's* would certainly have understood the philosophy behind the analysis of an autograph (seeing the signature as an inscription of "character"), as well as the inherent promise of such a collection to function as a means of fostering a kind of "intuitive apprehension of the essence of another human being" (Thornton, *Handwriting* 81). Like Poe's collection, autograph books "collected" traces of individuals one might wish to memorialize, functioning – like a mourning quilt or memorial volume – to inscribe this "essence" of a

connection between those whose autographs appeared in his work and those who read them and the personal inscriptions that appeared in a young man or woman's autograph album. Arguably, while one might feel that they had a better "sense" of the idiosyncratic individuality of an Anthon or Longfellow after reading his signature, attending to Poe's analysis, and perhaps engaging in some of their own, this was different than the type of intimate affective connection they might feel when a brother, sister, lover, or friend inscribed a signature and perhaps a bit of verse or scripture into an autograph album as a purposeful attempt to characterize his or her individual "self" for and relationship to the book's owner. There is a reciprocity and an established history of association drawn upon and extended in such work as this that is absent in Poe's work – after all, with the exception of Poe's autograph (which is the only one in the article actually produced with the intent of being publicly circulated as a means of intuiting something about its author), the rest of these autographs were never intended to appear in this format, being excerpted from business letters. Thus, the other half of the intimate connection that such autographs usually brokered – the sense that the individual inscribing the autograph is as intensely interested in brokering a connection and presenting a sense of "self" through the autograph as the owner is in preserving these – is arguably absent for all the people appearing in Poe's collection with the exception of Poe himself. Such an absence means that Poe's collection of signatures allow readers to enter into a sphere of private association with these individuals – intuiting and perceiving their character and to some extent even their person (as the Anthon entry shows) – but in a voyeuristic way that is distinctly different from the mutually intimate act of inscribing and reading character that would generally occur in autograph albums. Nevertheless, the idea that one could approach individuals through their script in the way that Poe suggests readers do with Anthon, Longfellow, Sedgwick and others is only made possible by the culturally prevalent belief in and practice of inscribing character. Therefore, the fact that Poe offers his script up willingly in order to allow readers to "rightly" assess his character and feel themselves somehow intimately "connected" to him – a connection arguably strengthened as he and they walk through this gallery of personalities together analyzing them along the way – suggests that this exercise truly is as much about rightly assessing the character of Poe as it is that of any other literary figure.

beloved individual into a material object that could then be used as a medium through which that individual could be continually, if largely imaginatively, approachable and accessible.

Even the denomination of his article as a "collection of autographs" seems to ally it or acknowledge the debts that the article, and the reading practices being called into use, owed to the contemporary memorial practices that mark other "collections" – such as the one belonging to mid nineteenth-century Iowan Nannie Kern. Her autograph album gives ample evidence of the way in which a "collection of autographs" could "bring" an individual "before us," fostering both an "intuitive apprehension" of his or her "character," as well as broker or perpetuate a kind of affective connection – something which the book's inscription details nicely:

## **Dedication**

A book of <u>names</u> – names of the true and the beautiful – The good – names of friends – companions dear – beloved, living and dead – may they all be written on memory's scroll – graven upon the tablet of the heart – ne'er to be effaced until the heart shall cease to beat – – – This little book Time and accident may destroy and all its treasury of names be lost – Ah – may they all be written where nor time nor accident may lessen – even with the finger of God – in living characters – within the <u>Book of Life</u> – A book of Memories – memories of kindly hearts and happy days memories of youth, & joy, & friendship – – may they all be treasured in the Chambers of the soul – secure against the lapse of time – borne through the portals of death – unto the life above –

A book of <u>names</u> and <u>memories</u> of treasured names and cherished memories –

Truly Your Friend, Robert H. Kinncaind

Fort Madison Iowa

Dec 16<sup>th</sup>, 1864 (Kern, fig. 13)

As such an inscription (along with the dozens of autographs and appended thoughts, poems and scriptural verses contained in the volume) attest, such "collections" not only constituted a kind of representative community of loved ones ("friends, companions dear"), but, given that it was made up of these powerful individual "traces" of the self, the book with its signatures functioned as the medium through which a kind of affective

connection to these individuals could be perpetuated for the reader. Indeed, the material text, marked with the "living characters" of those who have put pen to paper and signed themselves "beloved," represents both "memory's scroll" and "the tablet of the heart" – apt metaphors that eloquently describe the way the text calls up the memory of the absent beloved and, through the generation of affect, collapses the distance between reader and writer, engraving the one onto the "heart" of the other and making both seem mutually accessible to each other in a way that prefigures a kind of perpetual association in the beyond – when their names have been inscribed next to each other "within the Book of Life."

Such ideas drive not only the production Kern's album but such albums generally. Indeed, an inscription such as the one which appears in the late nineteenth-century album of another young Midwesterner testifies to the prevalence and longevity of such ideas. It reads, "Dear Hortie, Perhaps these lines may be, / The last I will ever write for thee. / Then keep, O keep till life shall end, / The last remembrance of a friend. / Lovingly, / Sylvia Alderman / March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1888" (see fig. 14, Hortense). The fact that the "last remembrance" is, essentially, an autograph that, along with the poetic script itself, stands as a material trace capable of making "Sylvia Alderman" an "intuitively" or affectively "apprehensible" presence beyond the 1888 date which she inscribes onto the sheet, testifies, again, to the ability that autographs and script had to represent an individual, and make them an "accessible" presence despite material absence.

By bringing a "collection of autographs" before his readership and inviting them to peruse, analyze and find themselves in a sense more intimately acquainted with or connected to these writers, Poe was actively inviting his readers to engage in an exercise that would have seemed, as the above albums attest, quite familiar – one whose goals were generally the preservation and presentation of an individual's "self" through his or

her script, and a perpetuation of a sense of community. By placing his signature at the head of the rest of this "collection," Poe thus seems to actively encourage his readership to engage in an interpretive mode of reading that not only tacitly argues for his place among the community of writers – such as Sigourney, Sedgwick, Cooper, Irving, Longfellow, Bryant, and Kennedy – who stood as some of the most respectable and famous literati of the time, but he also invites his readership to employ their chirographic sensibilities such that they might "intuitively apprehen[d]" the "essence" of who he and these others are as "human being[s]" (Thornton, *Handwriting* 81). And while at first it appears that Poe might be leaving his own script uncommented on so as to invite readers to construct any image of him that would be pleasing to them, it is important to note that he chooses to place his own personal script in closest proximity not to Sigourney, Sedgwick, Longfellow, Irving, Bryant or Cooper, but to the classical scholar Charles Anthon. His reasons for selecting to place Anthon's script in closest proximity to his own when he had over one-hundred thirty-nine others to choose from becomes more clear, perhaps, when one turns to examine the signatures themselves. Indeed, of the initial forty-one signatures in which Poe includes his own (and arguably over the range of all one-hundred thirty-nine), Anthon's is the signature that arguably resembles Poe's the closest (fig 15). While others bear a certain resemblance as well, 25 the fact that Poe locates one of the most similar "hands" in closest proximity to his own, and then denominates it as "regularly beautiful," "scrupulous" in its "precision, finish, and neatness," indicative of fine "taste and intellect" and marked by a "want of force" that evinces a gentle and generous character, suggests that Poe is giving readers every opportunity to see his hand and "self" in a similar light.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Edward Everett's and Fitz Greene Halleck's also bear some slight resemblance (fig. 16).

Poe used his signature throughout his career as a means of signifying something of his "self" – using it to create a kind of visual rhetoric of the self that, to borrow Poe's language, signified that he was a man, like Anthon, of "precision, finish, and neatness," of "fine taste and intellect" (Poe, "A Chapter," 226). Indeed, when Poe, only a year later in 1843, was presented the opportunity of once again "coming before the public" in an overtly personal manner – this time in a noteworthy biographical sketch of himself that appeared in March in the Philadelphia *Saturday Museum* – Poe chose to represent himself, as he claimed he would prefer in "A Chapter on Autography," not solely through portrait and prose, but through the "living characters" of his inscribed autograph. Given

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> In a recent 2009 conference *The Third International Edgar Allan Poe Conference: The Bicentennial*, Jeffrey Savoye made a very similar argument, documenting dozens of Poe signatures (appearing in both print and manuscripts) that he scanned and indexed while co-editing *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan* Poe. Savoye's basic argument was that Poe was aware that he was, in essence, "coming before the public" when he had his signature printed, and he compellingly argued that his signature becomes more ornate and careful "depending on who he wanted to impress" at the time. Even a cursory glance at Poe's signatures shows this to be the case. His letter to the Buckinghams offering up both "Epimanes" and the remainder of Tales of the Folio Club, shows him using a rather "fair" version of his signature, with twirls in the "E." "A," and "P" and in the underscore as well (fig. 18). Poe's inscription of his name on the by-line marking the fair copy of "Eulalie" appears as another similar version of this "fair" hand, as does his letter to Isaac Lea soliciting him to be the publisher for "Al Aaraaf" (see fig. 19 and fig. 20). The visual rhetoric of these signatures is different, to various degrees, from the somewhat casual "work-a-day" one that marks letters to those with whom he was quite familiar – such as his 1841 letter to Rufus Griswold, (fig. 21). Poe's attempts to show his public and his publishers his "best self" in his work shows that he was not only sensitive to the way in which his work might otherwise characterize him, but it confirms his investment in this prevalent cultural thinking.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Poe, who had just agreed with Thomas C. Clarke, proprietor of the *Saturday Museum*, to partner in the creation of Poe's new literary magazine *The Stylus* (of which I shall say more presently), was largely responsible for this article, its portrait, and his autograph. Indeed, scholars have generally come to accept that despite the fact that the (significantly embellished) biography was attributed to Henry B. Hirst, its style suggests that Poe had some hand in its production – either by furnishing information to Hirst, or, as Burton Pollin has suggested, by essentially ghost-writing it. Poe's acceptance of (if not encouragement of) the embellishment of this biography, which include him taking "first honors" in his class at Virginia and fighting for Greek independence (neither of which were true), suggests that Poe was eager to have himself identified as a man of intelligence, distinction, and valor (and, for the literary minded, it also served to identify him with another literary figure, namely Byron), and act as further confirmation that he felt an anxiety to dispel (as he had in his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*) critical perceptions of himself as somehow "macabre," "morose," or possessed of a "licentious fancy." This fact is nicely paralleled in Poe's attempt to make even his signature more elegant, ornate, and refined than it typically was. For more information on the ghost writing of this biography, see Pollin.

that, to date, this was arguably the lengthiest, most detailed, and most flattering (though not entirely accurate), description of Poe's background, life, and career it is perhaps fitting that Poe selected a more than average or "fair" signature to "represent" himself (fig. 17).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, this autograph, which includes an ornate flourish underneath an even more regular and careful inscription of his name than that which appeared in his "A Chapter on Autography," provides a nice visual analogy to claims such as those which appear in this biography – such as the fact that Poe "descended from one of the oldest and most respectable families in Baltimore" (largely true), can "claim connextion with many of the noblest families in England" (a stretch, perhaps, unless one counts his step-father's association with wealthy London merchants), and is someone whose grandfather was "one of the most intimate friends of General LaFayette" (more of an acquaintance or associate, really) (as quoted in Pollin, 163-164). Perhaps more importantly, however, Poe's "Italic print" signature which, like Anthon's, displays a certain modicum of "precision, finish, and neatness," and which "lack[s]...superfluity...with the exception of the twirl" undergirding "the signature," inscribes onto the page a "neat and graceful" visual image that is complemented and re-inscribed by the article itself, which goes to great lengths to depict Poe as a literary artist whose "unequalled" skills, taste, and intellect allow him to successfully wield his pen in a variety of capacities, as poet, critic, humorist, and writer of Gothic tales. Certainly there is nothing in portrait, prose, or script to suggest he is anything but a talented, if not virtuosic, writer.

Poe testified to his desire to somehow maintain the view of the "hand" (and thus "self") once again when, only a week after he published his biography, portrait, and signature in the *Saturday Museum*, he announced that he and Thomas Clarke had come together with the intent of publishing a new literary magazine, entitled *The Stylus*. *The* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Poe's autograph in "A Chapter on Autography" appears to be fairly representative of his usual signature.

Stylus was anything but a casual endeavor for Poe. Indeed, he had been working on the development of this magazine in one form or another since 1834, and until his death in 1849 he would continue to solicit funds, subscribers, and supporters capable of bringing this dream to fruition. The prospectus for The Stylus is a telling document not only because of the way in which the magazine was characterized by Poe as a one of exquisite taste that through its literature, criticism, art, and even "typography, paper and binding...will far surpass American journals of its kind," but because in the prospectus, he actively encouraged readers to view the "Magazine['s] character" as a kind of material manifestation of Poe's own personal "individuality" (Poe, "Prospectus," 3). This can be seen as Poe rehearses for his readers his own professional resume, characterizing the work he had done for the Southern Literary Messenger and Graham's Magazine (where he had not only performed editorial duties, but published poems, tales, and reviews) as preparatory to the work he would do in The Stylus, with the significant distinction of this magazine being, at long last, a more full and complete expression of his own personal "self." Poe's own words are as follows:

The necessity for any very rigid definition of the literary character or aims of "The Stylus," is, in some measure, obviated by the general knowledge, on the part of the public, of the editor's connexion, formerly, with the two most successful periodicals in the country—"The Southern Literary Messenger," and "Graham's Magazine." Having no proprietary right, however, in either of these journals; his objects, too, being, in many respects, at variance with those of their very worthy owners; he found it not only impossible to effect anything, on the score of taste, for the mechanical appearance of the works, but exceedingly difficult, also, to stamp, upon their internal character, that *individuality* which he believes essential to the full success of all similar publications. In regard to their extensive and permanent influence, it appears to him that continuity, definitiveness, and a marked certainty of purpose, are requisites of vital importance; and he cannot help thinking that these requisites are attainable, only where a single mind has at least the general direction of the enterprise. Experience, in a word, has distinctly shown him — what, indeed, might have been demonstrated à priori — that in founding a Magazine wherein his interest should be not merely editorial, lies his sole chance of carrying out to completion whatever peculiar intentions he may have entertained. In many important points, then, the new journal will

differ widely from either of those named. It will endeavor to be at the same time more varied and more *unique*; — more vigorous, more pungent, more original, more individual, and more independent. (3)

The way in which Poe narrates his struggle with the proprietors of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Graham's Magazine* to "stamp upon their internal character, that *individuality*" which he felt was so necessary to its success not only depicts the material magazine as a site of contention where the individuality (preferences, ideas, desires) of its proprietors and the individuality of Poe are at odds, but in accordance with this, defines the magazine as a kind of "unique...vigorous...pungent" reflection of the self (or selves) responsible for their production. And indeed, *The Stylus*, as described above, begins to sound like a personal expression of Poe's own "self" and "individuality" when he claims that his singular or "single mind" will be responsible for "the general direction of the enterprise," ensuring a "continuity, definitiveness, and a marked certainty of purpose," that make the magazine into a material expression of his own "peculiar intentions," his own "individual" and "independent" self.

The fact that Poe intended *The Stylus* to be, in essence, a material representation of his own unique "*individuality*" makes the central image of its cover – a cover Poe himself personally designed and sketched – all the more significant. Displayed prominently in the center of the page, and ringed by Poe's script in such a way as to continually draw the eye back towards it, the cover's central image is of a hand in the act of inscribing (in Greek) the work "Truth" (fig. 22). Such an image certainly works to repeal, to some degree, the anonymity of print, reminding readers that, despite the fact that what they will find within is presented in uniform and reproducible print, the "truth" is that these words are integrally tied to an active, living, individual who inscribed them. But, given the visual resonances of this page, with the title "STYLUS" in Roman caps at the top visually balancing and reflecting the name "EDGAR A. POE" at the bottom, and together corralling the eye of the reader back to the "truthful" hand itself, the image also

suggests that this is Poe's hand, and that whatever it might be engaged in producing, be it the criticism, tales, or poems that he would have selected or penned inside, or the very writing of the cover itself, his "hand" was always an essential medium for revealing "truth." In short, the images, script, and words that make up the cover design work to signify to the reader that it is only with the hand coupled to the pen that one can perceive the "truth" about the fuller "*individuality*" of "Edgar A. Poe['s]" personal identity or character – an individual whose talent, "idiosyncrasy," "character," and "individuality" make him capable of wielding that pen in a variety of ways that suggest him to the reader as a skilled, brilliant, if not "virtuosic" writer, critic and editor whose own productions are the result of "matured" and deliberate "purpose" and not reflections of a morbid, macabre, and licentious mind. 30

Finally, Poe's conception of *The Stylus* as a kind of penultimate vehicle of literary "self"-expression becomes even more provocative when one takes into account the printing technology that he ultimately championed for its, and indeed for all, literature's

It should be mentioned that Poe's motto for the magazine, "Aureus aliquando STYLUS, ferrus aliquando" – meaning "sometimes [with] a pen of gold sometimes a pen of iron" – is equally provocative when one considers it in light of the idea that the magazine is inherently concerned with the production of "TRUTH." Certainly, it references not only the "true" intentions Poe had for using the magazine to turn metal pen, and/or metal type, into profitable "gold" (as Terence Whalen has rightly asserted), but it is also refers to the general character of the magazine, which will embrace both impartial, "truthful," even "iron-pointed" criticism and aesthetically rich or "golden" literature. At the same time, it also seems to reference the nature of that literature itself, suggesting the way that Poe planned to continue using both the "iron-like spur" of Gothic horror as well as the "gold[en]" tones of more ethereal poetry to bring his readers to a greater awareness of the "truth" about "the immortality of Man" and "the glories beyond the grave." It also has a certain resonance for the argument I am making above, namely that the "TRUTH" about Poe is that he can write in a variety of ways – with a pen of "iron" or "gold" – in an attempt to achieve his aesthetic goals and further his literary career. Thus, once again, the ability to be correctly perceived when appearing on the page, Poe seems to say, is integrally tied to the ability to retain a view of the hand.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> I do not wish to imply that this is my own personal feeling about Poe's individual nature, nor do I wish to propose that scholars see him this way generally. I am merely suggesting that Poe was committed to using the "hand" as a provocative symbol of the self that could signify on multiple levels and in multiple ways – something he unquestionably wished to take advantage of in presenting it to his readers in the ways I have pointed out.

material production. In an 1845 essay printed in the only journal Poe ever owned, the *Broadway Journal*, Poe effusively praised an emergent mid-nineteenth print technology known as anastatic printing, claiming that it would "revolutionize the world," and longing for the day when it would be used to print everything from books to the "page[s] of this Journal" (Poe, "Anastatic Printing," 230).<sup>31</sup> This technology, which was developed in Germany in the early 1840s before quickly migrating to England, was one that allowed an individual to create a zinc printer's plate directly from any document, whether handwritten or printed, which could then be used to mass-produce a facsimile of the original.<sup>32</sup> The ability to mass-produce handwritten documents was truly significant, "revolutionary" even, not only because it held the power to re-structure the relationship between authors, publishers, and printers – allowing authors "the immense advantage of giving their own manuscripts directly to the public without the expensive interference of the type-setter, and the often ruinous intervention of the publisher" – but because, in Poe's words, an author's "neat and distinct style of handwriting" would finally grant the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Arguably, the *Broadway Journal* is the closest thing we have to a physical incarnation of *The Stylus*, since it was, as mentioned, the only journal that Poe ever owned any stake in, having purchased it in 1845 from John Bisco and Charles Frederick Briggs. It was plagued by financial difficulties from the start and ceased publication on January 3, 1846 – roughly three months after Poe assumed complete ownership and control.

Poe describes the process of reproducing any document, manuscript or print, by this method: "We dampen the [page] with a certain acid diluted, and then place it between two leaves of blotting-paper to absorb superfluous moisture. We then place the printed side in contact with a zinc plate that lies on the table. The acid in the interspaces between the letters, immediately corrodes the zinc, but the acid on the letters themselves, has no such effect, having been neutralized by the ink. Removing the leaf at the end of five minutes, we find a reversed copy, in slight relief, of the printing on the page; — in other words, we have a stereotype-plate, from which we can print a vast number of absolute facsimiles of the original printed page — which latter has not been at all injured in the process — that is to say, we can still produce from [the original manuscript] (or from any impression of the stereotype plate) new stereotype plates *ad libitum*. Any engraving, or any pen-and-ink drawing, or any MS. can be stereotyped in precisely the same manner" (Poe, "Anastatic Printing," 230). Perhaps one of the most insightful and interesting histories and demonstrations of the possibilities of "Anastatic Printing" is found in the 1849 book "On the Various Applications of Anastatic Printing and Papyrography" printed in 1849 by D. Bogue in London. This book, which details how the process works, was itself printed using the anastatic print process. (For a contemporary critical work detailing the process and its history see Wakeman.

writer the "certainty of being fairly brought before his readers, with all the freshness of his original conception about him" (230).<sup>33</sup> In short, Poe's penultimate literary magazine would have been one that ensured him the ability to bring himself more fully and "fairly…before his readers" by employing technologies that would have ensured the accurate presentation of his "self" through his "script." Through such a material object, he seems to say, the "TRUTH" about him and his work might be more readily perceived, distinctions between his own personal character and the character(s) of his literature might be readily drawn, and the more "legitimate" "effects" that formed the heart of his "original conception" – bringing readers to an greater sense of the "immortality of Man"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Certainly, this endeavor was an important one for Poe personally, but curiously enough, by 1845, when he penned his article on anastatic printing in the *Broadway Journal*. Poe had also come to realize that reconnecting the "hand" to the "text" was not only as a crucial means for defending his own artistic practice and character, but a means for engendering a more vibrant and "luminous" kind of democratic subjectivity and society than had been enjoyed previously. Indeed, not only did Poe concern himself in this article with limning out all of the ways in which bringing the hand back into view would benefit "poor devil authors" such as himself, but he also went on to describe the way in which doing so would fundamentally impact the intellect of average nineteenth-century writers and readers. As Poe went on to say in this article, "The cultivation of accuracy in MS....will tend with an inevitable impetus to every species of improvement in style — more especially in the points of concision and distinctness- and this again, in a degree even more noticeable, to precision of thought, and luminous arrangement of matter. There is a... reciprocal influence between the thing written and the manner of writing — but the latter has the predominant influence of the two. The more remote effect on philosophy at large, which will inevitably result from improvement of style and thought in the points of concision, distinctness, and accuracy, need only be suggested to be conceived" (Poe, "Anastatic" 231). In short, Poe felt that as individual writers worked to "improve" the "hand" in which they wrote, there would emerge a corresponding improvement in the nature of their thoughts and expression – in essence an improvement of some essential characteristic of that writer's "self" (they become more precise, "luminous," distinct, and accurate in their nature). Presumably it follows that as engaged and active readers were given more "luminous" writing, they would, of necessity, be engaged in thinking more "luminous" thoughts, which would not only improve or enlighten their own personal intellectual nature, but their personal script as well – a fact which would, in a truly revolutionary way, begin the process over again. The "revolutionary" power inherent in reconnecting the "hand" to the material mass-produced text would, according to Poe, drive the creation of what he termed a "new regime" – a more utopian social and literary world. In Poe's words, nineteenth-century America's literate world is "at present...a species of anomalous Congress, in which the majority of the members are constrained to listen in silence while all the eloquence proceeds from a privileged few," but, with the "hand" and "self" made evident and integrally tied to an easily mass-produced text, a "new regime [will emerge], [in which] the humblest will speak as often and as freely as the most exalted, and will be sure of receiving just that amount of attention which the intrinsic merit of their speeches may deserve" (231). Curiously, Poe's conception of a text as a site whose accurate representation of its producer's "self" fosters a kind of social progress by inspiring writers and readers towards more "luminous" "self"-expression prefigures the rhetoric of Walt Whitman as the next three chapters will show.

and a "prescience of the glories beyond the grave" – might be more readily perceived and appreciated.

### **Conclusion**

Poe's desires to pen literature that inspired readers to a sense of their own "immortality" and a foreknowledge of the "glories beyond the grave" led him to produce Gothic tales that, given their macabre nature, led many readers to call into question just what type of "character" could produce such literary work. In short, Poe found that his choice of genre, as he shifted away from writing more Romantic and sentimentally inflected poetry towards writing Gothic tales, risked opening up both his larger aesthetic goals and his personal "self" to misinterpretation at the same time that it promised him a larger reading audience. He sought to counter such potential misinterpretations by relying on contemporary practices intimately tied to a culture of mourning and memorializing, practices which asserted a unique connection between the characteristics of an individual's script and the character and nature of the individual himself or herself. As early as 1830, when he began producing this Gothic work, Poe relied on his script to testify to his own individual nature in such a way that distinctions could be easily drawn between the dark and macabre figures of his Gothic works and his own personal "self." Indeed, throughout his career, as he penned poems in albums, wrote out his manuscripts, penned articles such as "A Chapter on Autography," sought to bring to fruition *The* Stylus, and advertised print technologies such as anastatic printing, Poe was actively searching for, if not championing, some way of using the thinking and conventions surrounding handwriting and the "self" - conventions at the heart of the nineteenthcentury's memorial culture – to offer up to his readers an accurate portrayal of his "self" that would assuage any anxieties over his own personal nature and testify to the "legitimacy" of his larger literary goals.

Poe's desire to find a means of preserving and presenting the "self" in an otherwise mass produced object limn out one more important and provocative connection between himself and the other figure with whom this study is centrally concerned, namely Walt Whitman. Like Poe, Whitman worked throughout his career to maintain a "trace" of "self" in the books he created, lacing them with portraits, signatures, handwritten dates and epigraphs, etc., in order to create a text which held the potential to function as a reliable "trace" of the self represented therein. However, Whitman, who had worked in print shops as an apprentice, compositor, printer, etc., since a boy of twelve years of age, arguably had considerably more faith in the power of otherwise "anonymous" print to accurately "trace," suggest or open a window onto the "self" than Poe did, and, as the next section of this study will show, he worked diligently using print, script, and paratext – in tandem with prevalent cultural ideas, rituals, and practices surrounding death, mourning, and memorializing – in order to preserve and protect his own individual identity (which I investigate at length in Chapter Four), the identities of the "Million Dead" of the Civil War (Chapter Five), and, finally, the "immortal" identity Whitman felt was shared by all – an identity or sense of "self" that, when made visible, "traceable," and accessible, would serve to make America into the utopian democracy Whitman felt it was ultimately destined to become (Chapter Six).

### **CHAPTER IV**

# THE COLLABORATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF A DEATH-DEFYING CRYPTEXT:

## WALT WHITMAN'S LEAVES OF GRASS

In March of 1837 a resident of Dover, Vermont, Lois Gould, presented to her new sister-in-law, Harriet Lazell Gould, a small book, rather plain in design, filled with blank sheets of paper. While the book could have been used for anything (keeping notes, addresses, accounts, even a diary), Lois gifted it to Harriet with a specific purpose in mind. In the epigraph, Lois wrote the following:

Should dearest friends some kind memento trace, Along the unwritten columns of this book When distance or the grave hides form and face Into this volume sweet t'will be to look. Each fond remembrance oft will speak to you In language which may never be forgot Of those who ever constant were and true And gently whisper O forget me not. (as qtd. in Kete 12)

Lois's gift to her new sister-in-law was, thanks to the inscription she penned there, an invitation to Harriet to participate in a culture of mourning and memorializing which regularly made use of things like hair-weavings, memorial quilts, mourning portraits, and in this instance, handwriting and sentimental poetry, to preserve a "trace" of those loved ones whose "form and face" was inevitably hidden by distance or "the grave." It was an invitation that Harriet quickly accepted, writing in it herself and diligently circulating her book in order to have her friends "trace" their own sentimental "mementos" onto its pages (usually a poem, and in several cases, a poem that openly acknowledged the ability of the poem being written to do precisely what Lois Gould's inscription said it could). Within roughly ten years, Harriet had filled her volume with page after page of poetry memorializing loved ones. Some were written in her hand, some in the hand of her

friends, and by the end of the 1840s she was adding addenda in the form of folded sheets of paper. Accepting her sister-in-law's invitation, she had created a textual collection of her family and friends, a medium through which they could "speak to [her]" despite distance or death, one which could ensure that Harriet would always be able to hear the faint, if not uncanny "gentl[e] whisper[s]" of the absent (and) deceased.

Memorial volumes like the one gifted by Lois and created by Harriet were common during this time period, and this particular mourning and memorializing practice appears to have been rather ubiquitous throughout the nineteenth-century. Other similar but in some ways more elaborate practices existed as well. In 1876, William Lloyd Garrison, famed abolitionist, wrote and self-published "for private presentation" a memorial volume entitled "Helen Eliza Garrison: A Memorial" for his wife who had died the end of the year previous from acute pneumonia. Its focus, as the title implies, was necessarily narrower than Gould's, seeking to memorialize only one individual instead of many, but its function was arguably the same, to mediate "those feelings which...bereavement naturally awakens in the breast," by painting the "vanished loveliness and worth" of a dear loved one (Garrison 3). From the tipped in photograph of Eliza at about age forty, to the four chapters which chronicle her upbringing, her courtship with William, her marriage and family life, her activity in the abolitionist cause, the gracious nature of her character, her devotion to God, her last sudden illness and funeral, and the continuing influence on friends, loved ones, and social causes that she has had, the book reads as an attempt not only to memorialize, but to assert and perpetuate a connection between the living and the dead, a connection whose complete severance seems, according to the logic of this text, simply unthinkable. Beginning and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The American Antiquarian Society has a substantial collection of commercially produced, highly ornamented memorial albums in their holdings, but as Kete remarks, "plainer versions are easily found in local historical societies throughout New England" (239).

ending, as it does, with mourning poems in which Garrison addresses his wife directly, speaking to her as if she were as capable and eager to commune and converse with him as he apparently was to do so with her, this book, in true mourning and memorial fashion, holds the power to foster a sense of continued interpersonal association despite her bodily absence.

The verse "remembrances" in Gould's book and the picture, poems, and descriptions in Garrison's seem, in many ways, stylistically and topically distant from the work of a poet like Walt Whitman. Critics have long been fascinated with *Leaves of Grass* for its remarkably frank and open embrace of sexuality, its fervent championing of democratic ideals, and its expansive rhetoric of inclusion, but few have limned any connections between the literary practices surrounding death, mourning, and memorializing that proliferated through the nineteenth century and Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, a book that Whitman himself claimed was most remarkable for what it had to say about death.<sup>2</sup> As this chapter will show, Whitman did, in fact, rely extensively on a culture of mourning and memorializing to create *Leaves of Grass*, a text which, like Gould's and Garrison's, preserves and perpetuates individual identity, seeking to make the one represented therein still available despite absence or even "death." Making extensive use of the very same literary devices that writers of mourning poetry used, and with his physical text resembling the popular sentimental memorial albums of the time period, Whitman not only signaled his indebtedness to the artistic practices that

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This comment was made in response to Horace Traubel, who late in Whitman's life made the assertion to Whitman that "If *Leaves of Grass* is remarkable for anything, it is its celebration of death," to which Whitman responded by saying, "That's what we think—but they don't, or won't—see it so" (Traubel 8:334). One notable exception to lack of critical works focusing on Whitman and death is Harold Aspiz's excellent monograph *So Long! Walt Whitman's Poetry of Death*, in which Aspiz takes seriously Whitman's assertion regarding the "remarkable" things *Leaves of Grass* has to say about death. Aspiz's text, however, looks past how Whitman's style of address and textual design are drawn from a culture of mourning and memorializing in favor of seeing how the "theme [of death is] richly developed in *Leaves of Grass*" and in analyzing Whitman's trend for seeing death, "life and immortality [as]...integral parts of the same evolutionary cycle" (Aspiz 15).

proliferated in this culture, but he signaled to his readership that this text, like those albums, worked as a repository for an otherwise "disembodied" entity, nevertheless reachable, vital, and vibrant.

### The "Sentimental Bits"

Any discussion of Whitman's indebtedness to a culture of mourning and memorializing must necessarily take into account his pre-*Leaves* literary writings. These early writings constitute, to a large degree, a corpus of sentimental literature which in the words of one critic, resemble the work of "the innumerable horde of fourth-rate and unoriginal versifiers who occasionally found, as did Mrs. Lydia Sigourney, a following" (*Early* xv-xvi).<sup>3</sup> Such a trenchant comparison is nevertheless certainly accurate. Like Sigourney, Whitman wrote moralistic poems and tales that frequently grapple with the idea of death. Indeed, of the fifty or so pieces of literature published prior to *Leaves of Grass* (literature which includes poems, tales, and the novel *Franklin Evans*), death features prominently in at least half of these, and several of them are either *memento mori* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Whitman's penchant for producing this literature has generally been explained away by critics such as Thomas Brasher as a way of "trying to appeal to the general public," or in some cases as a way to make money (xy-xyi). The idea that Whitman wrote some of his sentimental literature in order to make money was originally proffered by the poet himself, however – a claim he made specifically with reference to his temperance novel Franklin Evans which he said was written because "cash payment was so tempting—I was so hard up at the time-[and]...I set to work at once ardently on it (with the help of a bottle of port or what not). In three days of constant work I finished the book. Finished the book? Finished myself. It was damned rot—rot of the worst sort—not insincere, perhaps, but rot, nevertheless: it was not the business for me to be up to. I stopped right there: I never cut a chip off that kind of timber again" (Traubel 1:93). While Whitman obviously found the work unappealing and felt that it was not the type of thing he wished to continue writing he nevertheless curiously characterized the work as "sincere," indicating that there was something about the "sentimental" character of the work that appealed to him and had value. Michael Warner has claimed that Franklin Evans "seems designed more than anything else to narrate its title character into as many disparate social situations as possible," and claims that ultimately the mode of address and the language of temperance/addiction make "voluntaristic culture...a context in which internal dissonances of appetite, the involuntary, or amnesia can be read simultaneously as expressive of a self and as selfing problems" (Warner 37, 43). As this chapter will show, Franklin Evans was not the only early sentimental text written by Whitman concerned with overcoming the "problems" of representing the "expressive...self" in and through text, and that the modes of address used in his temperance work to grapple with these issues were themselves experimented with earlier in Whitman's mourning and memorial literature.

poems dedicated to reminding the reader that regardless of fame, ambition, or personal accolades he or she too must die and so should be prepared, or are relatively standard mourning and memorial pieces that either memorialize an individual or seek to console a reader about the nature and purpose of death.<sup>4</sup> They are, in many ways, formulaic, and demonstrate, if nothing else, that Whitman was well-versed in both the ritualistic and literary culture of mourning and memorializing. Perhaps the most overt example of this is found in his literary responses to the death of MacDonald Clarke, also known as the "Mad Poet of Broadway," who died March 5th, 1842. Clarke, a Byronesque figure who had a reputation for deeply idolizing a succession of young beautiful New York women with a "troublesome but guileless enthusiasm," had been preyed upon by a group of youths some days earlier who had approached him and told him that his latest object of fixation, Ms. Mary ---, was eager to accept his attentions and that her father was not opposed the match (Child 94). These ne'er-do-wells provided him with new clothes, a carriage, and a corsage, and drove him to the young lady's home, leaving him to present himself at the door. While no details of the unquestionably uncomfortable scene at the doorstep exist, it is fair to say that he was (roughly?) rejected, and those that knew him claimed that the "[t]he mortification and frenzy into which he was thrown by this act of cruelty completely broke down what was left of his mind" (as qtd. in Hollis 200). Two days later, a night watchman found Clarke "during a terrible storm" with "[h]is hat blown off" and his clothes rain-soaked, "kneeling before a poor beggar...writing the history of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> These would include "The Inca's Daughter," "The Spanish Lady," "Sailing the Mississippi at Midnight" (which also appeared as "The Mississippi at Midnight"), "Ambition," (which appeared in different form as "Fame's Vanity"), "The Death and Burial of McDonald Clarke," "Time To Come" (Which originally appeared as "Our Future Lot"), "Death of a Nature Lover" (which originally appeared as "My Departure"), "The Love that is Hereafter," "The Winding Up" (which appeared with slight differences as "The End of All"), "Each has his Grief" (which also appeared as "We All Shall Rest at Last"). The latter seven could easily have been included in one of the many anthologies of mourning poetry published during the period, anthologies that, fittingly enough, featured the works of writers like Lydia Sigourney, Felicia Hemans, Elizabeth Oaks Smith, Charles Sprague and even John Quincy Adams.

the mendicant" to whom he had just given "his last penny" (200). He was taken initially to the "Tombs" (lower Manhattan's jail), and then to the Blackwell Island Lunatic Asylum. Although he had some apparently lucid intervals while in the asylum, he spent most of his time crying out for water and complaining that his brain "was all on fire" (Child 97). A few days after he entered Blackwell's he was found drowned in his cell, water still pouring from an opened faucet. His keepers could not tell whether his death was by accident or by design.

Whitman was touched by the story of the poet, and apparently by what he felt was the public's failure to properly mourn and memorialize him – something which Whitman attempted to rectify by publishing two thoughtful eulogies and an elegy for him. On March 8<sup>th</sup> (only three days after the death of Clarke) he wrote a eulogy in which he stated that "although it was not our fortune to be acquainted with the Poor Poet...we feel grieved at the news. He seems to have been a simple, kindly creature – a being whose soul, though marked by little that the crowd admire, was totally free from any taint of vice, or selfishness, or evil passion" (Rubin and Brown 106). His rather sentimental column (three times the length of his previous day's editorial on Emerson's lecture "Nature and the Powers of the Poet") was, in essence, a public act of mourning and memorializing. In it, Whitman worked to sketch the tenor of Clarke's character, as well as his literary work, and he repeatedly called upon his readers to join with him in not only remembering Clarke, but imagining him as a now exalted figure reminding them that, "[H]e is in that place which we are fond of believing to be peopled by joy never ceasing, and by resplendent innocence and beauty" (107). In closing, Whitman apostrophically addressed the dead poet, saying, "Peace to thy memory....In 'the sphere which keeps the disembodied spirits of the dead,' may the love of angels, and the ravishing splendor of

the Country Beautiful, and the communion of gentle spirits, and sweet draughts from the Fountain of all Poetry, blot out every scar of what thou hast suffered here below!" (108).<sup>5</sup>

Such a moment is easy to read over and dismiss as simply conventional and sentimentalized – which it certainly is – but to dismiss it would be to miss the important work that it accomplishes. Considering that Whitman's entire column has been an attempt to memorialize Clarke, and considering that he places such emphasis on the fact that Clarke now enjoys a transcendent, immortal existence, his use of apostrophe in this moment has the effect of confirming for his readers the "facts" that he has been asserting all along. For, as Barbara Johnson has stated, such an apostrophe or "direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first person speaker" makes "the absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed...present, animate, and anthropomorphic" (30). In short, when Whitman employs an apostrophe to directly address the dead poet, it reinforces the idea of Clarke's continued existence because it tacitly asserts that he is an entity *capable* of being the recipient of such address, or, as Jonathan Culler has phrased it, it is a moment that is "not the representation of an event; if it works, it produces a fictive, discursive event" that occurs in the "now" of reading and makes the addressee into a still vital, reachable entity with whom one might discourse and commune (153). In short, in the very same moment that Whitman asserted Clarke's ongoing vitality he also, through

Leaves of Grass (Higgins).

Whitman substituted the name of the dead poet's most famous piece of verse, "Afara," for the name of the poet himself when making this direct address, so that it actually reads, "Peace to thy memory, Afara!" Whitman's choice is an interesting one not only for the way in which it called attention to the achievements of the poet in the moment that it also addressed and memorialized him, but because Afara was a nomadic Ethiopian whose wanderings in the desert suggest a kind of parallel in the almost "nomadic" existence of the poor, sometimes dispossessed and homeless poet who wandered about Broadway. Clarke's book of poetry "Afara" also, as one scholar has noted, is written so that in form and address it resembles "a chapbook," and thus "has an intimate feel about it, as if you – the reader – were one of a select group who could appreciate the poet" (Higgins). Whitman's choice to address Clarke as "Afara" might therefore also simultaneously signal his appreciation for the "intimate" way that this particular book of poetry reached out to its readers – something that Whitman himself would work hard to achieve only a few years later in

the use of apostrophe, made Clarke into a reachable being capable of being communed with despite the material facts of his (in)existence.

Apostrophic styles of address were a staple of Whitman's early literary career, and he used such modes of address prolifically in his writing about Clarke in order to invoke a sense of "presence" and interpersonal communication between not only himself and the dead poet, but himself and his reader as well – something he did when he apostrophically (or "directly") addressed his reader in another tribute to Clarke only four days later, and then in an elegy published a few days after that. The elegy, entitled "The Death and Burial of McDonald Clarke," sought to heighten the sense of the speaker's presence in such a way that his "communion" with his addressees might carry a sense of urgency, vitality, and directness that would spur them to greater action. Its brevity allows it to be quoted in full.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Direct address and apostrophe are closely allied rhetorical devices, which is why I have chosen to refer to them collectively as "apostrophic styles of address." Direct address targets an absent (but presumed to be at some point available or "listening") reader, and apostrophe targets an absent (but presumed to be reachable or "listening") entity of virtually any kind (prayer is essentially an apostrophic address to God, for instance). As I see it, each is very similar to the other, in fact it may be fairly said that they are obverses of the same coin, so to speak. Apostrophe makes an otherwise "absent, dead, or inanimate" object such as a vase, a landscape or deity seem "present" and "animate," while direct address heightens that same sense of "presence" and "vitality" (degree of "animation") for an otherwise "absent, dead, or [now] inanimate" author, something that Whitman would use to his advantage throughout his early writings and throughout *Leaves of Grass* (Johnson 30). In both cases, communication and/or communion is achieved by heightening the sense of the co-presence (in the reader's temporal "now") of both speaker and addressee. In other words, apostrophic styles of address allow speaker and addressee to "share" a kind of imagined space of communion and communication – a "psychotextual" space, for lack of a better word – that seeks to bridge materially enforced distances or dislocations.

The full title includes the words "A Parody," which, as Thomas Basher explains, is not to be interpreted as Whitman intending to satirize Clarke in some way, but rather as Whitman's mode of acknowledging the fact that in this poem he had relied quite heavily on Charles Wolfe's very popular "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna" – going so far as to use one line of the poem verbatim, and following closely the sentiments of the remainder. Thus Whitman's "parody" is one of form and content, and his declaration of this is an acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Wolfe in the creation of this particular poem (Whitman, *Early* 26). Given the fact that this poem is rarely treated critically, it is probably worth pausing to note that this is the first published elegy written by the writer who would later arguably pen the most profound and powerful elegy written in English, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd." It should also be noted that Whitman's second eulogy to Clarke followed in much the same vein as the first, with the exception that he was apparently becoming more and more uncomfortable with the lack of proper mourning and

Not a sigh was heard, not a tear was shed, As away to the "tombs" he was hurried, No mother or friend held his dying head, Or wept when the poet was buried. They buried him lonely; no friend stood near, (The scoffs of the multitude spurning.) To weep o'er the poet's sacred bier; No bosom with anguish was burning. No polish'd coffin enclosed his breast, Nor in purple or linen they wound him, As a stranger he died; he went to his rest With cold charity's shroud wrapt 'round him. Few and cold were the prayers they said, Cold and dry was the cheek of sadness, Not a tear of grief baptised his head, Nor of sympathy pardon'd his madness. None thought, as they stood by his lowly bed, Of the griefs and pains that craz'd him; None thought of the sorrow that turn'd his head, Of the vileness of those who prais'd him. Lightly they speak of his anguish and woe, And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him, But whatever he was that was evil below, *Unkindness* and *cruelty made* him. Ye hypocrites! stain not his grave with a tear, Nor blast the fresh planted willow That weeps o'er his grave; for while he was here, Ye refused him a crumb and a pillow. Darkly and sadly his spirit has fled, But his name will long linger in story: He needs not a stone to hallow his bed; He's in Heaven, encircled with glory. (Early 25-26)

memorializing that was taking place, for he tacitly reminded his readership that "it is well for men to turn aside once in a while from the noise and din of the great Babel – from the scarring cares, and the gross anxieties of the other world – and give way to the reflections which such an event as Clarke's decease very naturally awakens. These reflections cannot but have a gentle influence; they cannot but shine down upon the heart, like sunlight upon a flower bud, starting and swelling the blossom into fragrant and full-blown life" (Rubin and Brown 109). Whitman's sentiments here provide an opportunity to once again return, albeit briefly, to the notion that I forwarded in the Introduction to this dissertation, namely, that for Whitman – and seemingly for a larger nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing – contact with death (or the idea of death) was truly the only way to find oneself living a "full-blown life." Thus whether one was reading a conventional elegy on the death of the apparently indigent but viceless "Mad Poet of Broadway," or the sometimes startling and "culturally challenging" poetry and prose of a writer like Poe, both essentially invited readers to "turn aside...from the noise and din of the great Babel" and use these literary meditations on death as a means of instigating their own personal "reflection" on the nature of death and the afterlife – meditations that, regardless of the unconventionality of the images presented by a writer like Poe, might ultimately lead to conclusions as similarly "transcendent" as those Whitman describes above.

Whitman's elegy is interesting for several reasons. Certainly it shows Whitman championing contemporary mourning rituals and customs (such as dying among family or friends who might hold the "dying['s] head" and witness the "last look" which indexed the state of the dying's soul, or having a funeral service where a "polished coffin" held the body of a valued loved one wound "in [a] purple or linen" shroud and where the "prayers" and the "tear[s]" of friends whose "bosom[s] with anguish [are] burning" testified to the value of the individual who has passed), but it also shows Whitman once again turning to apostrophic styles of address to create a sense of "presence" that lent the poem a feeling of intimate interpersonal communication between an anxious speaker and "you" the reader(s). This sense of "presence" culminates with Whitman turning directly towards his readers, employing the (archaic) second person plural pronoun, and condemning them as "Ye, Hipocrites!" It is at this moment that Whitman's voice unquestionably takes on an added sense of urgency and a presence, as what was a narrative now becomes an apparent moment of atemporal personal address. He is no longer describing Clarke's death and the lack of respect shown him as he had throughout the first half of the poem, he is rather speaking directly to "you" and is doing so now, condemning you for your lack of participation in these rituals, and for your lack of charity in "refus[ing] him a crumb and a pillow."8 In this moment, his apostrophic direct address becomes a mode of invoking a sense of his speaker as an entity "present, animate, and anthropomorphic" whose challenge to "you" the reader to behave and feel properly gains traction and power through the device's ability to shift the poem from a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The virulence of Whitman's address is arguably lost on modern readers given our (lack of) proximity to Clarke. However, one can imagine what sort of response (shame?, anger?, derision?) a contemporary reader familiar with Clarke and his death might have had. Certainly Whitman's direct address sought to provoke his reader and did so by making the speaker an entity that, in attitude and address, seemingly leaps from the page to challenge them with his rebuke.

narrative to a "discursive event" of intimate, if not somewhat heated, interpersonal communication.

In both his eulogy on Clarke and his poetry, Whitman made use of apostrophic styles of address in order to heighten a sense of immediate "presence," and foster a sense of "discursive" communication between speaker and addressee. Seemingly by 1842, when both of these pieces were written, Whitman was comfortable making use of the device, as well he should have been, for he had not only been using it in his journalistic writing, but he had employed it regularly in his writings about death for some time. <sup>9</sup>
Indeed, even in Whitman's earliest extant piece of published literature, "Our Future Lot," published in 1838, he relied on apostrophe to make an otherwise absent entity present. <sup>10</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Whitman's comfort in using this device was not solely a result of his exposure to and his work in producing mourning and memorial literature, but also, as Ezra Greenspan has shown, due to his work as a journalist. Suffice it to say that the style of direct address that I am investigating in this chapter was not only a staple of nineteenth-century mourning and memorial poetry, but also a staple of the period's (frequently serialized) sentimental novels (novels themselves following in the tradition, as Garret Stewart points out, begun by "[t]he eighteenth-century pioneers of prose fiction...[who] peopled the novel with avatars of [both] fictional attention, [and] not infrequently with individual personifications of its readers"), as well as a much used journalistic convention employed by editors and reporters alike when producing their columns and articles (Stewart 7). Indeed, Whitman's early life as a printer's devil, compositor, printer, writer, and editor brought him into daily routine contact with a literary object, the newspaper or magazine, in which a variety of different genres nevertheless regularly employed this technique of direct address (in poetry, serialized novel, and editorial). Thus, in one sense, it is truly fair to say that Whitman's work as a "newspaper man" made him aware of the potentials of this address. However, at the same time, it is important to acknowledge that he explored and developed those "potentials" in the work of his sentimental poetry and tales at the same time that he did so in his editorials and articles – articles, editorials, and poems which, fittingly enough, went on to be housed in contemporary newspapers. Thus, While Greenspan's argument rightly traces out the way in which Whitman's direct address develops in his writing as a journalist during the 1830s and 1840s, I would like to offer here a complementary narrative that raises into view the fact that during the same time, Whitman was equally engaged in exploring the potentials of this direct address in his sentimental poetry and tales (For more information on the technique of direct address in Whitman's journalism see Greenspan's Walt Whitman and the American Reader, for more information on its use in Victorian novels see Garrett Stewart's Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> This poem originally appeared in the *Long Islander* sometime in the Fall of 1838 (exact dates are unknown as no extant runs of the *Long Islander* from this time period are known to exist, and the poem was reprinted on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1838, in the *Long Island Democrat* as "from the *Long Islander*" (see *Early* pg. 27 for more information)). It was later reprinted (with some alterations and with Whitman's name attached) in the *Aurora* in 1842 when Whitman was editor. Whitman had started the *Long Islander* sometime in the spring of 1838 (at the age of nineteen) as an attempt to escape from a life of teaching that he had, of necessity, recently fallen into. Only two other pieces vie for the prominence of being the earliest remaining

The poem is a meditation on death with its speaker seeking consolation and respite from the grief associated with his realization that he is mortal. The first section describes him as being in a state of "flashing hope and gloomy fear," as he considers the ultimate state of "[t]his curious frame of human mould," whose "troubled heart and wondrous form must both alike decay" in "cold wet earth" which will inevitably "close around dull senseless limbs, and ashy face" (*Early* 28). Hoping to temper the "gloomy fear" and bolster his "flashing hope[s]" he reaches out to "Nature."

But where, O Nature! Where will be my mind's abiding place? Will it ev'n live? For though its light must shine till from the body torn; Then when the oil of life is spent, still shall the taper burn? O, powerless is this struggling brain to pierce the mighty mystery; In dark, uncertain awe it waits the common doom – to die! (28)

This apostrophe might seem a rather rhetorical one, for certainly in appealing to "Nature" one cannot really expect a reply. However, a reply is precisely what is found in the poem. The speaker's voice ceases, and "Nature" voices the remainder of the lines that follow:

Mortal! And can thy swelling soul live with the thought that all its life Is centered in this earthly cage of care, and tears, and strife? Not so; that sorrowing heart of thine ere long will find a house of rest; Thy form, repurified, shall rise, in robes of beauty drest. The flickering taper's glow shall change to bright and starlike majesty, Radiant with pure and piercing light from the Eternal's eye!" (28-29)

Nature's response is remarkable not only because the picture that is painted with it accords nicely with contemporary images of heaven and the afterlife (the speaker will arise apparently embodied, although "repurified" and in "robes of beauty drest"), but because the words Nature utters, and the way in which this utterance is structured (as a

published work produced by Whitman. These are a piece on "Summer Produce and Fall Crops" and the "Effects of Lightning" both of which were reprinted in the *Long Island Democrat* as from the *Long Islander* in August of that year. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell if these prose pieces were in fact written by Whitman given the fact that they, themselves, might have been recirculations from another area paper.

direct address to the speaker), work together to confirm the validity of its message. 

Because the speaker's apostrophic address to Nature is answered with a direct address to the speaker (an address that, similar to *Leaves*, uses a nebulous second person pronoun whose indefiniteness encourages readers to interpret it as referring to them as much as the speaker) it makes the poem into a "discursive event" in which speaker/reader commune with a now "present, animate, and anthropomorphic" (not to mention apparently omniscient) Nature capable of dispensing emphatic knowledge regarding the speaker's certain "change to bright and starlike majesty, / Radiant with pure and piercing light from the Eternal's eye!" (29). 

Moreover, the fact that "mortal" speaker/reader finds himself able to commune with "immortal" and divine Nature confirms the idea that the "immortality" of which Nature speaks (and which it embodies) certainly exists, and thus remains a possibility to be enjoyed in the afterlife. Thus apostrophe becomes a key device through which a sense of presence and communion can be "effected" – a sense of presence and communion which itself confirms the assertions of immortality that are topically the concern of the poem.

Such use of apostrophe and direct address, as one might infer based upon its presence in the elegy to MacDonald Clarke and in "Our Future Lot," was a staple of Whitman's early literary writing, and he generally made use of it to encourage a sense of proximity between speaker and some other entity – such as Nature, or a reader. Certainly

Whitman's depiction of a kind of embodied afterlife in this, his early poetry, arguably gives way in his later work – as the second and sixth chapters of this dissertation suggest – to a sense of immortality in which one "merges" into a larger, divine, cosmic Oversoul.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Moreover, its address of the speaker as "Mortal!" seems to confirm that it, itself, is decidedly *not* mortal, but rather divine in its own right, something suggested by the fact that Nature chooses to address the speaker as "Mortal!" in an attempt to distinguish that speaker from Nature itself – i.e., Nature's way of differentiating between itself and the speaker is seemingly by marking the differences between them. The speaker *is* mortal, Nature immortal, which would account for its apparent knowledge of the ultimate change that this "mortal" will undergo when it puts on the "robes" of immortality.

such is the case in Whitman's 1840 poem "We All Shall Rest At Last." Penned two years after "Our Future Lot," it uses direct address to establish a rather remarkable sense of presence, this time between a speaker and reader. The poem begins with the speaker proclaiming his understanding of the fact that "On earth are many sights of woe, / And many sounds of agony" which he then goes on to detail before ending with "All, all know grief; and at the close, / All lie earth's spreading arms within" (Early 16). After delineating the sources of woe that cause most individuals pain – a list which culminates with death – he then begins to direct his otherwise personal meditation on the nature of death overtly towards the reader, whom he directly queries saying, "O, foolish, then, with pain to shrink / From the sure doom we each must meet. / Is earth so fair – or heaven so dark – / Or life so passing sweet?" (16). Whitman continues with this direct address, employing the archaic second person pronoun, "ye" (which he had previously used in his elegy for Clarke), to heighten the sense that he is "present(ly)" speaking to "you" the reader, "No; dread ye not the fearful hour – / The coffin, and the pall's dark gloom, / For there's a calm to throbbing hearts, / And rest, down in the tomb" (17, emphasis mine). In making his reader the overt object of his address, Whitman moves the poem away from being a meditation on the nature of death, and towards something much more akin to a dialogue in which the (assumed) skepticism of a reader is being overtly addressed by the speaker, who is very interested in helping his reader understand and appreciate the real nature of death and immortal individual identity, something he further exemplifies when telling the reader that after death:

> Our long journey will be o'er, And throwing off this load of woes, The pallid brow, the feebled limbs, Will sink in soft repose.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Originally published in the *Long Island Democrat* on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1840, and then again (with some revisions) in the *New World* (New York) on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1841. Later re-titled by Whitman (with some revisions to the poem itself) as "Each Has His Grief."

Nor only this: for wise men say That when we leave our land of care, We float to a mysterious shore, Peaceful, and pure, and fair. (17)

Perhaps fittingly, he begins the poem's last section with yet one final direct address in which he exhorts the reader, "So, welcome death! Whene'er the time / That the dread summons must be met," pressing not only his points regarding the nature of death as something to "welcome" rather than fear, but furthering the sense that this speaker is capable of directly exhorting, speaking or communing with "you" the reader in the moment of reading (17). Whitman's attempt to "reach out" through the text and "speak" directly to the reader "personally," as it were, is an action that fundamentally accords with the contemporary practices of mourning and memorializing (which held that dealing with death was very much a collaborative project). And, like "Our Future Lot," it makes use of the culture's literary conventions of apostrophic styles of address to heighten its assertions of immortality, styles which leave a reader with a sense that he or she enjoys the "presence" of an otherwise "absent" entity. Thus, the fact that the speaker seems to be "present," and capable of speaking to you (or "ye," as the case may be) "now," in every moment of reading, complements the text's assertion that individual identity and interpersonal communication are not integrally tied to the corporeal presence of those involved, and that the potential for continued association with otherwise "absent" entities, such as the beloved deceased, is very much a possibility. 14

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> "We All Shall Rest At Last" is intriguing not only because it follows an early pattern of Whitman seeking communion with an addressee in order to gain or provide insight into the nature of both death and individual identity, but because in its questioning of its reader regarding his or her attitudes towards death, its direct address, and its assertions about the eternality of the human soul it is, in many ways, a pale prefiguration of Whitman's 1855 poem "To Think of Time." In this poem, much like "We All Shall Rest At Last," Whitman queries his reader as to that reader's fear of death, asking here, "Have you guessed you yourself would not continue? Have you dreaded those earth-beetles? / Have you feared the future would be nothing to you?"(*PP* 100). He then goes on to detail some of the various pains associated with dying while proposing the idea that while they culminate certainly in death, they also usher in another kind of life as well. "When the dull nights are over, and the dull days also, / When the soreness of lying so much in bed is over, / ... When the breath ceases and the pulse of the heart ceases, / Then the corpse-limbs stretch on the bed, and the living look upon them, / ... The living look upon the corpse with their eyesight, / But without

Several similar examples of Whitman using apostrophic styles of address in order to achieve a sense of "presence" and "communion" exist among Whitman's early writing and they are not limited to his poetry only. In his tale "Tomb Blossoms" Whitman relates the story of a young man who in his regular walks comes across a widow whose husband, at the time of his death, was buried in one of two unmarked graves that lay side by side. Unsure which grave is her husband's, the woman regularly decorates both of them. The young man, after learning the story, watches the old woman perform her memorials. His realization that her love for her husband has led her to see that the grave and death are not things to be feared, but that they are the promise of peace, rest, and possible future reunion with a loved one leads him to burst into apostrophic address, this time to God. He proclaims the following:

Oh! Thou whose mighty attribute is the incarnation of love, I bless Thee that Thou didst make this fair disposition in our hearts, and didst root it there so deeply that it is stronger than all else, and can never be torn out!...The grave —the grave. What foolish man calls it a dreadful place? It

eyesight lingers a different living and looks curiously on the corpse" (100). Such a thought leads Whitman's speaker to commune with the reader in "thinking" about the purpose and nature of life and existence, something which culminates in the poetic realization, voiced by the speaker that at death, "You are not thrown to the winds . . you gather certainly and safely around yourself. / Yourself! Yourself! Yourself forever and ever!" (101). Fittingly, Whitman's communion with his reader ends with one final direct address, and then, like "We All Shall Rest At Last," an image which models for the reader the kind of appropriate attitude to take when meeting death. It reads as follows: "We cannot be stopped at a given point . . . . that is no satisfaction; / To show us a good thing or a few good things for a space of time—that is no satisfaction[....] / Do you suspect death? If I were to suspect death I should die now, / Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited toward annihilation? / Pleasantly and well-suited I walk, / Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good, / The whole universe indicates that it is good, / The past and the present indicate that it is good[....] / I see now that everything has an eternal soul! / The trees have, rooted in the ground . . . . the weeds of the sea have . . . . the animals. / I swear I think there is nothing but immortality! / That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for it, and the cohering is for it, / And all preparation is for it . . and identity is for it . . and life and death are for it" (106). It should be noted that this pattern of question and answer also mark "Our Future Lot," although in abbreviated form. Consider that "Nature's" answer to the skeptical speaker's question "Where will be my mind's abiding place" is answered first with a question of its own, and then with assertions similar to those made in "To Think of Time." Nature's response reads, "[C]an thy swelling soul live with the thought that all its life / Is centered in this earthly cage of care, and tears, and strife? / Not so; that sorrowing heart of thine ere long will find a house of rest; / Thy form, repurified, shall rise, in robes of beauty drest. / The flickering taper's glow shall change to bright and starlike majesty, / Radiant with pure and piercing light from the Eternal's eye!" (Early 28-29). Clearly the pattern that Whitman follows in Leaves of Grass is one which he began developing in his early literary work and continued to employ, although with less conventionality, in 1855.

is a kind friend whose arms shall compass us round about, and while we lay our heads upon his bosom, no care, temptation, nor corroding passion shall have power to disturb us. Then the weary spirit shall no more be weary the aching head and aching heart will be stranger to pain; and the soul that has fretted and sorrowed away its little life on earth will sorrow not any more....let us think of the grave and death, and they will seem like soft and pleasant music. Such thoughts then soothe and calm...they open a peaceful prospect before us....What is there here below to draw us with such fondness? Life is the running of a race – a most weary race, sometimes. Shall we fear the goal, merely because it is shrouded in a cloud? (*Early* 94)

Once again, Whitman seeks to establish a relationship between speaker and addressee that consoles and works to facilitate a greater understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of death, but in this case, he broadens that relationship to include his reader as well. Whitman's speaker's apostrophe here becomes not only a means for facilitating a kind of enlightening communion with God, making God into an entity "present, [and] animate" if not in some sense "anthropomorphic," but it also allows Whitman a means of freeing the narrative from its previous sense of temporal progression and making it into a kind of "discursive event" happening "now" (much as he did in his elegy for Clarke). It is a discursive event that allows both speaker and his reader to begin to "share" in the discourse with the divine and also in the insights provided. In the sentence that begins the apostrophe this can be seen as Whitman moves from using the personal pronoun "I" which he has employed throughout the narration and begins to use "our," "us," and "we," which incorporate speaker and reader alike – a stylistic move that he would put to provocative use later in *Leaves of Grass* when, in a poem like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" Whitman similarly joins his "I" and "you" into a "we," claiming that their shared experience of riding the ferry, seeing the same sights, feeling the same feelings allows "I" the poet and "you" the reader to share a kind of intimate association that appears almost timeless, atemporal, communal, one which culminates with the unifying sentiment, "We

understand, then, do we not?.../ What the study could not teach.... / What the preaching could not accomplish..." (*PP* 312). 15

This transition to a kind of corporate first person plural address allows Whitman to make several statements about the nature of death in which there is apparently little distinction between his thinking on the subject and his reader's. Death, or the grave, becomes for both "a kind friend whose arms shall compass us round about," "we" shall "lay our heads upon his bosom," and "no care, temptation nor corroding passion shall have power to disturb us" (312, emphases mine). He ends this address with what is apparently an injunction to the reader, as well as to himself, in saying, "let us think of the grave and death, and they will seem like soft and pleasant music...shall we fear the goal because it is shrouded in a cloud?" (312). The collapse of the reader's and the speaker's thoughts into one voice which represents them both, fosters a sense that speaker, reader, and God are all "present" and "communing," and turns the poem into something like a prayer conducted during communal worship – where Whitman's voice speaks the collective thoughts and hopes of the participants, and voices the insights that the various participants' "communion" has inspired. This sense of "presence" and "communion" reinforce the text's overt message that death is nothing to be feared, that immortality is assured, and that one's self and that self's intimate relationships will be perpetuated despite what seems like a painful absence because similar intimate and "communal" relationships have just been established between speaker, reader, and God via this text. By using apostrophe to break out of the otherwise constrained "narrative time" or flow of the story in order to enter into a kind of universalized time where he can speak to a reader - any reader, at any point in time - about the nature of death, his message as well as the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> I will return to analyze in detail this crucial passage from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" – arguably one of the most provocative and profound moments of the type of address I am investigating in this chapter – shortly.

speech act itself provide the reader with both the knowledge and the "sense" that death does not equate with cessation or annihilation, and that individual identity and interpersonal relationships are perpetual.

### Sentimental Addresses to the Dead

In every instance that Whitman chose to employ apostrophic styles of address he was working to heighten the sense of "presence" and proximity enjoyed by speaker and addressee. Whether with Clarke (whom Whitman addressed directly in his eulogy), or the reader of "We All Shall Rest At Last" or "The Death and Burial of MacDonald Clarke," or Nature in "Our Future Lot," or both God and reader in "Tomb Blossoms," Whitman made use of this literary device in order to "produce a fictive, discursive event," rather than merely the "representation of an event" (Culler 153). In virtually every case, he did so in order to make an otherwise "absent, dead, or inanimate entity...present, animate, [and] anthropomorphic" (Johnson 30). However, Whitman's use of apostrophic styles of address in order to foster this sense of presence and counter the otherwise deleterious effects of death was not unique to him. Indeed, the literature of the time period, including that of a "fourth-rate and unoriginal versifier" such as Lydia Sigourney, was generally replete with apostrophes and direct address because of the way these worked to "create the site in which the important utopian promise of sentimentality – of nonviolated community, of restored losses, of healed wounds - [could] be offered to...writers and readers. It is the method by which obstructions are removed and salutary bonds instituted and protected....the rhetorical strategies of direct address to the reader and apostrophic appeal to an abstraction calls together both the ... self of the present and the past [or 'passed'] subject" in such a way that the deceased seem a presence still vital, and capable of being reached (Kete 47). In sum, these modes of address proliferated throughout a copious body of mourning and memorial literature, itself circulating largely

through both a gift economy and periodicals, because they were a powerful means of cultivating a sense of continual presence and interpersonal connection between the otherwise "absent dead," and the living who longed to be connected to them.

Sigourney's poem "On the Death of a Friend" serves as a good example. Like Whitman's "Our Future Lot" and "We All Shall Rest At Last," this poem is divided into two parts. The initial part, which comprises one large stanza, is dedicated to sketching out the benevolent character of this "friend" and "mother." It reads, in part, as follows:

Hers was the unwavering mind,
The untiring hand of duty. Firm of soul
And pure in purpose, on the eternal Rock,
Of Christian trust her energies reposed,
And sought no tribute from a shadowy world. (Sigourney 208)

Most of the initial stanza continues on in this vein, ending with an assertion that due to the departed friend's goodness, surely "He" (meaning God or perhaps Christ) "did remember her" in her final hours of pain and death. It is at this point that the poem breaks its descriptive, narrative, and temporal flow with the familiar apostrophe, directed at the departed loved one.

Oh thou whom grieving love
Would blindly pinion in this vale of tears,
Farewell! It is a glorious flight for faith
To trace thy upward path, above this clime
Of change and storm. We will remember thee
At thy turf-bed, – and 'mid the twilight hour
Of solemn musing, when the buried friend
Comes back so visibly, and seems to fill
The vacant chair, our speech shall be of thee. (208)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This poem appeared in Lydia Sigourney's book entitled *Zinzendorf* which originally appeared in 1835, three years prior to Whitman's earliest piece of verse. While *Zinzendorf* is a collection of poems, it was apparently so imbued with poetry of mourning that its author felt compelled to dedicate the final paragraph of her preface to an explanation of why this collection focused so much on death and mourning stating, "Many of the poems in the present collection, were suggested by the passing and common incidents of life....Should it be objected that too many of them are elegiac, the required apology would fain clothe itself in the language of the gifted Lord Bacon: – If we listen to David's harp, we shall find as many hearse-like harmonies, as carols; and the pencil of Inspiration hath more labored to describe the afflictions of Job, than the felicities of Solomon" (6).

This final stanza of the poem brings the memorialized friend back into intimate association with the speaker of the poem (and apparently the reader as well given the use of the collective pronoun "we"), establishing a powerful sense of the potential for continued interpersonal association. It does so, once again, by using an apostrophe that makes an "absent, dead, or inanimate entity...present, animate, anthropomorphic" as well as "produce[s] a fictive, discursive event," but it also, in this case, uses the moment of discourse it creates between absent dead and living to forecast many more such moments (Johnson 30, Culler 153). Indeed, the poem suggests that the communion that is being carried out "now" in the moment of reading (which has become, in essence, a moment of shared speech for reader and speaker) will be repeatedly enjoyed whenever at "the twilight hour / Of solemn musing" "speech shall be of [her, the departed]," for in any such moments, as in this moment of reading/shared speech, the otherwise "buried friend" will come "back so visibly" that she will seemingly "fill the vacant chair" (Sigourney 208).

For any (mournful) reader who feels that the poem's description of an "unwavering mind," "untiring hand of duty," and a "firm...soul / ...pure in purpose, on the eternal Rock" is an apt description of the one that has been lost, the poem is thus primed to become a powerful means of reentering into a sphere of association with the deceased individual. The reader is allowed to not only "see" a loved one in the character that is described by the poem, but encouraged by the inclusive "we" of the poem, is also allowed to share in the speaker's voice and assertions; thus the reader, as much as the speaker, addresses the dead directly and in the process assures, and is assured that continued interpersonal contact will continue. Although Sigourney's poem is a mass-produced poetic object, because of the "thin" description it employs (making the dead into an image capable of being "impressed" with almost any specific identity of the

reader's choosing), it is nonetheless capable of using the conditions of that mass production to facilitate the poem's ability to establish a sense of continued "presence" for a remarkable number of deceased women so long as they in some way fit the description above.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, poetry like Sigourney's functioned in many ways like the preprinted memorial cards and pictures that began to crop up in the late 1830s and which
proliferated later in the century. These cards were mass-produced and widely-distributed,
and so were made available and affordable to those with little time or money available to
them to participate in the some of the more time- and resource-intensive activities of
mourning. Such cards generally carried a thought-inspiring verse of scripture or
literature that asserted the eternality of the human soul, a mourning image, such as a dove
representing the promise of the Holy Spirit that all should rise again, and a blank spot in
which to write (in one's own characteristic hand) the name of the departed whom they
wished to remember (fig 23). While the mass-production of such objects (which would
proliferate in the middle decades of the century, and saturate the larger culture in the
century's later decades) would lead some contemporary individuals to become skeptical
of their use, nevertheless, these objects, like Sigourney's poems, held the potential to
mediate the feelings of the bereaved and should not be seen as merely overly facile

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> A fact of some importance, for Whitman, as the next chapter will show, used a similarly "thin" descriptive process in his work of Civil War poetry *Drum-Taps* when seeking out a means of representing the identities of all of the "Million Dead" of the Civil War –a representation that, I argue, was constructed in order to facilitate otherwise disrupted practices of mourning and memorializing and cohere a social body torn apart by civil war.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Once again, this simple action – the writing of the name of one's deceased loved one in the "hand" of the living bereaved – tied the two together "scripturally." The script of the living, impressing the name of the dead onto the memorial space, symbolically binds the identities of the two individuals together in ways that assert they are inseparable despite death and absence.

expressions of grief.<sup>19</sup> For a modern reader to imagine the power that a mass-produced poem such as Sigourney's might have, it is necessary to suspend skepticism regarding the less than adroit poetic language and the "conventionalized" representations of heaven and deity in order to consider the use value such a poem might have had for those currently bereaved. This is perhaps easier to imagine in a mourning poem where provenance can be established, and the mourner's impulse and reasons for mourning are clear and not hypothetical. "Lines on the Death of Warren S. Gould who died April 6<sup>th</sup> 1843," written by Harriet Gould after the death of her young son, provides just such an insight and makes it apparent that the goal of establishing a sense of continued "presence" and "communion" with the lost loved one, and the means of achieving that goal, were largely the same in the non-public, non-professional literary practice of individuals like Gould as they were for a professional writer like Sigourney.<sup>20</sup>

In her 1844 poem, written one year after her son Warren's death, Harriet Gould, like Whitman in his early poetry, relied upon apostrophe in order to "re-present" the many individuals she wished to commune with, including her deceased son himself.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Two notable literary examples of this would be Mark Twain, whose "Ode To Stephen Dowling Bots" and ensuing commentary in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are unquestionably scathing in their attitude towards such practices (and are certainly familiar to all critics of American literature), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who, although her seminal work "The Gates Ajar" reads as a mourning guide, nevertheless criticizes many of the same practices it encourages when those practices are carried out without what might be called a 'genuine sentiment' behind them. Karen Haltunnen's exceptional work *Confidence Men and Painted Women* explores the potential tensions between private expressions of grief and public displays of gentility that could, at times, potentially cohere in the objects, rituals, and practices of mourning employed during the time period. Her work suggest that it was the tension between private sentiments of bereavement and the public display of the markers of grief that arguably led individuals, such as Twain and Phelps, to become skeptical of such objects, rituals, and practices. See her chapter, "Mourning the Dead: A Study in Sentimental Ritual" in *Confidence Men and Painted Women* for further elaboration.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Harriet Gould, it should be remembered, was the young bride from Dover, Vermont, whose sister-in-law presented to her a wedding gift of a volume of blank pages intended for use as a memorial volume. By the time that Harriet penned these lines for her departed son the volume was essentially filled, and this particular piece of poetry is one of the addenda that she folded and included in the volume after writing it on a separate piece of paper.

Unlike Whitman's early work, where the speaker's (or reader's) grief over inescapable death generally serves to motivate the discourse, Gould's poem is motivated by the specific grief she has experienced (and continues to experience) over the death of her son. In a curious succession, Gould turns to three separate addressees, and by directing apostrophes to each one she creates a kind of "communal" space in which all addressees are active, vital, and "present." The first of these addressees is her son himself, to whom the opening apostrophe is directed, although, as her diction makes clear, the poem is immediately concerned with inviting others into a sphere of mourning where they can commune together and aid her in her bereavement.

Oh can it be a year has fled
Its scenes of grief and joy
Since we were bending o'er the bed
Of thou my sainted boy?
Since almost with a broken heart
I watched each faint drawn breath
And felt I could not with thee part
To meet the embrace of death. (Kete 213)

Gould's apostrophe, like Whitman's to "Nature" in "Our Future Lot," works in its very first sentence to invoke a space in which author, son, and reader are all present by remembering (or inviting the reader to imagine remembering) the presence of all three at the moment of death. For the first three lines of the poem, the address seems intimate and personal between the speaker and the reader – they are the "we" that were "bending o'er the bed" where the boy lay dying. However, as soon as Gould invites her reader into a shared space in which she seemingly talks "to" that reader about this shared experience, she moves into directly addressing "thou" or "you" "my sainted boy" – an act that shifts the reader's sense of being addressed, to a sense of being "with" the speaker as she addresses the boy herself, as if the company of author, reader, and deceased boy stood together and the speaker served as mouthpiece for both herself and the reader. With reader, speaker, and deceased boy all made "present, animate and anthropomorphic" what

was materially only "human mould" (to borrow from Whitman) becomes, at least imaginatively, a still discrete individual, capable of being "reached" and "communed" with through the poem.

Having established such a connection with both reader and her deceased son, she goes on to relay to him what his loss has been like for her, and, thanks to her continued use of the pronoun "we," what that loss does (or would) feel like for a reader, as well.<sup>21</sup>

When one we love is born away And we are left behind How thick the beacons of memory play And cluster round the mind. The acts he did, the words he spake, The pleasing smile he wore From drear oblivion's dreams awake As fresh as e'er before. (213)

Harriet, having addressed her son and made him both "present" and a "presence" she can commune with, "shares" with him what the experience of his loss has been like. She tells him that she, along with the readers implied in the "we" she chooses to use in the poem, have not forgotten his actions, his attitudes, his words, or even his "pleasing smile" (213).<sup>22</sup> Immediately following this stanza comes another in which she directly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Her continued use of "we" not only allows her to express personal feelings and limn direct connections between herself and her son, but also allows her experience of loss and her grief to be borne communally (if only imaginatively) with the larger (readerly) community that that "we" invokes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>Curiously, even though a contemporary reader cannot possibly have had any idea what the actions, words, and smile of Warren were like, the fact that Gould makes them the subject of this stanza invites a reader to imagine what those must have been like, and so, in a sense, engage with her in an act of mentally "resurrecting" her son. An invitation to imagine, cloaked as an invitation to remember (perhaps not by Gould either, but by the poem's unintended circulation in this very dissertation), thus provides an even hitherto unacquainted reader with a means of entering into the communal sphere of mourning that Gould establishes in hopes of perpetuating both the "memory" of her dear son, and a group of interested and sympathetic collaborators who can help her (if only because she imagines their sympathy for her and her son in the moment of the reader reading the poem) in her grief. Thus, while the "we" of the poem makes the readers present and gives them access to the "presence" of both the speaker and the deceased boy, it arguably also provides the speaker (and/or author) of the poem with a sense that she is not alone in her grief, and that indeed, every reader, whether actually acquainted with Warren and by his side at death or not, is potentially a collaborator in maintaining his memory and thus aiding her in her grief. They form, for her, an "imagined community" (to borrow from Benedict Anderson) capable of providing a bereaved mother with a whole host of willing and sympathetically involved aides to assist her.

addresses her son, with the reader seemingly bearing witness to all that she says. She proclaims as follows:

Alas my boy, though sundered far Beyond those orbs that shine, I look above those twinkling stars And claim thee still as mine... Oh it shall be a source of joy That earth so near to heaven That love can go and clasp my boy And feel a welcome given. (Kete 214)

Here, the speaker, with the reader bearing witness to the exchange, reasserts the eternality of her relationship with her son, and reminds him that even though they are separated by death it is a "source of joy" to know that "earth so near to heaven" represents a distance transcendable by "love [which] can go and clasp" him, and return to the mother who can also "feel a welcome given" (214). Thus, by directing an apostrophe to her deceased son, Harriet makes him "present" to such a degree that she feels it possible to perpetuate the bonds of love that have otherwise been threatened by his material death.

As if the remarkable direct address to reader and deceased were not enough,

Harriet Gould chose to include a final apostrophe to God, seeking to invite his "presence"

into this sphere of communion. She proclaims, once again apostrophically, as follows:

Oh thow that smites but to...[heal] I have felt thy chastening rod Assist me now to do thy will And put my trust in God That when I've trod life's journey oe'r And at death's portal stand My Warren at the opening door May wave his little hand And cry fear not the threshold crossed You'll find no thrill but joy This is the better one you lost He is now an angel boy. (Kete 215)

Gould's final apostrophe is remarkable not only because, like prayer, it invokes the "presence" of God, seeking the collaboration of the divine as she has sought the collaboration of the reader in maintaining faith in the idea that she will see and be with her son again, but because this moment of poetic prayer is immediately answered with a curious moment of co-habitation where the speaker's voice melds with the voice of her son, and the various addresses she has directed at him culminate in what she has sought all along, a sense of continued association with her deceased son made evident by his apparent "cry" of "fear not the threshold crossed, / You'll find no thrill but joy [here] / [For] This is the better one you lost / ...now an angel boy[!]" (215). Gould's various apostrophes invoke the "presence" of a rather powerful community made up of herself, her reader, God, and most importantly, her deceased son. It is a complex "discursive event" which fosters a sense of communion, if not direct communication, between a variety of individuals living and dead despite material absence.<sup>23</sup>

Gould's use of apostrophe in this work, bouncing as it does from one addressee to another, becomes almost dizzying at times (which, perhaps for some readers, impedes its aesthetic value), and yet this is precisely what discloses the use value of this poem, and

 $<sup>^{23}</sup>$  The communion between the speaker and the various addressees of the poem has a parallel in the exterior act of circulation that a poem such as this might have enjoyed. Indeed, this poem, written on a sheaf of paper and folded in such a way as to make the customary nineteenth-century envelope was precisely the type of object that was circulated throughout the bulk of the nineteenth-century by friends and family seeking to come to grips with the loss of a loved one. A poem such as this, written on letter paper by Harriet, may well have been a clean copy of a poem that she wrote the year after Warren's death (as the poem indicates in its opening lines), but waited some years to ready for circulation (the clean copy bears a date of 1851). Given that many of Harriet's friends, such as Sarah Sparks, Melvina Burr, and Abigail Lazell had penned consolation poems of their own into Harriet Gould's memorial volume, it becomes plausible that this clean copy was being sent out as the voice of one who had grieved but learned to mourn successfully, now reaching out to aid those who had once sought to aid her. Such conjecture becomes more plausible given the fact that the exchange of such "verse-remembrancers" was a standard part of the culture of mourning and memorializing in which friends and loved ones collaborated with each other in helping to mitigate grief by (literarily) reinforcing an understanding of death which allotted for the perpetuation of both individual identity and bonds of love. The poem thus becomes a prime example of the way in which private mourning verse worked to foster a sense of communion between individuals which not only helped them deal with the idea of death, but which testified to the belief that addressing the threats of death required a collaborative effort.

thus what makes it an excellent example of why such work was a staple of the nineteenth-century's culture of mourning and memorializing. If the hair of a loved one, or a portrait, or a letter written in his or her characteristic 'hand' all maintained a sense of the deceased's identity, and allowed the bereaved to feel continually connected to the deceased, then poetic work such as Gould's provided a means whereby the actual "voice" of the dead could once again be heard, testifying to a bereaved speaker or reader that the "presence" of the deceased was still an active, vital, and important part of his or her life, despite bodily absence. Such objects, and especially such poetry, alter, in the words of one critic, the "thread[s] in the 'woof of time,'" lacing the moment of reading with a sense that temporality, materiality, and even mortality are transcendable, and suggesting that while a loved one may be dead, a sense of continued communion (a balm to the bereaved) is still very much a possibility (Kete 62).

## Communal Journalism

Whitman's early work, like Sigourney's, Gould's, and that of most of the poetry associated with a culture of mourning and memorializing, relied extensively on apostrophe in order to achieve a desired sense of "presence," opening up a space in which speaker and addressee could commune together in response to death, and quite often in order to perpetuate bonds of love and sentiment which had otherwise been threatened. However as Ezra Greenspan has shown, Whitman's attraction to this stylistic device was not the sole province of his early mourning and memorial poetry but also marked much of the journalistic work he engaged in, an insight that limns out the common ground shared by these "sentimental bits" (as Whitman called them) and the notable editorials he produced – editorials in which he also sought a kind of "communion" with his readers. The fact that Whitman's editorials and his early literary writings on death both make use of this mode of direct address, share this ground so to speak, appropriately mirrors the

nature of the periodicals in which such editorials, poems, and tales would have appeared. Indeed, it should be remembered that such a style of address was used across genres, from the sentimental poetry, tales, and novels of the time period (all printed in periodicals), to the editorials regularly penned "in a day of editor-dominated journalism" in which reaching out to "connect" with one's audience was an important way of encouraging readers' loyalty and continued patronage (Greenspan 49). Greenspan notes that as editor for the New York *Aurora* in 1842,<sup>24</sup> Whitman "right from the first made it his practice to personalize himself and his relations with his readers" through the use of a similar style of apostrophic direct address. But, as Greenspan's work makes clear, it was in these early 1840s editorials, that Whitman began to articulate the apostrophic direct address he had been using in both his literary work and his journalism for some time in terms that finally approximate those found in *Leaves of Grass*. His editorial of April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1842 is an apt example.

Reader, we fear you have, by way of novelty, a *poor Aurora* this morning....[for] finding it impossible to do anything either in the way of "heavy business," or humor, we took our cane...and sauntered forth to have a stroll down Broadway....Well, (are you interested, dear reader?) in due time we arrived at the ponderous iron gates which give ingress to the Battery....And for the next two or three hours, we possess no recollection of having done anything in particular. And at half past 8, P.M. (fifteen minutes before this present writing) the chilling consciousness came over us that we hadn't written anything for a leader. And so we concocted the foregoing (what were you about, at half past 8, last night, dear reader?) And all we have to add is, that if you read it over a second time you will find more meaning in it, than you might at first imagine. (Rubin and Brown 44-45)

In selections such as this, Whitman uses direct address, much as he had in his earlier literary writings regarding death, to narrow the distance between himself and his addressee, affecting not only a sense of "presence" but apparently a sense of intimate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> An editorship which began at virtually the same time he published in that paper his two eulogies and elegy for MacDonald Clarke, four years after he published "Our Future Lot," two years after "We All Shall Rest At Last," and only two months after he published "Tomb Blossoms."

communion as well – with his two parenthetical inclusions being arguably the most overt examples of this, as he whispers, "are you interested, dear reader," and the query, "what were you about, at half past 8, last night...?" generating a heightened sense of presence and intimacy. His desire to establish such a sense of intimate communion with his readers was something that he remarked on overtly in another of his editorials, this one published Christmas Eve 1847 in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, where he said, "We feel a hearty sympathy with each woman, man, and child who communes with us, and we with them, every day, for what is giving up one's attention to another's thoughts, even in print, but communion?" (Whitman, "A Merry Christmas"). Whitman's description here is fortuitous, because certainly his prior editorial regarding his walk on Broadway does little, if anything, other than seek a kind of reciprocal "giving up [of] one's attention to another's thoughts." This description is fortunate in more ways than one, however, for in explaining his desire for communion in this quote he chooses to do so not by asserting that he does establish such a communion, but by once again directly addressing, or in this case querying, his reader. Thus, this directly addressed question works to establish the very sense of "communion" that the larger statement asserts is the goal of Whitman's journalism.

# Whatever Else, a Death-Defying Cryptext

The sense of "communion" produced by such editorials marks a notable early moment in the development of Whitman's style of apostrophic direct address, a style of address that, as this chapter has shown, he had been experimenting with in a variety of genres for some time. When Whitman turned once again to producing poetry in 1855, he capitalized on the work of this long foreground in order to make himself into a rather remarkable "presence" that provocatively seeks out or inspires a sense of communion with a reader. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to write about *Leaves of Grass* without

writing about what its remarkable apostrophic direct address – its famous "you" – is actually doing in the work. Critics such as C. Carroll Hollis, Mark Bauerlein, and Stephen Railton mark one vein of inquiry focusing on the oratorical and/or performative nature of this "you," with Hollis providing one of the most memorable descriptions of its function by calling it "the most successful metonymic trick in poetic history" (Hollis 252). Others, such as Robert Martin, Michael Moon, Vivian Pollak, and Helen Vendler have focused on the (socio)sexual possibilities the address opens up. In her book *Invisible Listeners*, Vendler characterizes Whitman's address as marking his failure to find "in conventional social intercourse, or in the lyrics he knew, the intimate relation with a man that he yearns for," which leads him to "invent an invisible comrade-reader in futurity...[an] ideal addressee...evoked constantly throughout the first three editions of Leaves Of Grass....[C] reation of this sort of intimacy springs from a fundamental loneliness, forcing the author to conjure up a listener unavailable in actual life" (4-5).<sup>26</sup> Others, such as Vincent Bertolini, Betsy Erkkila, and M. Wynn Thomas have investigated the political and democratic potential in Whitman's address, with Bertolini calling it the foundation for the "politics of Leaves of Grass...[through which Whitman] situates the reader's active embodied subjectivity as the locus of transformations intended ultimately to reverberate throughout American society, as new waves of Whitmanian subjective agents create the conditions for an expansion of democratic collectivism that would realize the utopian promises of 'America' in the practical material life of the nation" ("Fratricide" 1057).<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as this chapter has demonstrated, Whitman's "you"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See also Bauerlein and Railton.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See Moon, Martin, and Pollak.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>See Erkkila and Thomas (*Lunar*).

is easily seen to be a mode of address regularly employed in even his earliest literary writings, writings which themselves were located within a culture of mourning and memorializing in which Whitman actively, if mostly literarily, participated. And while I agree that Whitman's direct address opens up a myriad of sexual and/or democratic possibilities, it is always also working to provide its reader with a sense that interpersonal communion and individual "presence" are not dependent on corporeal embodiment, as the remainder of this section will point out. Therefore Whitman's work, whatever else it is doing, is always also asserting something remarkably akin to the culture of mourning and memorializing about death and the nature of human existence, something which potentially alters the way we might read, say, even the most overt sexual passages the text brings forward, passages that appear to have little or nothing to do with death. Take, for example, the following:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning; You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me, And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my barestript heart,

And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet. (Poetry 30)

The use of direct address in a passage such as this creates an undeniable sense of "presence" for the speaker, as he seems to possess the capability of fostering what might be termed a rather intimate sexual communion with a reader. And while the literary technique of apostrophic direct address is essentially the same as that used in his writing on death, the overt focus of such a passage seems, at first glance, to have little to do with death (unless it be the "little death" itself).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, even in what appears as an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> The "petit mort" that the speaker experiences in the text is, however, not without a correlation in the experience of the reader, especially when considered in light of what Roland Barthes has to say on the idea of the "petit mort," or "jouissance" associated with the act of reading. Arguably, for Barthes, the "jouissance" or "bliss" of reading comes not in any reader's titillated response to a writer's overt, pornographic representation of sexual gratification, but rather in the textual moment when the reader is invited to do the "writerly" work usually assigned to the author – in short, the "pleasure of the text" is truly experienced, according to Barthes, when the reader becomes the erotic force behind the text and takes the "pleasure" usually reserved for the author by engaging in the act of "writing" or "producing" the text itself

overtly erotic and sexual moment, it is curious to note that the power that this image has to arouse, startle, or shock readers is arguably proportional to the degree to which those readers equate themselves with the "you" being asked to recall their participation in this act. For any reader who fails to identify as "you," and instead assigns that pronoun to an entity such as Whitman's "soul" (referenced a stanza or two earlier), or perhaps an unnamed lover (anyone who is not the reader), the scene becomes, at best, a voyeuristic one, and Whitman certainly seems to lack any kind of immediate presence. However, for readers willing to answer the hail of the "you" and "write" themselves in as the partner involved in the actions depicted, the scene not only provides them with an uncanny memory of a sexual experience that (didn't but nevertheless) is happening, but it makes that speaker into an active, living, and very vital entity with whom it is possible to "commune" (in mind, memory and body apparently) on even the most intimate of levels despite that speaker's material absence – they "now" have a memory of the feel of "his hips," the spread of his chest and the prominence of his "bosom-bone," the taste and feel of plunging their "tongue to [Whitman's] barestript heart." In directing his address to readers and in providing those readers with the details necessary to provocatively imagine an intimate physical encounter Whitman succeeds, regardless of whether or not this textual/sexual reading experience feels pleasurable, startling, or simply intriguing, in making himself into a discrete individual "presence" who is seemingly active, vital and

<sup>(</sup>a pleasure which is usually rather "destabilizing, [and] disconcerting") (Locey 22). Whitman's text, in this moment, is arguably a "writerly" text in that it invites a reader – any reader – to actively "write in" the identity of the agent responsible for producing the speaker's sexual gratification. As much as it is Whitman's body that is being imagined in this sexual experience, it is the reader's body as well that becomes the focus of the action for it is the reader's tongue and hands that ravish the body of the speaker. Thus through Whitman's "you" a kind of negative space is held open that cannot, in essence, be filled until the reader comes along, answers the invitation such a "you" holds open, and fills it with an identity that only they can "write" in. For more information see Roland Barthes's works *La Plaisir du Texte* and *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973 and 1970) respectively (latter in Works Cited).

"present" in readers' temporal moments, and thus he becomes an entity capable of being "reached" and even "held," as if he was with readers "now."

Whitman's embodiment and "present-ing" of self in a passage which reads overtly about sex nevertheless tropes to a significant extent on the work of mourning and memorial objects in the nineteenth-century. Just as Harriet Gould's poem (directly addressed to her son, reader, and God) helped her ignite "the beacons of memory" and see once again "The acts he did, the words he spake, / The pleasing smile he wore / ... As fresh as e'er before" (Kete 214), and just as it allowed her (via sentiment and imagination) to "go and clasp my boy / And feel a welcome given," Whitman's text, in this moment, works to bring his "self" (physical body and individual identity/character/"soul") into the mind of his readership with such power that readers experience him as a vital, living, approachable entity capable of being "reached," "held," and loved (Kete 214). Whatever else he appears to be, he is certainly "present, animate, anthropomorphic" (Johnson 30). Whitman's attempts to invite his reader to collaborate with him in creating a rather remarkable sense of presence and communion, where both reader and speaker share a kind of intimate space and experience together, imply that the fundamental eros which undergirds Whitman's text is arguably the same that undergirds all mourning and memorial objects: it is the drive to "extend" the self beyond the bounds of physicality and temporality "ceaselessly," as Freud put it, so that that self can be always available for contact or communion. Consider that even the most erotic moments between Whitman's speaker and "you" only gain efficacy in direct proportion to how "real," "vital," and "alive" the speaker appears to be. 29 If Freud is right that sexual erotics and activity are merely overt articulations of a fundamental eros which drives all

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> And consider that Whitman's ability to evoke such a "sense" was due, in large part, to the long foreground of writing on death that emerged out of his early participation in the (literary) culture of mourning and memorializing.

individuals in a "ceaseless trend towards extension," then even when the text approaches its reader in a sexually erotic way, the power of that sexual eroticism is always already dependent on the speaker's even more fundamental drive to extend himself as a living, active entity into the reader's temporal moment (Freud 77). Without the speaker's uncanny and intimate sense of being present, his erotics would seem, at best, coolly distant, impotent, flaccid even. In short, Whitman's most erotic moments are arguably not the overtly sexual ones, but, like the mourning objects his text curiously parallels, emerge when his "procreant urge" spurs him to extend himself beyond the usual confines of time, space and perhaps even mortality into the reader's "now," an absolutely necessary prelude for the more sexual erotics which then follow.

The stanzas that follow the overtly sexualized passage above seemingly testify that this (sexual) communion is fostered between speaker and reader not only to proselytize Whitman's belief in the need for a more free expression of sexuality, but ultimately to prove the nature of death and the perpetuity of individual identity. The above quoted section, frequently excerpted as I have done so above, nevertheless is followed by a rather remarkable meditation on death and immortality which culminates, as do his early poems as well as Harriet Gould's poem, in successive assertions (if not active imaginings) of both speaker's and reader's immortality. In the lines that follow the speaker claims that the experience of "communing" climaxes not only in a sense of "peace and joy" which "[s]wiftly arose and spread around me" but also a "knowledge that pass[es] all the art and argument of the earth," namely that "the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own," and that the immortal kinship that he and God share extends to "all the men ever born [who] are also my brothers . . . . and the women my sisters and lovers," and not only to these, but to the "limitless...leaves stiff or drooping in the fields, / And brown ants in the little wells beneath them, / And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and

heaped stones, and elder and mullen and pokeweed" (*PP* 31). Thus, the intimate sexual communion between speaker and reader which establishes a sense that individual identity and "presence" can be perpetuated despite material absence is itself quickly parlayed into a discourse on the immortality of all living things. Whitman's textual erotics, though overtly sexual, nevertheless functions as much to bring a reader to see immortality everywhere, in himself, in all men, even in the "limitless" leaves, ants, moss, bushes and plants, as it does to titillate. It is a realization that carries over into the next successive meditation, one of the most famous in *Leaves*, in which the speaker examines a handful of grass – grass which ultimately represents "hints about dead young men and women, / And hints about old men and mothers, and offspring taken too soon out of their laps" (32), hints which "show there really is no death" and that these "men and women...mothers, and offspring...are alive and well somewhere" (32).

Fundamentally, the communion that Whitman seeks to foster in even his most erotic textual moments, such as this, mirrors the type of communion that marks the poetry of mourning and memorializing. Indeed, both Harriet Gould's address to her son, and Whitman's erotic address to his reader "create a thread in the 'woof of time'" that fosters a sense of "presence" and of "communion" regardless of material (in)existence (Kete 249). This presence and communion is sought out over and over again in Whitman's 1855 work, always through his reliance upon apostrophic direct address. Frequently, it is a communion and sense of presence that Whitman overtly parlays into a meditation on the nature of death and the eternality of the individual, something demonstrated not only in the above mentioned section, but throughout a poem such as "To Think of Time," and perhaps most famously at the end of "Song of Myself," where the speaker invites the reader to converse and commune with him by proclaiming, "Listener up there! Here

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See note 12

you....what have you to confide to me?," and, after having established the ability to commune and converse with one another, goes on to assert, "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles / [....] Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged / Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you" (*PP* 88). But regardless of whether or not Whitman's moments of direct address always end in overt meditations on the nature of death and the eternal perpetuity of the soul, every moment in which he directs his address towards his reader is a moment in which he reinscribes the idea that he is an active, vital, reachable presence, capable of being communed with despite his material absence – an idea that he would push not only throughout 1855, but in 1856 (especially in a work like "Sun-Down Poem"), 1860, 1867, and beyond.

To more or less a degree then, Whitman relied on, troped upon, and borrowed from stylistic conventions central to a culture of mourning and memorializing in order to make himself a "presence forever accessible to readers of the future. . .able still to confront him, interact with him, even though death and time and space separated them" (Folsom, "Nineteenth" 282). And arguably those readers who encountered such address were preconditioned to respond to it as powerfully as they did because they were regularly exposed to literature in which such literary devices performed the powerful work of mediating connections that would otherwise have been impossible to perpetuate. However, Whitman further encouraged his readership to approach this text

Perhaps the most notable instance of this was the response by Anne Gilchrist who not only moved to the United States from Britain after reading Whitman's poetry in hopes of perpetuating the relationship between them that she felt the book brokered, but who went so far as to send him a marriage proposal, a ring, and an offer to have him father children upon her – all before she met him personally. Gilchrist, arguably one of the most insightful and perceptive early critics of *Leaves of* Grass, did move to the U.S. in 1876 with hopes of marrying Walt. Finding that the communion she experienced with the speaker of his work did not extend to the kind of passionate communion she hoped for when meeting him personally, she settled into becoming a life-long friend, and champion of Whitman's work. See Gilchrist, "A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman" for an example of her criticism on *Leaves*.

as if it were seeking to make present an otherwise disembodied entity when he actively designed a material book which, in form, size, and color, bears a rather remarkable resemblance to the mourning and memorial volumes which regularly performed such work for the countless individuals who engaged in such practices.

Certainly, the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* has long been considered a physical oddity, and for a book of poetry this arguably was the case.<sup>32</sup> Certainly the most prevalent and popular book that compares to Whitman's 1855 *Leaves* in terms of physical design is Fanny Fern's *Fern Leaves From Fanny's Portfolio* (fig. 24). However, the size of Whitman's book, as well as the cover design may have struck reviewers as "curious" because its parlor-table size and its floriated cover matched much more closely with the size and type design for nineteenth-century keepsake albums (of which Harriet Gould's book is physically a much simplified version) than it did a more public work of literature. Indeed, as one critic of cultural ephemera has noted, the physical construction of *Leaves of Grass* with its "fancy cloth covers in green, [and] decorated with natural patterns in an oversized format, made this edition difficult to distinguish from a lady's album" (Gernes 105) (fig. 25). Such ladies' keepsake albums, like Harriet Gould's book, were generally

 $<sup>^{32}</sup>$  It becomes increasingly difficult to talk about the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* as "a book" – as if any singular copy was capable of representing the entire print run – based upon the findings of the 2005 census conducted by Ed Folsom. As Folsom's findings show, the twelve eight-page signatures that constitute the book are not uniform given that Whitman edited them as they came off the press and printed various states of each signature which were not bound with like states. Nor is the frontispiece picture of Whitman uniform, as Ted Genoways has shown. Rather, it exists in two variants, one of which shows Whitman with an enlarged crotch. Nor is the binding itself uniform as it appeared in at least three distinct states (however, even this is misleading as some copies were bound in paper boards, and because some of the first and second state bindings were subcontracted, and differences are thought to exist in the work of the principle binder Charles Jenkins, and the subcontractor Davies and Hands, leading one to suspect that over time these differences will constitute yet another state of the binding). As Folsom adroitly points out, there is little that is uniform about the physical construction of this book, and "For all we know at this point, there may be 795 variations" (Folsom, Census, 78). Nevertheless, the elements of the physical text that I bring forward seem to have been consciously designed by Whitman, and only altered when he ran short of funds, thus for the details that I focus on, I believe it is safe to say that Whitman intended that these elements would appear relatively uniformly in all of the books he produced, despite the fact that monetary concerns forced him to abandon these plans at some point. For more information see Folsom "The Census" and Genoways "'One Goodshaped.""

kept as "an emblem of life, a faithful mirror of the minds of the compiler's community," and they were intended to preserve the identity of those who were written about or those who wrote in such an album. Thus when Whitman chose the oversized cover and floriated design that would be embossed thereon, he suggestively imported the material trappings of a culture of mourning and memorializing onto the book. 33 If this is the case, then arguably readers situated within in a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing would not at all have found the volume to be a curious one until they opened it up and found within it not blank white pages waiting to be filled with poetic thoughts and sentiments about, or from, loved ones, but with lines and lines of verse already printed thereon. However, Whitman's choice to design his text in the way he did suggests, perhaps, that he wished his readers to pick up the volume prepared to engage in the same spirit of communion or "celebration" of one's loved ones that usually filled the pages of a keepsake album – something which his opening lines of poetry reinforce. Indeed, in context of a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, Whitman's opening proclamation "I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume" begins to read like very much like the fundamental idea behind all the mourning and memorial objects which proliferated in the culture at this time period. Verse remembrances, it should be remembered, were written to "celebrate" not only the life that

As Ed Folsom has pointed out, the print shop of Andrew Rome where Whitman had the 1855 edition printed seemingly specialized in printing pre-printed legal forms. This folio sized paper may not, therefore, have been as much a "choice" for Whitman as it would have been a necessity given that this is what the press at the Rome shop was set up to handle, a necessity that inevitably dictated the oversized folio binding as well (See Folsom, "Census" for more information). However, Whitman, who would spend his entire career negotiating how best to use aspects of the mass production of a book to suit his larger artistic goals found opportunity here as well. Combining the larger folio sized paper with binding typography and ornamentation, not to mention an engraving of his own picture – all elements commonly appearing on keepsake albums and/or memorial volumes – Whitman found a way to use the materials that were available to him to signal to his reader the type of intimate reading practices he wished for that reader to employ when approaching this text. Thus, reading *Leaves* was not merely to be an aesthetically pleasing experience, it was supposed to be an intensely personal one that worked to forge and preserve intimate communion between individuals.

the deceased individual enjoyed, but the prospect of continued association in the future. When Whitman "celebrates himself and "assumes" the reader will take part in doing so as well, he is working to collaboratively generate an object through which that celebrated self can maintain a sense of vitality and availability. Moreover, when Whitman asks – through the double valence of the term "assume" - readers to "assume" to celebrate themselves just as Whitman is celebrating himself, he marks out the other effect of reading Leaves of Grass, namely how the celebration of Whitman's apparently eternal self is, in essence, a celebration of the same eternality of the reader given that in their essence, speaker and reader are the same type of beings sharing not only "atoms" but apparently the characteristics of immortality Whitman displays throughout his work.

Therefore, for a reader to "read" the cover of Whitman's text was, by the text's design, to prepare that reader to understand that what lay within was not mere poetry, but like the verse-remembrances that filled the memorial keepsake albums of so many in this culture, a means of perpetuating connections with an otherwise absent individual. What you will find within, the text's outer design seemed to say, is not merely artistic language arranged to be aesthetically pleasing, but a means of connecting with one who loves you, and whom you should love as well, one whose "form and face" may be by "distance or the grave hid[den]" but who nevertheless "will speak to you / In language which may never be forgot" (Kete 12).

As if the cover itself were not suggestive enough in this regard, Whitman also chose to place within it another common feature of such memorial/keepsake albums<sup>34</sup> –

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> As commented on in chapter one of this dissertation, there is a certain slippage between "keepsake" or "memorial" albums and "mourning" albums, and what begins overtly as one might easily end up as the other. A "keepsake" or "memorial" album was generally an album circulated through one's family and friends in which they would pen poems or sayings that may or may not be original productions. The owner of the album, as was the case with Harriet Gould, would likely pen sentiments in their album as well to mark special occasions or perhaps just an especially provocative visitation of "the Muse." Into such an album might also go other "keepsake" or "memorial" items such as locks of hair, daugerreotypes, flowers—items that had some significance with respect to either the album's owner or one of the people the

namely a photograph (a mass-reproduced engraving of a daguerreotype, to be specific) of himself. Images of writers appearing as a frontispiece were not necessarily a remarkable literary practice, even at this time. 35 Indeed, Rufus W. Griswold's highly popular *The* Poets and Poetry of America, which was in its sixteenth edition by 1856, featured a frontispiece that depicted several of the writers that appeared in the text, including William Cullen Bryant and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. However, for Whitman, the image chosen for his frontispiece was not at all one which was intended to convey stately literary respectability, but one which, as Ed Folsom has pointed out, serves as a "gesture at creating the organizing metonymy of *Leaves of Grass*: the book as man, the pages and the ink as identical to the poet himself' (Folsom, *Native* 147). Like the many mourning portraits that were created throughout the nineteenth-century which depicted children and adults at play, at work, or resting in relatively normal attire (fig 26 and 27), or those taken in life but used to serve a mourning function after death (such as Eliza Garrison's, fig. 28), Whitman's image of himself presented his readership with the idea that this book did not represent the activities of his professional and public self, but rather that it was an object that represented, and, given the logic of the culture, "re-presented" his "real" self

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keepsake album helped that owner to remember (i.e., "memorialize"). However, such albums always also held the potential to *become* mourning albums when, to quote Lois Gould, "distance or death" hid "form or face." During the process of mourning for the lost dead and seeking to re-establish the connections that it had threatened what had been kept as a "keepsake" or "memorial" of an individual became a powerful means of "mourning" them – which, it should be remembered, did not mean a powerful way of experiencing or nursing a sense of grief, but a means of working to restore what had been lost. As Mary Louise Kete reminds, "Successful mourning, within the culture of sentiment, occurs not when a replacement has been found but when restoration has been achieved. The most successful restorations occur through the production and circulation of a remembrance or token of the lost person. Such a restoration does not displace the dead but conserves the living as it carried some essential aspect of the person remembered, and something of the person remembering, imbued within it. Rather than marking the acceptance of an irredeemable gap made by the death of a particular person, the sentimental poem [or artifact therefore] attempts to close that gap. It continues the constitutive relay of communication via ongoing exchanges of affection in which the individual may find meaning" (62).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Although as Folsom points out Whitman's portrait at the beginning of the 1855 *Leaves* marks, "perhaps the first [time a] daguerreotype [was] ever used as a frontispiece for a book of poems" (Folsom, *Native* 145).

and encouraged a viewer (or reader) to "see" the "re-presented" figure as an entity still vital, reachable, and capable of interpersonal association (fig. 29). Thus, Whitman's image, working as a "re-presentative" trace, was primed to be understood in the context which the book's cover and size would already have suggested. Namely, that this text was a synecdoche, a part that not only represented but "re-presented" the whole, absent individual from whom it was drawn, much like the quilts, portraits, and hair weavings that adorned the bodies and walls of the nineteenth-century's populace and parlors did – parlors where Whitman's folio-sized, finely decorated, self-preserving and self-presenting book would have nestled rather nicely next to those other albums whose work and look were in many ways similar to Whitman's own.

#### Conclusion

In its material design and in the way that it addressed its readers, Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass* sought, like many of the contemporary mourning and memorial volumes did, to create what was, in essence, a death-defying cryptext, a talisman, medium, and repository which sought not only to house a kind of literary corpus, but one which relied upon prevalent cultural literary practices to "enliven" that corpus in the "presence" of a reader – ensuring a perpetual connection, communication, and communion between them. It was a work that itself formed a kind of foundation, or basis for the remarkable work that would follow. Work that includes perhaps Whitman's most famous moment of reaching out to "commune" with a reader – his most critically acclaimed achievement in "re-presenting" himself in a reader's temporal "now" – namely his 1856 "Sun-Down Poem," better known as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Using the same style of apostrophic direct address that he had not only relied extensively upon in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, but in the long foreground that led up to the production of that volume, Whitman produced this most remarkable poem, one in which he reached out from the deck of the

Brooklyn ferry to "you that...cross shore to shore years hence," "you that...are more to me, and more in my meditations than you might suppose" (Leaves (1856) 211). To "you" Whitman spoke most intimately in this poem, and more provocatively than he had certainly ever done so before, seemingly transcending his own temporality, his own mortality even, when claiming that "It avails not, neither time nor place – distance avails not, / I am with you," "I project myself, also I return – I am with you, and know how it is" (212-213). Such provocative moments of direct address, repeatedly layered amidst seemingly "shared" observations of "river," "crowd," "ships," "seagulls," and "summersky," allow Whitman to "[c]loser yet...approach you" until "you," in perhaps startled agreement, nevertheless sense the rightness of Whitman's claim that "I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me" (213, 218). Such a sense of shared space, of atemporal communion arguably reaches its culmination when Whitman avers that it is the experiences, sentiments, thoughts we share which "fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you" so much so that "you" and "I," as so many mourning and memorial poems worked to achieve, are made into a reunited "we." As Whitman narrates it, at this moment of communion when "you" and "I" seemingly co-habit the same temporal space, "We" come to "feel" our shared immortality, a sense of the ongoing vitality and connectedness of our soul(s). In Whitman's words, through the poem "We understand, then, do we not? / What I promised without mentioning it, have you not accepted? / What the study could not teach – what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplished, is it not?" (219). Such questions, spoken directly to "you," allow "us" – Whitman and reader – to "accomplish," in a sense, what the period's religious "teaching" and "preaching" asserted was inevitable, or perhaps more importantly, what it's mourning objects worked desperately to affect for the bereaved, namely, the "reunion," even the "communion," of the dead with the living.

Whitman's desire, demonstrated in "Sun-Down Poem" to find increasingly efficacious ways of brokering a connection between an individual reader and a textually embodied, but materially absent, "self" would, it turns out, only take on an added urgency in the years that followed the production of either the 1855 or 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. Indeed, as provocative and "communal" as the poems in such volumes were, an even greater challenge would present itself roughly a decade later at the close of the Civil War – as Chapter 5 will show. For in the wake of a conflict which claimed the lives of not hundreds, nor thousands, but hundreds of thousands of lives, Whitman felt compelled to use the lessons he had learned in penning such "communal" work to assuage the personal griefs and bind up the political wounds that afflicted a bereaved national public – a public desperately seeking to maintain some "trace," some sense of connection to and communion with, the "Million Dead" they had otherwise lost to the violence of war (MDW 56).

#### **CHAPTER V**

# EMBODYING THE BOOK: MOURNING FOR THE MASSES IN WALT WHITMAN'S DRUM-TAPS

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1863, Lieutenant Nathaniel Bowditch of the First Massachusetts Cavalry, son of famed abolitionist Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, was fatally shot during a charge at Kelly's Ford, Virginia. Nat lingered for about three days before finally succumbing to his wounds. His father, receiving the news that his son had been killed in the battle, "fairly broke down" – grief was "like a dagger in my heart" and tears a "constant companion" (as qtd. in Faust, "This" 167). Henry, nearly prostrated in his grief, nevertheless scrambled to Virginia to procure the body of his son before excessive decay made such a thing impossible. Arriving in Virginia, he arranged to have his son's body "embalmed" – then a relatively new mortuary science – "that it may be seen on my return to Boston" (167). Henry brought the body of his son home, and there the Bowditch family, along with friends and community members, viewed it and held a funeral, mourning as they knew how.

Henry was unquestionably comforted by bringing his son home and having him interred in Mount Auburn's Cemetery (beneath a large monument depicting a replication of Nat's cavalry sword), but this was just the beginning of his mourning process. Seeking to maintain a sense of connection with his son and to remind himself of the afterlife he hoped they would one day enjoy together, Henry, in accordance with common cultural practice of the time, produced a rather remarkable array of mourning objects. Taking a ring from Nat's finger and a button he had cut from his son's blood-soaked cavalry vest, Henry created an "amulet" which he connected to his watch, saying "There I trust they will remain until I die" (169). For Henry, so it seems, every act of registering the passage of time, "checking the clock" so to speak, held the potential to remind him that he was

nearing that much-anticipated "moment" when he would be reunited with the son represented by the watch's amulet. Then, perhaps even more remarkably, he began a "collation of the letters, journals &c illustrative of his dear young life" (169-170). These "elaborate memorial volumes and scrapbooks...traced Nat from birth to death," and in that fashion, they functioned as a kind of repository which preserved some vestige of his identity for his bereaved family, allowing them to feel that Nat was in some sense continually "accessible" and perpetually connected to them (169). It was just such a connection that made the six years and countless hours necessary to produce these volumes worthwhile. As Henry said, "The labor was a sweet one. It took me out of myself" and into the imagined presence of his deceased son regularly (170).<sup>1</sup>

Few had the opportunity to mourn as Henry Bowditch did. As Drew Gilpin Faust has pointed out, the nature of death on the Civil War battlefields all but precluded the ability of most family members, loved ones, and friends from engaging in these types of rituals and practices. The fact that "men [were] thrown by the hundreds into burial trenches; soldiers [were] stripped of every identifying object before being abandoned on the field; bloated corpses [were placed in] hastily dug graves; nameless victims of dysentery or typhoid [were] interred beside military hospitals; men [were] blown to pieces by artillery shells; bodies [were] hidden by woods or ravines, left to the depredations of hogs or wolves or time" meant that roughly "40 percent of deceased

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The mourning project did not end here either. Bowditch placed the memorial volumes into a larger memorial "cabinet" that occupied a conspicuous place in the family parlor. Over time Bowditch collected into this cabinet many of Nat's personal effects along with those items, like the volumes, that he felt helped preserve the identity of his son – working to provided himself and his family with a sense that Nat was continually "with" them despite his material demise. Along with Nat's memorial volumes and artifacts, Bowditch included in the cabinet several other memorial objects that had also served to mourn and memorialize other members of the family such as Bowditch's father and grandfather. The cabinet was thus an integral part of Bowditch's mourning process for his son, helping him translate the pain of loss into a rather "productive" mourning practice, but it also served as a kind of repository in which he prefigured what he expected to enjoy in the beyond – namely, continued association in a sphere in which he, his son, his father, and his grandfather might perpetually reside together. For more information see Tamara Plakins Thornton's essay, "Sacred Relics."

Yankees and a far greater proportion of Confederates" died into a kind of anonymity that inhibited traditional mourning and memorializing practices such as funerals, the witnessing of the last moments of life, and the maintenance of a physical trace of the deceased (Faust 104).

As Chapter One demonstrated, during the nineteenth century, witnessing and recounting the moment of death, preparing the body for burial, arranging the funeral, selecting a gravesite and headstone, commissioning post-mortem photography or mourning portraiture, creating hair weavings, mourning quilts, and even memorial jewelry were commonplace components of mourning – and all required access to the body of the deceased. Most of these rituals and practices incorporated and therefore necessitated both the body and other "traces" of the dead – bodies were needed for funerals and burial, bits of hair were needed for weavings, and clothing was needed for producing memorial quilts and jewelry (such as Bowditch's amulet). Such "traces," along with others, adorned mourners' bodies and walls and functioned to make the dead a vital presence in the life of the living. As Martha Pike has said, "Most of these objects – embroideries, prints, photographs, printings, jewelry and mementos – were made to be displayed in the home, so that the memory of the deceased could be kept alive and in the family" (67), and "what motivated this seemingly unusual practice was the desire to maintain family continuity...the bereaved wished their dead to be restored to them as living presences" (71). Pike points out that in the absence of the deceased a "trace" preserved and perpetuated identity and allowed the living to feel as if the deceased were still, in some way, continually with them. In a sense, these "traces" restored what death had threatened to annihilate – the identity of the deceased as an active and important part of the mourner's life. Therefore, failing to "witness" the death and burial – along with being unable to garner any "trace" of the individual lost – created very real impediments

to the process of mourning and in many cases had very real consequences. As the wife of one Confederate officer remarked, those who suffered such complete loss were far too often left "stunned and stupefied . . .forever, and a few there were who died of grief" (as qtd. in Faust 145). No bodies meant no true rituals of mourning, so it seems, and thus no relief from the pain of grief and loss.

Walt Whitman was unquestionably familiar with the way in which the Civil War impeded mourning and spawned a kind of perpetual grief. He spent much of the Civil War ministering to the soldiers in the Washington area hospitals, had seen first-hand the faces of those who had come to collect the bodies of those they loved, and certainly understood that for every individual fortunate enough to retrieve the body of a loved one, there were many, many more "stunned and stupefied" by the fact that they would never have such an opportunity. Seeking to mediate the grief of such individuals and counter the increasing interruption of ritual mourning practices, Whitman, in the spring of 1865, published a small volume of war poetry entitled *Drum-Taps*. In his book, I argue, Whitman was actively at work seeking to recover the bodies and preserve the identities of the Civil War's "Million Dead" in the face of their material annihilation much as he had done for his own body and identity in *Leaves of Grass*. In doing so, he was essentially working to mediate the pain of grief and foster successful mourning through the production of a text that, like Bowditch's amulet and memorial volumes, represented the deceased and allowed readers to imagine themselves reconnected to a beloved soldier through its pages. Such work, as will be shown, was accomplished through literary images marked by a curious lack of detail, and augmented by a material construction in which binding, typography, and visual ornamentation were crafted to represent any and every lost soldier of the Civil War.

Fostering successful mourning, while important in its own right, was not the only benefit Whitman hoped would be derived from this text. By connecting readers – North and South – to their dead soldiers in the presence of the poetic "I" which ministers to those soldiers throughout the volume, Whitman hoped to facilitate a collaborative process of mourning which would create what was, in essence, a community of "readerly" mourners united in spite of geographical, political, or ideological distances. In doing so, he was mirroring for such readers the way in which shared grief and collaborative mourning could affectively anneal a new "Union," bound together through shared pain and grief into what one contemporary dubbed a "republic of suffering" (Olmsted 115).

# (Re)collecting Soldiers

Whitman's recovery of the bodies and the identities of the Civil War's "Million Dead" was a project with a long foreground. It began when Whitman first started visiting the Civil War hospitals and kept notes in a series of small, ephemeral notebooks. These notebooks form the foundation not only for Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, but for much of the journalism and prose he wrote regarding the War. To the casual observer, these notebooks appear to be little more than a lengthy catalogue of soldiers including details like names, dates, wounds received, and comfits desired, and Whitman certainly used them in this way, claiming that "from the first I kept impromptu jottings in pencil to refresh my memory of names and circumstances, and what was specially wanted, &c. In these I brief'd cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bedside, and not seldom by the corpses of the dead" (MDW 3). And while references such as "John W. Gaskill, co. E 24<sup>th</sup> N.Y.V. bed 57 W.6. Camp weak and prostrated—pulmonary—sent for his description list bring him some *nice* cake sponge cake" or "Chester H. Lilly bed 6. ward 6. Camp 145<sup>th</sup> Penn. Eriseppelus Jaundice & Wounded some preserve or *jelly*, or oranges" (NUPM 2:520-521) certainly seem rather mundane and unremarkable, to see

these "jottings" only as a "form of practical memory" would be to miss the important ideological work they do (Benjamin 205). Whitman spoke regarding the nature of the notebooks as much more than mere aids to memory when he claimed that their long lists not only helped him remember what was wanted or needed for these soldiers, but that the "perusal" of such lists across "blood-smutch'd" pages afforded him a view of "those subtlest, rarest, divinest volumes of Humanity . . . [and] arous'd . . . undream'd-of depths of emotion" (*PP* 711, *MDW* 56). Not wholly unlike the scraps of letters, diaries, etc., that Henry Bowditch collated in order to create a "divine" volume capable of representing the life of his son and fostering a continued sense of connection to him, Whitman's notebooks, taken all together, form a scriptural collection subtly testifying to the rare and divine humanity found in the wounded who lay all about him.<sup>2</sup> The affective connection of perusing this collection was unquestionably a powerful one for Whitman, as Bowditch's had been for him, and for both, such connections arguably aroused "undream'd of depths of emotion."

It was in these notebooks that Whitman first set out to preserve or, more appropriately, "reinscribe" individual soldiers with the more subtle, rare, and "divine" individuality that the war seemingly threatened to elide if not destroy outright.<sup>3</sup> It was a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> While this particular section focuses largely on what Whitman wrote within the notebooks themselves, the material significance of those "blood smutch'd" pages will be treated later in this chapter.

While death was arguably the most radical of threats the War presented to the identity of the soldier, it was probably not the most prolific. Indeed, despite the individual excitement and communal exuberance shared over "joining the ranks," a man's entrance into the sphere of war unquestionably overlaid (if not stripped) his personal identity with the rank and trappings of soldiery, based his individual value upon how well he could kill off the "competition" or how willingly he subjected himself to the violent machinery of war, and marked or "re-identified" him as legitimate target for destruction. Whitman saw the fruits of this "re-identification" first-hand in the hospitals where he was granted a view of war's potential for turning men into little more than "commodities," as one critic has phrased it, "exchanged by the state for the maintenance of its ideology" (Sweet 33). While Whitman and others were particularly sensitive to this threat, it should be acknowledged that war arguably held the ability to "re-represent" an individual's "identity" to that individual and others in what might be termed "recuperative" ways, as well. Indeed, an individual might enter a sphere of war hoping to distinguish himself and claim a new kind of heroic identity that was different from the work-a-day identity enjoyed previously. And while there are probably as many

reinscription that also provided Whitman with a means of maintaining a sense of affective connection to these soldiers despite their future material state.<sup>4</sup> Both are easily seen when examining a selection from the notebook itself.

Bed 41 Ward G. Armory May 12 William Williams co F 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana / wounded seriously in shoulder – he lay naked to the waist on acc't of the heat - I never saw a more superb developement of chest, & limbs, neck &c. a perfect model of manly strength – seemd awful to take such God's masterpiece & / nearest friend – Mr. J.C. Williams Lafayette Tippecanoe co. Indiana (NUPM 2:632)

Whitman begins this brief entry by acknowledging the way in which the war threatens to annihilate this man's identity altogether. He is, after all, merely the incapacitated and soon to be deceased occupant of "Bed 41 Armory G [on] May 12" when Whitman finds him. Immediately, however, Whitman begins the process of recuperating whatever aspects of the man's identity that he can. He begins by translating him from the occupant of "Bed 41" into "William Williams Company F Indiana – wounded seriously in the shoulder" – an improvement, certainly, as this articulation of his identity moves him

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reasons for entering a sphere of war as there are individuals enlisting, the point I wish to stress here is that a sizeable number of individuals (not only Whitman but individuals like Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, the reviewer of Brady's gallery writing in the *New York Times* from whom I quote, several of the individuals who reviewed Whitman's work or wrote to him upon reading it – whom I detail at this chapter's end), shared an anxiety over the way in which a highly destructive war fought on far battlefields precluded the possibility of participating in significant cultural rituals of death and of maintaining traces of the deceased. For many individuals, war thus "imperiled" the ability of these soldiers' identities to be "perpetuated" in ways that cultural practice suggested was crucial. In short, despite whether or not an individual soldier felt that the "re-representation" of their identity upon entering a sphere of war was good or bad, the fact that it imperiled the ability of bereaved individuals to practice or participate fully in those rituals and conventions intended to "preserve" the identity of the deceased placed that identity in a "perilous" position. For more information on the way in which the Civil War held the potential to imperil the identities of the soldiers who fought in it see Timothy Sweet's *Traces of War*, and Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In this sense, Whitman's notebooks were already paralleling the work of many of the time period's mourning objects. Like a lock of hair, a letter written in the hand of the deceased, a mourning portrait, or a a mourning amulet, Whitman's notebooks preserved some portion of the individual's identity and, especially in the case of those soldiers who passed away as a result of their wounds, became a literary means of "reaching," "recalling," or "recollecting" them. Whitman's conceptualization and use of the notebooks as a means of combating absence not only shows the way in which Whitman's practices here parallel certain aspects of a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing, but also explains the potential power that such "re-inscriptions" might have for connecting Whitman as well as a large number of the bereaved to their otherwise lost and "un-identified" Civil War soldiers.

away from a point of virtual anonymity and towards a more defined identity. And while the war-torn shoulder has, in effect, reduced this man's military identity to little more than the impending casualty who currently occupies "Bed 41," Whitman ironically uses it, and the exposure it necessitates, to recognize his "superb development of chest and limbs neck etc.," something which not only suggests Whitman's seeming erotic attraction to the man, but also "appreciates" (in the sense of raises) the man into a "perfect model of manly strength." No longer merely the inhabitant of "Bed 41" or even the otherwise anonymous soldier of "Company F Indiana," the man now becomes "God's masterpiece and truest friend" and his loss "seems awful" to contemplate. The man's identity and value, largely stripped away by the war, has been redressed by Whitman, who, through his own eroticized appreciation of what he sees before him, re-draws him as virtually divine, "God's masterpiece and truest friend," "W.J.C. Williams" of the city of "Layfayette" in "Tippecanoe Co[unty] Indiana." In redressing the man's impaired identity, Whitman seeks to protect that identity from what his wounds have made inevitable, namely his impending death and the dissolution of his body. In literarily preserving Williams, inscribing him as one of many specimens of inestimable worth collected within the notebook, Whitman finds a means of preserving and perpetuating a portion of his identity and of maintaining an affective connection to him despite his impending material destruction.

Other entries function similarly, such as "ward C bed 46 May 64 Wm Hamblin co D 5th Maine wounded 10th lft leg just below knee bone fract came here 26th / wife Louisa M Hamblin Biddeford Maine wrote from Fred'k'g" (NUPM 2:450). Here, Whitman locates the man within the geographical and ideological confines of the hospital as well as his identity as a soldier, before broadening out to place him in the social world of Biddeford, Maine, and in his role as a husband and affective partner. Another

example, that of "ward C bed 28 May 16 Michael Gilley age 27 Nativity Germany co G 9th N Y Cav. (died) – sister Mary Gilley Sheldon wyoming co New York g[un] s[hot] w[oun]'d in right hip hit on 7th May / brother John is also wounded (young) ask if he wrote & if so what hosp he is in" works similarly (NUPM 2:448). It rescues the man from being merely another anonymous casualty of war by re-limning the connections between him and the broader locale and affective circle from whence the man was drawn. Despite the fact that the man has "died," his inclusion in Whitman's notebook works to preserve a greater sense of his unique identity, and to make him perpetually available for Whitman to reconnect with or "recollect" as he peruses the volume.

If the hospitals represent a kind of vast accumulation point of what might be described as the detritus churned out by the war, then Whitman's notebooks represent a "re-collection" of this detritus into a protective textual space where some portion of unique identity can be protectively "housed" - not unlike a memorial volume, or, perhaps, a memorial cabinet such as Bowditch generated. As such, Whitman's notebooks, with their long lists of soldiers, move beyond being practical aids to memory and rather form "a whole magic encyclopedia" in which he inscribes (and reinscribes) the unique identities of thousands of soldiers of the Civil War, and he uses these entries as "a system, on the basis of which [he] seeks to piece together [a] world" in which even the dead soldiers of the Civil War are active and available presences (Benjamin 207, Baudrillard 7). Paralleling the work of contemporary mourning objects, Whitman's inscriptions thus become a means through which he can continually "recollect" and "recollect" them as unique individuals, specimens of inestimable value, and "God's masterpiece[s]" and "truest friend[s]." In this sense the notebook's representations can be read somewhat like Leaves of Grass itself in relation to Whitman the actual nineteenth-century human. As a textual specimen protectively housed within the

collective space of a text, "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" is assured that the "celebration" of his self will continue long after the material body referenced has suffered sickness, decay and death (*PP* 28). By the same method of collection and representation, the identities of the dead, dying, and wounded Civil War soldiers are preserved, and perpetuated in such a way that Whitman – so long as his unique archive exists – might in some way always have them to be with him in much the same way as Henry Bowditch's memorial volumes, or any other bereaved's hair weavings, mourning quilts, mourning jewelry, or memorial portraiture did. <sup>5</sup>

### Debuting the Collection: Journaling a Sympathetic

#### **Collaboration**

On Dec. 16, 1863, the *New York Tribune* published a list of Civil War soldiers wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg and listed among them was "G.W. Whitmore."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Whitman's penchant for "collecting" and literarily preserving unique "specimens" like the aforementioned William Williams is only one particular moment of a practice that Whitman would engage in throughout the entirety of his career. Indeed, it is arguably fair to say that the idea of "specimenizing" and "collecting" drives the vast body of his writings. Not only can *Leaves* and the notebooks be seen operating in this way, but texts like Memoranda During the War are similarly marked when Whitman states, "to me the main interest of the War, I found, (and still, on recollection, find.) in those specimens . . . stricken by wounds or disease at some time in the course of the contest" (MDW 4-5, emphasis mine). Similarly, his publication of memoirs in 1882, a sizeable portion of which is Whitman's depiction of his Civil War years, is appropriately titled Specimen Days and Collect. In his introduction to this volume Whitman straightforwardly conceptualizes his text as a means whereby specimens are collected, their identities preserved, and their value "appreciated." He states, "I publish and leave the whole gathering, first, from that eternal tendency to perpetuate and preserve which is behind all Nature... [and] to symbolize two or three specimen interiors, personal and other, out of the myriads of my time, the middle range of the Nineteenth century in the New World; a strange, unloosen'd, wondrous time" (PP 859, italics mine). Whitman's compulsive work of "speciminizing" and "collecting" not only allows him to "gather together, assemble, accumulate" but also "to regain or reassert control over, recall to order" (see "Collect"). To invoke Jean Baudrillard, collections, like Whitman's notebooks full of their textual specimens, "represent something ... profoundly related to the collector's subjectivity; for while the object is a resistant material body, it is also simultaneously a mental realm over which the collector holds sway, a thing whose meaning is governed by the collector alone. It is all the collector's own, the object of [his] passion" (Baudrillard, 7). In short, by "collecting" textual "specimens" into a book Whitman is able to not only ensure those specimens perpetual accessibility to a reader (think here of the remarkable amount of "presence" Whitman's voice has in his work), but, as mentioned, he gains a rather powerful means of asserting something about those specimens' meaning and value in the process. Nineteenth-century mourning objects unquestionably worked to do the same.

Whitman immediately recognized this as a misspelling of his brother George's name, and started almost immediately for Falmouth, Virginia, where the battle's wounded lay. Over "three days of the greatest suffering I ever experienced in my life" Whitman scurried about from place to place until he located his brother and ascertained that his wound was not a mortal one (Corr 1:58). Gratified that George was not in any serious danger he wrote home informing his family of the happy news, but closed his letter with a seemingly inconsequential note that nevertheless speaks volumes about what he hoped to accomplish as he began using his textual collection of soldiers to produce war-time journalism capable of representing the unique identities of those he had come into contact with in the hospitals, and of reconnecting those on the home-front to these wounded, sick and dying men. It reads, "I send my love to dear sister Mat, and little sis – and to Andrew and all my brothers. O Mat, how lucky it was you did not come – together, we could never have got down to see George" (Corr 1:60). "Mat" (also "Mattie") or Martha Whitman was the wife of Walt's younger brother Jeff. The letter makes apparent her desire to accompany Walt on his journey to Falmouth, most likely in order to nurse George should his wounds prove to be severe, a desire that for whatever reason was not to be realized.

Mattie's desire, however, was arguably a universal one among the "back home" populace of the Civil War. A wide variety of journals, newspaper accounts, and literary works testify to the desire of those at home to rush to the side of the sick, wounded, and dying of the Civil War upon hearing of their material circumstances, although for many, like Mattie, gender, age, race, economic circumstances, geographical location, or even the varying and disruptive war-front itself made such a thing simply impossible. Perhaps

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The desire of those on the home front to connect with their wounded was so prolific that it was appropriated and used by none other than Louisa May Alcott as the central crisis of her famous "Little Women," and drove the writing and public popularity of her famous *Hospital Sketches* as well.

in order to grant those, like Mattie, at least some access to the sphere in which those whom they loved were located, Whitman began to produce pieces of journalism which drew from the wellspring of his notebooks. Journalism held real potential in this regard. As Eliza Richards has noted, the same culture of industrial innovation that made war increasingly deadly made print journalism increasingly prolific, and the preponderance of journalistic accounts written from the field of battle fostered a sense of "'perpetual intercommunication' [between the home front and war front that] blurs distinctions between direct and vicarious experiences of violence, between the inscription of violence and the violence of inscription, between fighting and writing" (Richards, "Correspondent" 148).

Whitman's own journalistic accounts sought to make use of journalism's apparent ability to collapse the distance between the vicariously experienced and the directly experienced. However, they did so not exclusively to "re-present" war's violent battles (as Richards implies much of the era's journalism did), but to connect readers to the sick and wounded that Whitman ministered to and to invite those readers to collaborate, if only sympathetically, in aiding him to "re-represent" and rehabilitate what would otherwise be the detritus of war. Translating both the content and the methodology of his notebooks into journalistic accounts, Whitman began offering his readers a means not only of imaginatively accessing the war-time hospitals of Washington, D.C., but of participating with him in countering the deleterious effects that war was having on the bodies and identities of these soldiers. In doing so, he was once again experimenting with ways in which text could be used as a vehicle for preserving and protecting identity,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Harold Aspiz has rightly noted the differences between standard journalistic fare of the type Richard's investigates, and Whitman's war-time journalism (as well as his subsequent poetic rendering of war scenes), claiming that Whitman, "came to realize that his literary forte was 'photographing' more intimate scenes, narrowing his focus to picture a small incident or an individual dying or dead soldier" instead of the "kind of on-the-spot war reportage" that marked much Civil War era journalism (Aspiz 170).

but now he sought to do so broadly and publicly, inviting the general populace to use that text as a means of fostering a sense of affective connection to those soldiers made otherwise inaccessible by the violence and disruptiveness of war.

Whitman's first war-time article written for the *New York Times*, entitled "The Great Armies of the Sick" (23 Feb. 1863), is an excellent example of this. Whitman begins this account by bringing the reader to consider a group of anonymous soldiers seen in the state in which the war has left them, in this case as rows and rows of nameless "wounded" clustered in Washington's Patent Office Building, which had been used until the Civil War as an important national museum and had only recently been converted into a hospital:<sup>8</sup>

A few weeks ago the vast area of the second story of that noblest of Washington buildings, the Patent Office, was crowded close with rows of sick, badly wounded and dying soldiers. . . . It was a strange, solemn and. with all its features of suffering and death, a sort of fascinating sight. . . . Two of the immense apartments are filled with high and ponderous glass cases, crowded with models in miniature of every kind of utensil, machine or invention, it ever entered into the mind of man to conceive; and with curiosities and foreign presents. Between these cases were lateral openings, perhaps eight feet wide, and quite deep, and in these were placed many of the sick; besides a great long double row of them up and down through the middle of the hall. Many of them were very bad cases, wounds and amputations. Then there was a gallery running above the hall, in which there were beds also. It was, indeed, a curious scene at night, when lit up. The glass cases, the beds, the sick, the gallery above and the marble pavement under foot — the suffering, and the fortitude to bear it in various degrees — occasionally, from some, the groan that could not be repressed — sometimes a poor fellow dying, with emaciated face and glassy eye, the nurse by his side, the doctor also there, but no friend, no relative — such were the sights but lately in the Patent Office. ("Great Armies of the Sick")

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The locale is significant not only because it was serving as a large Civil War hospital, but because it also housed a museum quality collection of thousands of patent models, as well as, at various times, items such as the original Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin's printing press, portraits of Native American Indians, Egyptian mummies, and even a mosaic of Pompeii (see "Museum of Curiosities"). It was regularly visited as a museum by a curious public, and its stated purpose as described by its commissioner was to house "the most beautiful specimens of the genius and industry of the nation" (Ellsworth 1).

In this vignette, Whitman presents his readership with "beautiful specimens" of a different sort than usually seen in the Patent Office Museum. He allows them to see specimen-soldiers whose bodies were now included with the museum's other collectibles. and whose presence in the midst of the nationalist symbols and models of industrial capitalism make apparent the threat that the coupling of industry and war was posing to human identity. By conflating men and machines, and making the glass cases and patent models meld almost seamlessly into the "bad cases" and "emaciated face[s]" of the suffering soldiers, Whitman invites his readership to recognize not only the rather "strange" and "curious" way the war is imperiling these men's identities, but the imperative need for such a threat to be countered. He invites readers to participate with him by bringing forward the "Case of J.A.H., of Company C., Twenty-Ninth Massachusetts," which he claims could serve to "illustrate the average of [all] these young men and their experiences" ("Great Armies of the Sick").9 In an important articulation that should not be overlooked, Whitman not only "offers" readers the chance to take responsibility for connecting with and recovering the identity of this soldier but essentially "charges" them to do so, saying, "Take this case in Ward 6, Campbell Hospital – a young man from Plymouth County Massachusetts; a farmer's son aged about 20 or 21, a soldierly young fellow, but with sensitive and tender feelings" ("Great Armies of the Sick", italics mine). In making the imperative statement "Take this case" (one which essentially represents or "illustrates" all of "these young men and their

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Whitman may have gotten the idea that he could represent "cases" with a certain lack of specificity ("case of *J.A.H.*" for example) in order to make them "illustrate the average" from reading war-time hospital newspapers such as *The Armory Square Hospital Gazette*, which frequently told narratives this way (Whitman was a regular visit to Armory Square Hospital and was undoubtedly familiar with the paper). One representative example is found in the article, "A Surgeons [sic] Story," in which a one of the hospital's surgeons narrates the story of placing a feeding tube into a soldier shot through the esophagus and unable to eat. Although the article describes the man's wound in detail and then his gratitude when finally able to eat, the piece never mentions the wounded man's rank, name, or affiliation, calling him only "the poor fellow" (4). Several other similar examples exist; for more, see the archive of the *Armory Square Hospital Gazette* available online at http://segonku.unl.edu/test/civilwardc/.

experiences"), Whitman linguistically makes the reader into an agent just as responsible for rehabilitating them as Whitman himself is. Given that the remainder of the piece is written in the first person, Whitman's imperative invitation to readers to "Take this case" also becomes, in essence, an invitation to inhabit (or in the words of *Leaves*, "assume") the "I" that narrates the events of the remainder of the piece. The reader is imaginatively present with Whitman when that "I," "as luck would have it," passes "down Ward 6 one day, about dusk (4th of January, I think)" and finds the young man "with a look of despair and hopelessness, sunk low in his thin pallid-brown young face" ("Great Armies of the Sick"). The reader, almost as much as Whitman himself, is present to hear the story of how the young soldier was wounded at the war's front and received "little or no attention" before being hauled away and sent to the Washington hospitals "in an open platform car; (such as hogs are transported upon north)," treatment which "caused him a great injury — nearly cost him his life" ("Great Armies of the Sick"). Readers are invited to recoil in indignation as they hear that in spite of his wounds the man was callously forced to his feet and, like a hog, scrubbed down with "cold water" by hospital attendants seemingly surprised when he collapses, his "half-frozen and lifeless body [falling] limpsy" in their hands, "plainly insensible, perhaps dying" ("Great Armies of the Sick"). Along with Whitman, the reader is thus capable of finding a certain sense of joy in ministering to this soldier – writing "a letter for him to his folks in Massachusetts," soothing him when "he was getting a little too much agitated, and tears in his eyes," giving him "some small gifts," and then hearing from the man that "this little visit, at that hour, just saved him" ("Great Armies of the Sick").

In opening up a literary space in which readers can sympathetically collaborate with him in the rehabilitation of a soldier who "illustrate[s] the average of [all] these young men [of the Civil War] and their experiences," Whitman is actively seeking to

provide his readership with the means to do vicariously precisely what Whitman has done personally – connect with this soldier, acknowledge his unique individual identity, and in the process aid in virtually repairing the physical and ideological damage of war. <sup>10</sup> Moreover, in propositioning his reader with the idea that this "case" is capable of "illustrating" all the wounded, sick, and dying men found in the hospitals, Whitman invites his reader to see through the particularities of *this* soldier and imagine him as representative of those soldiers with whom the reader is more intimately concerned.

In providing his readership with a literary avenue for collaboratively and sympathetically ministering to the soldiers of the Civil War, Whitman was actively seeking to provide a means of overcoming impediments such as geography, age, gender, race, economics, and war-time conflict, all of which otherwise frustrated access. While they may not have had the ability to rush to the side of a loved-one who was confined to such a hospital, through their joint "sympathetic" ministering to the "average" soldiers presented in Whitman's journalism they might find themselves at least affectively

 $<sup>^{10}</sup>$  While Whitman's charge to "Take this case" is not present in all of his journalistic representations of the wounded, he repeatedly used this same pattern to broaden out his journalistic "I" so that it nevertheless allowed readers to see themselves as "with" Whitman, co-habiting the narrative voice and action as "they" ministered to the wounded, dying, and demoralized soldiers of the war. Further examples can be found in other of Whitman's New York Times articles. For example, in "Washington in the Hot Season" (16 August 1863), Whitman invites readers to see themselves as present with him when he encounters the soldiers of the war by beginning prose sections with statements such as, "I must give you a scene from one of the great Government Hospitals here," as if placing all that happens within the hospital scene in "your" care, even though he goes on to narrate most of what occurs using the familiar "I." Whitman reinforced this sense of readerly involvement and co-habitation when he went on to assert, "Soldiers you meet everywhere about the city." In both instances Whitman reverts back to using his journalistic "I" after having invoked "you" into the scene, but having "given" the scene to you already and asserted that "you" are essentially "meet[ing]" these soldiers yourself, the experiences of the "I" seemingly become as much "yours" as his. "You" walk with him through the wards, seeing the looks of the wounded, ministering "affectionately" and "sympathetically" to them. Thus, charges and assertions such as "Take this case," "I must give you a scene," and "Soldiers you meet" become an important means through which Whitman fosters for readers a sense of intimate and immediate experience in an attempt to grant personal and meaningful access to the wounded and dying of the war where they, even if only sympathetically, can repair war's damage. For further examples see the New York Times articles "Our Soldiers" (6 March 1865), and "The Last Hours of Congress" (12 March 1865).

connected to the war-time sphere of the hospital where their sick or wounded would likely have resided, and engaged in the type of rehabilitation of body and identity that the destructive forces of war made necessary.

Moreover, by connecting readers to soldiers through his curiously co-habited journalistic "I," Whitman not only opened up opportunities for readers to collaborate with him in sympathetically ministering to the soldiers of the Civil War, but he also lays the ground necessary for establishing what is in essence an "imagined community" of sympathetic individuals that includes not only Whitman and the reader reading this particular account, but all of the other readers that can be imagined reading and responding similarly. Thus, the collaborative work of sympathetically ministering to the soldiers of the Civil War also becomes simultaneously a project of building (or rebuilding, as the case may be) a sense of community for a group of readers whose sympathetic affections function as a badge of citizenry, all during a time when war was efficaciously tearing communities, large and small, apart. Thus Whitman's journalism, and the notebooks which lent that journalism much of its power, serve not only as a means through which individuals were given an opportunity to minister sympathetically to the various wounds (to both body and identity) suffered by the common Civil War soldiers, but they represent the "kelson of creation" from which Whitman's poetry, with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The idea of text serving to instantiate an "imagined community" is, of course, Benedict Anderson's, whose book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* posits that it was "print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways" such as as a nation-state, or, in the way that I am suggesting, as an affective community united despite the fact that their nation-state is currently in civil disarray (36). All readers, Northerner or Southerner, who may have found themselves affectively invested in Whitman's text and capable of imagining others around them as similarly affected, could thus imagine themselves "united" despite the fact that the political ties binding the nation together had been violently cut.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Stephen Cushman, in his excellent article "Walt Whitman's Real Wars," makes a similar point, characterizing Whitman's co-habited journalism as "second-person experiments" inevitably leading towards an "affirmation of the special qualities of 'our American wounded'" (143, italics mine).

its dual aspirations of healing both bereaved individuals and a broken nation, would steer its course.

# Bringing the War Home – Problems Pro(po)sing

### Recovery

Whitman's journalism represents an attempt to allow his readers to invest affectively in and therefore feel themselves connected to the wounded, sick, and dying soldiers housed in the hospitals of the Civil War, and to work with him and an "imagined community" of other readers to reinscribe and "re-represent" these soldiers as unique individuals of inestimable value. And while Whitman's journalism presented those interested in the welfare of the Civil War soldiers with an "average" specimen through which they might try to imagine not only the experiences of their own wounded soldier, but an affective community of interested individuals, like Whitman, who sought to care for them in the absence of "friends and loved ones," the content and format of the journalistic medium nonetheless constantly threatened to derail that journalism's power. Not only did the "carnival on the page" that was the nineteenth-century periodical overlay Whitman's accounts with inferences that he would likely have balked at, but the very stylistic conventions that Whitman was forced to adhere to in order to produce journalism impeded, to more or less a degree, the kind of access that ultimately became necessary to counter the ever-increasing destructiveness of the war. <sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> This characterization is Isabelle Lehuu's. In her text of the same name, she describes how the proliferation of print in the nineteenth century led to "new publications [that] were characterized not only by their abundance but also by their taste for the eccentric and the off-balanced" (3). While there was probably something appealing about the unexpected connections that emerged when his pieces appeared next to others that augmented or enriched their meaning – as some certainly did – it was just as likely that the meaning of Whitman's poems or prose works would be detrimentally impacted by their situatedness on the newspaper page. Thus, the eclectic nature of the antebellum newspaper page coupled with the way in which his work might be intercalated on it in less-than-ideal ways makes Whitman's reticence to leave it there all the more understandable. For more information see Lehuu.

For example, the placement of "The Great Armies of the Sick" within the pages of the New York Times is rather problematic. The piece leads the second page, but is preceded at the conclusion of the first page by an account which details the recent losses in grain and money incurred when a fire broke out on one of the Michigan Southern Railroad's grain elevators. Moreover, Whitman's piece is followed by one on the Southern "contrabands," an article which essentially appeals for money and clothing to be donated to the Ladies' Union Aid Society in order to help the newly freed slaves congregating in St. Louis. Framed by entries that detail monetary loss and ask for charitable contributions, Whitman's comment in his own piece that "A benevolent person of the right qualities and tact cannot make a better *investment* of himself, at present, anywhere upon the varied surface of this whole big world than in these same military hospitals, among such thousands of interesting young men" is given a decidedly economic coloring, as well as placed into competition with other claims on people's benevolence ("Great Armies of the Sick", italics mine). His imperative invitation for readers to join him in taking up the cases of the Civil War soldiers he brings forward in this journalism begins to become more of a imperative call for them to invest financially in his endeavor while muting his call for them to invest themselves sympathetically in the cause of these men through the text he has produced.

Whitman's reticence to leave his Civil War writings in the newspapers is due in part to the fact that he shirked at meanings, as the placement of "The Great Armies of the Sick" makes clear, superimposed upon his work and beyond his effectual control.<sup>14</sup> But

While the argument I have been making applies specifically to Whitman's Civil War prose, the same general principles arguably hold true for the smattering of Civil War poetry that he published in newspapers during this time period as well. The very first piece of Civil War poetry Whitman published, "Beat! Beat! Drums" is a good example. This piece, on appearance, was sandwiched between an article written by a Brooklynite praising the city for the remarkable number of its churches as well as the manner in which the Opera House has kept itself free from immoral performances, and an article that presents some excerpts from Emerson's essay "Manners." The editor's introduction of the poem completes the unfortunate placement with the trite phrase, "The following poem is finely descriptive of one of the phases

perhaps more importantly, as the war dragged on and casualties grew from hundreds to thousands to hundreds of thousands, the public's desire to connect with the wounded, sick, and dying soldiers of the war grew into a painfully frenzied search (not unlike Whitman's and Henry Bowditch's) for some means of connecting not only with those in the hospital but with the "Million Dead" now anonymously littering the battlefields of the North and South. Nowhere was this desire made more publically evident than in the throngs of people who queued up outside the studio of Matthew Brady when, after the bloody battle at Antietam, Brady displayed a series of pictures of the dead and the public reacted rather remarkably. <sup>15</sup> A *New York Times* review of Brady's photographs illuminates this. Its significance as a cultural touchstone warrants lengthy quotation:

> Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our doorvards and along the streets, he has done something very like it. . . . Crowds of people are constantly going up the stairs [to his gallery], follow them, and you find them bending over photographic views of that fearful battle-field, taken immediately after the action. . . . You will see hushed, reverend [sic] groups standing around these weird copies of carnage, chained by the strange spell that dwells in dead men's eyes. . . . There is one side of the picture that the sun did not catch, one phase that has escaped photographic skill – it is the background of widows and orphans, torn from the bosom of their natural protectors by the red remorseless hand of Battle . . . . By the aid of the magnifying-glass, the very features of the slain may be distinguished [and] we would scarce choose to be in the gallery when one of the women bending over them should recognize a husband, a son, or a brother in the still, lifeless lines of bodies that lie ready for the gaping trenches. . . . How can a mother bear to know that the boy whose slumbers she has cradled and whose head her bosom pillowed until the rolling drum called him forth – whose poor, pale face, could she reach it, should find the same pillow again . . . [lies in] a shadowed trench. ("Brady's Photographs")

of today's life" ("Beat! Beat! Drums"). In this context, the poem loses much of its patriotic fervor and unquestionably does not stand as the resounding call to arms that it might otherwise be.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The public's anxiety to recover or reconnect with the lost dead as demonstrated by Brady's 1862 exhibition of photos from the bloody battle at Antietam would only be exacerbated the following year, 1863, when three of the Civil War's most costly battles, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga, and Gettysburg would result in the death of over 115,000 men.

As this review dramatically illustrates, Brady's photographs became a means through which the public sought to reunite with the sons, fathers, and loved ones they had sent off to war – as indicated by the surprising admission that individuals brought magnifying glasses in hopes of "finding" those they had lost. Nevertheless, the fact that all who came searching for their dead did not find them was precisely the problem that potentially limited Whitman's journalism from becoming the profoundly recuperative text that the populace increasingly needed. Although it certainly invited readers to connect with actual Civil War soldiers and participate sympathetically in reinscribing or reinvesting these soldiers' identities and value, the very journalistic conventions followed in "reporting" on the soldiers Whitman brings forth introduced a level of specificity that could itself be problematic. Consider that in journalistic prose names, dates, regimental assignments, and other such personal markers were necessary for demonstrating authenticity, but would have served as an impediment to readers desperate to reconnect with their lost soldiers. Surely when Whitman mentions "a young man, farmer's son; D. F. Russell, Company E, Sixtieth New York" or "Charles Miller, bed No. 19, Company D, Fifty-third Pennsylvania" these names signify more powerfully to those family, friends, and acquaintances who can perceive the individual behind the name than to an anonymous reader, however interested or sympathetic (NUPM 2:738). <sup>16</sup> Therefore only a very few could truly have the experience of the widow/mother viewing Brady's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> I do not wish to imply that for those who wore them regimental markers were interpreted as a vehicle for somehow obviating or suppressing their personal identities, or that readers who read tales of the valor of a particular individual from a particular regiment could not have used this regimental information to form a sense of the "characters" of, say, the soldiers of "Company E, Sixtieth New York." Indeed, soldiers regularly gained a sense of identity from belonging to a particular regiment, and journalists regularly made use of specific regimental information in order to give their readership a sense of the unique characteristics of a particular regiment hailing from a particular locale (and appeal to the inherent pride felt by readers who had some connection to this locale). However, for readers desperately concerned with connecting with their own particular soldier, such information arguably serves to call attention to the distinctions between the soldier (or soldiers) represented and the soldier with which they are primarily concerned as much as it marks their similarities.

photographs.<sup>17</sup> In order to remedy this, Whitman needed to produce a reader-driven text approximating what Roland Barthes (perhaps confusingly in this context) terms a "writerly text" – one which engages the reader to participate in the writing and "makes the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text," and most importantly in this case, the one responsible for "producing" or assigning the specific identity of the soldier represented therein (4). If Whitman were able to find a means of inviting his reader to "write in" the text's most important images, then he could effectively prevent the text from becoming a fixed signification of any particular individual. To do so would allow Whitman the type of "infinite play" necessary in order to give the text the ability to represent any soldier to any individual without ever becoming "intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system which reduces the plurality of entrances" and forces the text to signify only one or another soldier (Barthes 5).<sup>18</sup> A text with such "infinite play" would erase any of the reader's impediments to "seeing" on the text's page the "poor, pale face" of the beloved soldier, and to seeing the text as a means of reconnecting with, if not in some sense recovering, the lost dead.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Stephen Cushman makes a similar point when he says that although Whitman "is urging his readers to accept a given sample as emblematic or typical" his suppression of "certain samples in order to produce [these] emblems and types," (specifically "samples" of blacks, foreign fighters, etc.) complicates the text's ability to actually *be* "emblematic or typical" for many readers (151). Cushman also sees Whitman's writings on the war (specifically his journalism and *Memoranda During the War*) as exhibiting a kind of liberal tendency to push towards or seek out a greater inclusiveness that might somehow get "the real war...into the books" (*PW* 1:116) by "opposing the top-down narrations of courteous generals...with the bottom up narrations of ordinary people, people whose importance to the writing of Civil War history he asserts with a strenuous outspokenness ahead of his time" (Cushman 150). However, because Cushman confines his study strictly to Whitman's prose his otherwise excellent essay overlooks what this chapter goes on to investigate at some length, namely how in his Civil War poetry Whitman found a means of overcoming the problem of "emblematic" representation encountered when writing his prose.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> I by no means wish to imply that Whitman's text *is* equivalent to Barthes' "writerly text" discussed in *S/Z*. Barthes' concept of a "writerly text" remains largely that – a concept - for as he points out, "the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in the bookstore" – nevertheless, Whitman's poetry to some extent certainly approximates the spirit of such a text as it works to elude "plasticization" and encourage a "plurality of entrances" whereby the reader may engage with and essentially take an active part in writing the text, as the remainder of this essay will show (5).

### The "Million Dead Summ'd Up" and Recovered

As the actions of an individual such as Henry Bowditch and the queues of anxious and bereaved gallery-goers suggest, the need to recover the dead from the battlefields of the Civil War was both very personal and, as death tolls mounted, increasingly widespread. The millions of individuals on the home front found it difficult to grapple with their losses because, as one scholar has phrased it, "[n]early half the dead remained unknown, the fact of their deaths supposed but undocumented, the circumstances of their passage from life entirely unrecorded," and unlike Henry Bowditch, these bereaved were never able to procure the bodies of their dead, along with the lock of hair, favored ring, or bloodstained vest which could be parlayed into a powerful object representing the identity of the deceased and capable of fostering a sense of affective connection to them (Faust 267). In the absence of bodies, traces, and information, "the living searched in anxiety and even 'phrensy' to provide endings for life narratives that stood incomplete," and to collect, preserve and parlay any material traces of the dead they could into the type of mourning objects that would allow the bereaved to overcome the "inhibition of mourning" their absence inspired (267). Whitman seemingly understood that if he could provide an increasingly "phrensied" public readership with both the "endings" of their soldiers' "life narratives" as well as some type of "physical trace" of their beloved deceased then he could not only help rescue the "Million Dead" from some portion of their regrettable anonymity but he could also mediate the deep grief of a nation.

Whitman sought to provide a means to counter grief and facilitate familiar mourning practices through his production of *Drum-Taps*, a poetic text littered with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Such as memorial quilts produced from the articles of clothing worn by the deceased, paintings or weavings that incorporated their hair, favorite rings to be worn in memorium (as Henry Bowditch did), etc. See Chapter One for more information on the variety of mourning and memorial objects produced during the time period and on the way in which these relied, in many ways, on the body of the deceased in order to be procured.

images of Civil War soldiers. But unlike the many newspaper articles and notebook descriptions in which Whitman included the details he had recorded in his notebooks, like names, units, ranks, and hometowns, these poetic images are virtually without identifying features even though many of the descriptions he uses can be traced directly back to the notebooks themselves. In "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest and the Road Unknown," "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," and "A Sight in the Camp at Daybreak Gray and Dim," Whitman made use of the experiences and identities of some of the unique individuals recorded in his notebooks in order to provide his readership with several experiences thought to be crucial to successful mourning during the time period, namely, the receiving of the dying's "last look," knowledge that the deceased experienced a "Good Death," presence at (or first-hand knowledge of) burial, and the depiction of the dead as an inheritor of the divine.<sup>20</sup> Throughout these poems (and almost all of those in *Drum-Taps*), markers of specific individuality are largely absent, and soldier images appear stripped not only of fundamental identity characteristics like name and race, but also of basic war-time distinctions, such as whether they fought for the Union or the Confederacy. Leaving these soldiers in such anonymity required readers to do the "writerly work" of imaginatively supplying an identity of their choosing – "the text," as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Encounters with anonymous soldiers also appear in poems like "The Wound Dresser," "Drum-Taps," "Calvary Crossing a Ford," "O Tan Faced Prairie Boy," "As Toilsome I Wandered Virginia's Woods," "Hymn of Dead Soldiers," "I Saw Old General At Bay," "Look Down Fair Moon," "How Solemn as One by One," "Dirge For Two Veterans" and "Reconciliation." Indeed, in all of *Drum-Taps* only one soldier is represented by name – and that is the soldier "Pete" in "Come Up From the Fields Father." In this poem, Whitman grants a reader access to the extreme pain of grief that the mother, in particular, experiences. If the reader is able to feel compassion for the mother (which is certainly the most likely response given the way the poem is constructed), then the poem becomes a rather intriguing instance of Whitman seeking to make his reader aware that the experience of grief that *he or she* has felt at the loss of their loved one and now see mirrored in the mother of Whitman's poem form a kind of affective kinship between them. The mother's anonymity also opens up to the reader the idea that it doesn't matter *who* the mother is (whether she be the mother of a Northern or Southern soldier, a black or white soldier), grief is the essential element that ties them together and therefore becomes capable of establishing a sense of commiseration or, with apologies for the textual play, commUnion.

Whitman said, "furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework" – and primed them to become a powerful means for the bereaved to gain the knowledge and "end of life narratives" necessary for them to mourn as they knew how (PW, 2:245).<sup>21</sup>

An examination of a few of the more poignant representations gives a view of Whitman at work constructing such images from his notebooks. In his poem "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown" Whitman relies upon an account of the retreat from the battle of White Oaks Swamp on June 30, 1862, as "told me by Milton Roberts," one of the many men he ministered to in the Civil War hospitals (NUPM 2:651). Whitman records Roberts' "silent stealthy march through the woods, at times stumbling over the bodies of dead men in the road" until he reaches a church converted into a hospital, "dimly lit with candles, lamps, and torches" which was now "filled, all varieties [of wounded], horrible beyond description. . .crowds of wounded, bloated and pale. . .the yards outside also filled – they lay on the ground, some on blankets, some on stray planks..." (NUPM 2:651). Using Roberts's story, Whitman crafted a poem in which a soldier, with the reader in collective and imaginative tow, finds himself first on Roberts's "march" and then in the presence of one of the "crowds of wounded" encountered there.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Thus Whitman was essentially working to provide his readership with an experience somewhat analogous to that which he had in creating the notebooks. In the notebooks, Whitman was able to inscribe the identities of those around him into the pages of a text in order to preserve them and make them perpetually accessible to him. In *Drum-Taps* Whitman makes the reader responsible for mentally "inscribing" the image of the soldier onto the otherwise anonymous soldier-images presented in his poems. In doing so, he gives readers the opportunity to "see" their soldier represented in the text which now becomes one of "those subtlest, rarest, divinest volumes of Humanity" such as Henry Bowditch had created, one which preserved the identity of their dead and "arous'd . . undream'd-of depths of emotion" (*PP* 800). I am not the first critic to notice Whitman's penchant for creating a text which operates in this manner. Gregory Eiselein in his excellent essay "Whitman and the Humanitarian Possibilities of Lilacs" investigates Whitman's elegy to Lincoln (and to some extent, the cluster of poems surrounding it), and claims that they were written "as a response to the immediate needs of a culture in mourning....[and provide] us not only an insight into the grief of that culture, but also an example of humanitarian cultural work that depends not upon coercion or obedience to an ideal, but upon poetic polyvalency and the imagination of readers in a democratic society" (Eiselein 73).

A march in the ranks hard-prest and the road unknown; A route through a heavy wood, with muffled steps in the darkness; Our army foiled with loss severe, and the sullen remnant retreating; Till after midnight glimmer upon us, the lights of a dim-lighted building; We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted building; (*PP* 440)

This opening is curious for the way in which Whitman introduces the experience not as solely his, nor that of his speaker, but, in an effort that seems calculated to invite readers to imagine themselves as present with the speaker and the rest of the "ranks," claims that this march and the experiences had on it are "Our[s]," this being the first pronoun that appears in the piece. This sense of collective experience is immediately followed by the lights glimmering upon "us" – speaker, reader, and "ranks" alike – and the experience that "we" share in coming upon the "dim-lighted" building. Mirroring his folding of Roberts's narrative into the poem, Whitman's use of collective pronouns in this moment seamlessly merges the speaker's experience in the poem with the reader's experience of the poem so that identity appears collective in much the same way as his journalistic account in the *Times* did. Even when the speaker moves into the building, away from the ranks, and employs the pronoun "I" instead of "we," the fact that the reader is allowed to continue to be a voyeur onto the scene encourages a kind of cohabitation of the poetic voice. In a state of curious conflation encouraged by the progression of the poem, the reader is allowed to move into the building itself where together the speaker and the reader see "crowds, groups of forms...on the floor, some in the pews laid down," before they finally encounter the following:

[. . . A] soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death, (he is shot in the abdomen,)
I staunch the blood temporarily, the youngster's face is white as a lily[. . .]
Then hear outside the orders given, *Fall in, my men, fall in;*But first I bend to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me,
Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness. . .
(*PP* 440)

By inviting readers into such close proximity to a soldier represented so completely generically (a lad dying from a gun-shot wound to the abdomen references thousands of actual Civil War soldiers), Whitman works to ensure that as many as possible can impress this image with the identity of a beloved soldier. Using Roberts's unique individual experience, Whitman crafts a poem in which the reader, who now "sees" his or her lost soldier in the face of the dying man Roberts seemingly encountered, is capable of receiving the "last look" of not just any lad, but rather the lad that reader sent off to war and lost to its "trenches...woods, or ravines" (Faust 104).<sup>22</sup>

By arriving with the speaker at the moment of death, readers are thus able to witness the final moments of life and gain an accounting of an event which would otherwise have been lost to them, both of which actions were highly important components of successful mourning in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In general, successful mourning required that someone, preferably family members, "needed to witness a death in order to assess the state of the dying person's soul, for these critical last moments of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> In a 2009 ALA conference session, Blake Bronson-Bartlett pointed out that immediately following Roberts's account, appended to it essentially, is the name of Civil War soldier Levi Tarkett, who may very well be the dying soldier Roberts met that night. If this is the case the omission of Tarkett's name further exemplifies how many of the details tying specific experiences to specific soldiers disappear when the notes are used to produce Whitman's poetry.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Achieving some sort of "presence" at the death of a loved one, even if it was only the kind of second hand or "virtual" presence achieved through a letter (or, as I am arguing, a poem) was crucial and eagerly sought after. Not only did it convey invaluable information about the supposed state of a loved one's soul, but such confirming (if even second-hand) "presence" was needed in order to still the kind of frenetic vacillation between hope and despair that a complete lack of information might otherwise inspire. Indeed, a narrative of the end of a loved one's life allowed a bereaved individual to be certain that the cessation of letters and the failure to return home meant that their loved one was indeed dead. In the absence of such certain information an individual might be perpetually haunted by the sliver of hope that such a situation inevitably created. Such narratives, like the material traces that were so prized, "succeeded in establishing 'the fact' of death in [the] mind [of the bereaved]...[who now] began to move from resistance to acceptance of [his or] her cruel fate and [his or] her new identity" (Faust 146). For reasons such as these, individuals, like J.M. Taylor of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, was still searching in 1895 for any bits of information regarding the death of his son Henry who died 30 years earlier after being imprisoned following Chickamauga (See "Naming" in Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* for more information). Philippe Aries has written extensively on this practice in his notable Western Attitudes Toward Death: from the Middle Ages to the Present.

life would epitomize a soul's spiritual condition. The dying were not losing their essential selves but rather defining them for eternity. Kin would then use their observations of the deathbed to evaluate the family's chances for a reunion in heaven. A life was a narrative that could only be incomplete without this final chapter" (Faust 10). By giving readers the opportunity to witness a beloved soldier's last "half-smile," Whitman provided them with the crucial sign that indicated the state of that soldier's soul. If a reader could "see" his or her own lost soldier in the text, then that reader could rest assured that his or her soldier had died a "Good Death," that the loved one was now at peace, and that hopes for continued association and reunion are not in vain.

Moreover, through the actions of the poetic "I" which they seemingly cohabit with Whitman, readers are not only allowed to witness this death, but to comfort, and indeed minister, to the soldier whom they love. They are invited to imaginatively reach out and "staunch" the wound; they are able to "bend to the dying lad" and ensure that his last living look is at a true friend, and to testify to themselves and even to "him" that he is an individual greatly "valued" by both narrator and reader alike. Hus not only do they receive the "last look" that reassured them that their beloved deceased awaited them in the beyond, they were able to recuperate the disorder and chaos of death on the Civil War battlefield, acknowledge the unique individuality and worth of this imagined soldier, and construct an end of life narrative that accorded more directly with "Victorian ideals of

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Thus, in this particular instance Whitman's poetic persona is not only "a surrogate mourner of the dead—one who took it on himself to do what the relatives could not do: to remember the dead man in the very presence of the corpse" (Thomas, *Lunar* 35), but is also a kind of literary conduit through which a reader is actively able to "identify," "remember," and thus effectively "mourn" the soldier that he or she "sees" here. Rather than standing in for, or replacing, the otherwise absent family member, Whitman's persona becomes the conduit through which the reader, as much as Whitman's persona, becomes the principle player in the exchange.

domesticity" which proclaimed it a great comfort for the dying and the bereaved alike when one died "among family assembled around the deathbed" (Faust 10).<sup>25</sup>

"A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest and the Road Unknown" thus provides a good example of Whitman using the experiences of one of the many soldiers whom he knew in order to create a poetic offering which provided the kind of information and access that might allow a reader to impress the text with an image of his or her own lost soldier, and more successfully grieve. It is not alone in this regard. Indeed, Whitman used the experiences of another soldier with whom he was familiar – namely William Giggee – in order to perform very similar work. In the notebook scholars have called "Return My Book" (his Fall/Winter 1862 notebook), Whitman recorded: ""William Giggee, Sept 18<sup>th</sup> '62. I heard of poor Bill's death – he was shot on Pope's retreat – Arthur took him in his arms, and he died in about an hour and a half – Arthur buried him himself—he dug his grave" (NUPM 2:493). Historical evidence indicates that William and Arthur were either brothers, friends, or perhaps even lovers, and that while fighting together at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Bill was shot with a minie ball and died as Arthur and a comrade tried to rush him to the hospital tent. Whitman certainly knew Bill Giggee

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> It is worth pausing here to note that Whitman thus makes himself into a sympathetic or affective "member" of the mourner's family in some sense. By sharing the process of mourning, he seemingly becomes a member of a community of intimates, like those that gathered with the Bowditch family to mourn the loss of Nat. Whitman's is an act which nicely reveals the ability of this poetry to foster a sense of connectedness between both Whitman and a reader regardless of political ideology or geographic location.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> For information on the previous identification of this entry as a possible source for "Vigil" see "William Giggee" in Charles Glicksberg's *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (47).

See Murray for more information about the series of events alluded to in Whitman's notebook. William Saley Giggee, born March 10<sup>th</sup> 1844 in Luzerne, Pennsylvania, died (according to official records) August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1862 at the second battle of Bull Run during Pope's Retreat (also called the Second Manassas by Confederates). As Whitman indicates in his notebook, William Giggie (Whitman spells "Giggee") was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, Co E, New York Volunteers, but Arthur's identity has remained a mystery. Given the resonances between the recording of the event in the notebook and the poem, critics such as Charles Glicksberg, seeing this notebook entry as the "germinal seed" for "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," have taken the poem largely at face value and assumed (incorrectly, it appears) that

well and could have chosen to represent the death of his friend in great detail, given that it had been related to him by "Arthur" – who was present for the entire incident. In spite of the availability of such detail, Whitman still chose to represent the deceased generically, and to do so through a speaker whose relationship to the deceased may or may not be familial.

Vigil Strange I kept on the field one night,
When you, my son and my comrade, dropt at my side that day,
One look I but gave, which your dear eyes return'd, with a look I shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine, O boy, reach'd up as you lay on the ground;
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle;
Till late in the night reliev'd, to the place at last again I made my way;

Till late in the night reliev'd, to the place at last again I made my way; Found you in death so cold, dear comrade – found your body, son of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding). (PP 439).

Once again, the poem provides the reader with a kind of "last look." Here, however, that look is so thinly described (as a "look I shall never forget") that the face which imparts it and the character of the look itself are totally up to the reader to assign. Thus, once again, the reader is granted a kind of access to the final moments of life in which he or she is allowed to see that the dying soldier died willingly and well with "One touch of your

Arthur was William's father (Glicksberg 142). More recently, Martin Murray has provided a provocative possible reading of the two as a homosexual couple serving together in the war (See Murray). The story may be more complex than either of these two readings implies. Civil War Rosters for the 1st Regiment, New York Volunteers list three men with the last name of Giggie – Arthur and William, both privates, and Ira, a wagoner. The 1850 census shows Ira as the father of a family that contained two sons, William and Andrew – but no mention of an "Arthur." There is no question that "Arthur" was not William's father (as Glicksburg assumes) and that the poem's representation of a son being buried by his father does not correspond with actual events. Ira was, in fact, discharged from service due to disability the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1862 – a full three months before William's death. However, (and as another alternative to Murray's formulation) the possibility exists that "Arthur" was in fact Andrew – and that the census taker merely misrecorded the name. Andrew was born in 1849 and would only have been 13 years old at the time – young to be a private in the Volunteers, but not unheard of. If "Andrew Giggee" and "Arthur Giggee" are indeed the same person, then the poem represents an almost complete reversal of the actual historical record – a 13 year old boy burying his 18 year old brother as opposed to an older father burying his son. It is compelling evidence of Whitman's re-writing and erasure of historical facts as he translated events from the notebooks to the poetry to provide himself with the opportunity to mediate the reader's experience of approaching and accessing his or her own lost soldier.

hand to mine." Perhaps as important, if not more so, is what the reader is allowed to witness as the poem draws to its close. Here, the speaker, with the reader once again in imaginative tow, returns to the body of the deceased and enacts the burial:

[A]t latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd, My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form, Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head, and carefully under feet.

And there and then, and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited...

Vigil for comrade swiftly slain—vigil I never forget, how as day brighten'd,

I rose from the chill ground, and folded my soldier well in his blanket, And buried him where he fell. (*PP* 439)

Here, in this poem, the reader is also offered the chance not only to gain a "last look" of sorts, but is enabled, through the actions of the speaker and the narrative he relates, to be "virtually" present at what is essentially that soldier's funeral. Like the innumerable letters home written by the friends and comrades of the Civil War soldiers who themselves witnessed the death and conducted the burial of another, this poem "make[s] absent ones virtual witnesses to the dying moments they had been denied...link[ing] home and battlefront...mend[ing] the fissures war had introduced into the fabric of the Good Death," and thereby effectively providing the bereaved with information and accounts primed to both console and foster successful mourning (Faust 15). For readers capable of seeing *their* soldiers in the image presented, the narration of this loving "comrade" not only provides them with the opportunity to see that a loved one died a "Good Death," but offers them the consolation of being virtual witnesses to the funeral or "vigil" held for that loved one after death.<sup>28</sup>

accurate, and, coupled with the nature of the anonymous soldier images that Whitman pens as well as his unique conceptualization of the material text itself (which I will discuss shortly), becomes a powerful

My assessment of this poem, although focusing on the potential benefits such an image offers to mournful readers, nevertheless complements Harold Aspiz's, which focuses on Whitman's persona. His claim that "[t]he persona's burial of the young soldier represents a ritual act of symbolic closure for the nation's unknown dead, here reverently buried, mourned for and remembered by one who loved them" is accurate, and coupled with the nature of the anonymous soldier images that Whitman pens as well as his

Whitman's invitation to use his text as a window through which to perceive, if not approach, a soldier of intimate concern is perhaps most overtly and easily seen in his poem "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," and it is here that he also invites readers to see their soldiers as the "divine" individuals that, in death, they seemingly have become. This poem is drawn directly from Whitman's own experience when visiting his brother George in Virginia. In his notebook he records, "Sight at daybreak (in camp in front of the hospital tent) on a stretcher, three dead men lying, each with a blanket spread over him – I lift up one and look at the young man's face, calm and yellow. 'tis strange! (Young man: I think this face, of yours the face of my dead Christ!)" (NUPM 2:513). In the poem, unlike the notebook, Whitman depicts his speaker examining the bodies of all three men, which he describes in turn as "elderly," "a sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming," and finally "the third – a face nor child nor old.../Young man I think I know you – I think this face is the face of the Christ himself, / Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies" (PP 441). Whitman's notebooks indicate that he only looked at one of the individuals, but in the poem he represents three – each of these drawing from a different age demographic while remaining largely vague as to other markers of individuality. In this one image Whitman seeks to present a trio of soldiers capable of representing almost any common soldier who fought in the Civil War – attempting to pen a visual synecdoche of the "rank and file" itself. <sup>29</sup>

means through which mourners could participate in the rituals thought necessary for successful mourning (174).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Whitman's overt reference to the color of the soldier's faces in the two poems just brought forward - the "yellow-white ivory" of the soldiers face in "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim" and the face "white as a lily" in "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest and the Road Unknown" – beg mention of another compelling element of Whitman's soldier avatars. Generally, the soldiers are presented in racially ambiguous terms, and most images could represent black or white soldiers. The soldiers, for example, in "Wound Dresser" and in "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night" have little definitive markers of race assigned to them – a pattern generally maintained by Whitman throughout the book. Like Whitman's refusal to denote whether a soldier was Union or Confederate, this ambiguity is a productive means of opening up as opposed to limiting recuperative connections.

Having cast his net almost as widely as he can and made room for readers to "identify" at least one of these men as *their* soldier, he moves from one to another lifting their blankets to gaze upon them, asking the question "Who are you?," and thereby prompting readers to supply the information – the identity – that the speaker cannot. In accepting such an invitation, readers find themselves imaginatively in the presence of a loved one once again. But it is at this point that Whitman translates them into (or at the very least associates them with) the "dead Christ," the most powerful and widely understood embodiment of the ideas of resurrection, eternal life, and continued perpetual existence available to nineteenth-century American readers.

In conflating dead soldiers with the image of Christ, Whitman not only suggests to his readership that their soldiers, crucified in battle as opposed to on the cross, are as divine and pathos inspiring as Christ himself, but that like Christ, their deaths are supposedly but a moment of transition. Like so many of the popular mourning poems of the time period, Whitman consoles his readers by inviting them to "see" a loved one in the company of (if not as representative of) the divine. In this one image, Whitman not only allows his reader the opportunity to locate the body of a beloved lost soldier and see it venerated as something inestimably divine, but his use of Christic imagery also allows that reader to overlay the familiar narrative of death, resurrection and eternal life onto a lost loved one and, through the company he keeps, potentially any soldier of the Civil War. Thus, Whitman pens an image whose visual and ideological characteristics would have allowed readers to find consolation and mourn according to established custom by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> While such a statement would be conjecture, it might not be too much of a stretch to say that images from nineteenth-century mourning poetry that place the deceased in the company of Jesus are so ubiquitous that they appear in almost every popular and well-circulated book of this type during the time period. Such images certainly abound in the poetry of figures such as Lydia Sigourney, Elizabeth Oaks Smith, Charles Sprague, Willis Gaylord Clark, and even John Quincy Adams.

accessing their soldier's (virtual) body and simultaneously recalling that their loved one now enjoys both a perpetual existence and a "divine" nature.

In each of these scenes, and many others like them, the collaboration of the author's poetic persona and the readers' imaginations allow such readers to experience those things they would otherwise have no access to – they "see" the wounds, "share" the last bitter-sweet half-smile, "witness" the death, preparation, and burial of the body, and are led to "envision" perpetual worth and existence. In short, they are granted the kind of (imagined) access that nineteenth-century cultural conventions held was needed for successful mourning. Indeed, it is hard to read these poems and not hear in them Whitman's attempts to give the aforementioned widow/mother an opportunity to recover in some sense her lost soldier "whose head her bosom pillowed until the rolling drum called him forth – whose poor, pale face, could she reach it, should find the same pillow again" ("Brady's Photographs," italics mine). These poems, each of which figures anonymous soldiers, invite readers to do just that – reach the "poor pale face" one more time with the help of Whitman's poetic speaker. Through this interaction, loss is acknowledged, and the desire to touch, to kiss, to hold, to recover the dead is imaginatively realized. Although "[h]undreds of thousands of wives, parents, children, and siblings of unidentified and missing men would never have the... 'melancholy satisfaction' of irrefutable evidence to serve as a foundation for emotional acceptance of loss" and therefore for successful mourning, they nevertheless were now being provided with a text whose imagery served as a potential means of representing "virtually" all of the deaths and burials of the otherwise anonymous dead, and of thereby allowing the bereaved the opportunity to mourn as they knew how.

Such a radical ability to stand in for any and all of the soldiers had a certain "cost" in that each poem required the suppression of the "real" identity of the soldier whose

unique experience and actual death Whitman used as the fodder from which to produce such otherwise anonymous specimens. With all significant vestiges of individuality and identity removed, the unique soldiers whose experiences Whitman draws upon, such as William Giggee and Milton Roberts, are essentially reduced to specimens in the most abstract sense – as representatives of an entire "species." The sacrifice of their individual identity "from all its original function in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind" is, perhaps, a kind of necessary textual violence equivalent to that which occurs when any collector detaches an object/specimen from its originary context, but it was only through such an action that they were primed to function as they did (Benjamin 204).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, by becoming essentially "object[s] pure and simple, divested of [their] function, abstracted from any practical context" other than their representative status in the text - where their "meaning is entirely up to him" or her who generates the image – they become abstract specimens standing in for any or all members of a population as the stuffed, mounted, and displayed animal in a museum of natural history might (Baudrillard 8). Like the brief and generic placards that mark a specimen as representing an entire species – *Ursus Horribilis*; *Grizzly Bear* – so too do Whitman's generic representations trade unique individuality for generic representation. It is only through the textual suppression or annihilation of unique identity and experience that a reader is allowed to step in and "recuperate" the anonymity he or she encounters there and thus find a means of recuperating grief in the absence of any "trace" of his or her loved one, or any "end of life narrative" as well.

# The Body of the Book

Whitman did not limit his attempts to reconnect a bereaved public with its lost loved ones to poetic images alone. Rather, he designed a book that materially suggests

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Or, to think of it in more historical than theoretical terms, it is a violence analogous, in many ways, to the inevitable and anonymous violence of the Civil War battlefields re-enacted.

itself as an effective substitute for the much longed for physical trace of a soldier whose body might otherwise have been annihilated in the chaos of war. Not only did cultural practice hold that material traces of the deceased were an invaluable means of fostering a sense of continued connection or association, as Henry Bowditch's amulet testifies, but Whitman himself had experienced firsthand the power of such traces. Indeed, according to Whitman, it was as much the physical traces of the soldiers he ministered to, the "blood smutch[es]" he said marked the notebooks' pages, as it was the words jotted down, that turned these notebooks from workaday scratch-pads into "a special history...full of associations never to be possibly said or sung" – a history of associations which evoked "undreamed of depths of emotion" (PP 714, 800). Recognizing the power that a soldier's war-drawn blood had to re-limn such associations, Whitman sought to translate these "blood smutch[es]" into his poetic text just as he had the soldiers' experiences.<sup>32</sup> It was an effort Whitman openly testified to in "Lo! Victress on the Peaks!" where he claimed that in *Drum-Taps* it was not only "poem[s] proud I, chanting, bring to thee – nor mastery's rapturous verse; / But a little book, containing night's darkness, and blood-dripping wounds, / And psalms of the dead" (Sequel 23). And indeed, the physical book of *Drum-Taps* (which was, like so many of the works he published, designed by Whitman personally) seems as "blood smutch'd," if not more so, than Whitman's notebooks were. The first binding of *Drum-Taps*, for example, was brownish-red, approximating the color of dried blood. Furthermore, it was circumscribed

Whitman's work to "embody" his book of poetry in this thus manner represents his desire to reproduce en masse the kind of powerful sense of connection that he felt when reading his notebooks as well as his awareness of a broad cultural need for a means of recovering some type of material trace of the dead in order to mourn according to custom. At the same time, it also represents him relying upon and adapting one of the key ideas of *Leaves*, namely that books can, in some sense, "be" people ("[T]his is no book, / Who touches this touches a man") in order to achieve both of these (*PP* 611).

on the front and back covers with long rectangular double rules (fig. 30).<sup>33</sup> In its proportions, double-ruled as it is, the volume resembles the rectangular-shaped plain-deal coffins in which soldiers were buried. And with its poetic contents constituting a whole host of images which could stand in for the reader's lost soldier, the book's binding suggests Whitman attempting to give the blood-soaked body of the soldier back to a loving "reader" in a container customarily reserved for the dead (fig. 31). Whitman only had a few copies bound with this cover, changing it in the larger second run to a dark, blood red, and then gilding the edges of its pages not in the customary gold color, but in a deep crimson, as if to make holding the book suggestive of holding the body of a Civil War soldier, marked by "blood-dripping wounds" (*Sequel* 23).

Like the binding, the visual ornaments and typography in the book's interior evoke a sense that this book is offered as a stand-in for the material body of a soldier otherwise lost to the sphere of war. Throughout his initial printing of *Drum-Taps*, Whitman employed a set of typographical ornaments that, like the rank insignias and uniform decorations of the time period, are a curious mixture between sharp-lined spear-like ornaments and wavy, vine—like ivies (see fig. 32). Resembling chevrons of rank, as well as the striping and ivy clusters that might adorn the vests and caps of the volunteers and enlisted men, these ornaments again suggest that in its typographical construction, Whitman was seeking to make the material text evoke or represent physical attributes associated with the Civil War's soldiers.

The history of *Drum-Taps*' publication is an interesting story in its own right and reflects in many ways the volatility of the war. Whitman, who had pushed to bring the book out early in 1865, was in the process of having it printed when Lincoln was assassinated. He hurriedly included "Hush'd Be the Camps To-day" and had 100 copies of the work bound by J.M. Bradstreet & Son of New York before he stopped production entirely and added a "Sequel" section consisting of three eight-page signatures and containing his other elegies "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd" printed up – along with an additional title page introducing these "Sequel" poems. This book (with the Sequel poems included) formed the vast bulk of the objects that Whitman produced and distributed as *Drum-Taps*. (For more information see Folsom *Whitman Making Books*, and Genoways "The Disorder of Drum-Taps.")

However, even more significant than these ornaments is what Whitman selects to follow them in the book's second section where he binds in the Sequel poems. In a kind of visual narrative played out through the type itself, Whitman moves away from employing visual ornaments that resemble military symbols and replaces them with ornaments that resemble both sawn logs as well as elegantly spiraling twigs whose curling motion suggests emerging life (fig. 33). The shift from ornaments that are militaristic to ones that resemble trees and tendrils visually reminds readers that the bodies of their soldiers are the "Leaven" – to use Whitman's term – that enriches the earth and results in the growth of new life and in particular new plants. Such plants would have included the trees or cotton bushes which grew from the woods and fields where the Civil War was fought and from which pulp and paper would have been made – indeed, the very paper upon which such as book as this might be printed. It is a process he overtly invites them to think about in another of the *Drum-Taps* poems, "Pensive on her Dead Gazing I heard the Mother of All," where the Earth is charged to "absorb" the "young men's beautiful bodies," turning them into "the essences of soil and growth" with their "blood, trickling, redden'd;" soaking the "grass" and "trees, down in your roots" (Drum-Taps 71). Their bodies translated into the natural flora of the war's battlefields, these young men are essentially "[held] in trust...[and] faithfully back again give[n]" as the plants grow to fruition and become the resources that constitute the material of the book itself (71). Thus, not only in its images, but in its material construction, this text sought to mediate a sense of connectedness by inviting readers to imagine that their dead soldiers had, in some sense, been returned to them, translated into poetry and the paper of the volume itself.

## Reading Recovery

Whitman's desire to produce a book whose images and physical construction provided nineteenth-century mourners with the "trace" and the "end of life narrative" that they needed in order to mourn effectively was, in part, driven by the fact that he knew that such collaborative mourning held the power to anneal individuals across geographic, ideological, and partisan lines. In his *Drum-Taps* poem "Over the Carnage Rose a Prophetic Voice," Whitman claimed that by sharing an affective sympathy for each other a nation of readers could cohere into a group of "friends triune, / More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth" (*Drum-Taps* 49). Whitman questioned what the source of such an affective annealment would be in this poem, asking his reader, "Were you looking to be held together by lawyers? / Or by an agreement on paper? Or by arms?," and supplies an answer in the last line where he denotes that which has the power to catalyze such an annealment will be none of these, "Nay, nor the world, *nor any living thing*, will so cohere" (49, italics mine). <sup>34</sup> If coherence is to materialize, Whitman implies, it will come through the "carnage" we mutually survey, grieve, and mourn, carnage that has essentially been translated into the images and materiality of his book.

While written responses of readers to *Drum-Taps* are rather scarce, there are reviews and responses that indicate that the soldier-images presented therein functioned as a means for readers to reconnect with images of their own lost soldiers, and at least in one compelling case, of fostering a sense of shared mourning capable of uniting

Whitman's claim that an "agreement on paper" will never anneal the nation's warring factions functions on multiple levels. Overtly, of course, it is a reference to legal treaties which attempt to mediate the differences polarizing North and South, but in another register it is a subtle reminder that the power of collaborative mourning that unites (i.e., coheres or brings into "agreeance") reader and speaker is not to be found in the words printed "on" the paper, but *in* the very paper itself as it *is* the actual "unliving" thing – the dead soldier – that together they agree to mourn. With reader, author and speaker in such "agreement," even the usual necessity of wrapping loving "arms" about one another in order to console becomes arbitrary because their mutual physical connection to the book itself, the fact that both have "handled" the body of the soldier that constitutes its pages (Whitman in the book's production, the reader in its purchase) brokers an equally, if not more powerfully, consoling form of contact.

individuals across the partisan lines drawn by the Civil War. To begin, a reviewer writing in *The Radical* in April 1866 picks up on the idea that the text allows readers a kind of physical proximity to the soldiers of the war while affording them a sympathetic friend, as through the "the soft and sweet strains of sublime tenderness" found in the poem, they are able to "walk with him through some of the hospitals" ("Walt Whitman's Drum Taps"). Moreover, William Dean Howells, writing in *The Round Table* for November 11th, 1865, forewarned readers that the volume would engage them emotionally, and that they should be prepared for "Woman's tears [to] creep unconsciously to the eyes" (Howells). Finally, a review by John Burroughs appearing in The Galaxy in 1866 claimed that in Drum-Taps a reader is "not drawn to the army as a unit – as a tremendous power wielded by a single will, but to the private soldier, the man in the ranks, from the farm, the shop, the mill, the mine" (Burroughs). Indeed for him, "[T]he end contemplated by the poet....[is to raise] that exalted condition of the sentiments at the presence of death. . . [where] the mere facts or statistics of the matter are lost sight of..." (Burroughs). For Burroughs, and arguably for Howells and the reviewer in *The Radical* as well, the volume countered the war's tendency to reduce these "men" to "casualties," engendering a kind of redemptive communion among the reader, the text, the author and the lost soldier. In each of these reviews, the poetry is represented as making recuperative connections, sentimentally bringing readers into mental proximity with otherwise inaccessible soldiers and thus indexing the book's potential to mediate the type of frenzied grief and pain experienced at the complete loss of loved ones, the access working to inspire, in Burroughs words, that more "exalted condition of the sentiments" reached when the reader is, perhaps, with a loved one "at the presence of death" (Burroughs).

Similarly, a piece of correspondence Whitman received points out not only the way in which his poetry had the power to aid in the mourning process of one Southern widow, "Theresa Brown" of "Waco, Texas," but the potential his postwar text had for uniting individuals across partisan lines. For her, the volume of Civil War poetry fostered not only a strong sense of connection to her husband – a Confederate soldier who died fighting in the war – but to Whitman as well. At first glance, the letter reads rather strangely. Brown spends a significant amount of time talking about the poem that she has, in fact, sent him. However, understanding this gesture in light of a nineteenthcentury culture of mourning and memorializing makes her actions and preoccupation far more understandable. She says, "I have written sometimes what seemed poetry to me but when I tried to put it in regular harmonious order hoop it round like a barrel, as it were, the poetry was all chocked [sic] out and it fell flat and insipid from my hands. [My poem] is only a harmless conceit of a working woman . . . . My husband was a southern soldier and is dead; it seems as if it would be a sort of satisfaction to me if I could think in my mind, 'Walt Whitman has read my attempt at poetry.' I do not believe you will misunderstand my sentiment" (as qtd. in Ceniza 238). As this observation points out, what prompted Brown to write to Whitman was the fact that as a widow who had read his poetry and seemingly benefitted from the experience, she might satisfy herself – and perhaps her sense of obligation to him – by gifting him with a poem in return. As her early characterization of the poem and her final statement point out, Brown labored under no suspicions that she was indeed a talented poetess hoping for an established literary persona's notice; rather, she envisioned herself in an economy of sentimental exchange which she felt sure Whitman would "understand" because it was one he had commenced.

This sentimental economy, revolving around the exchange of poetry and thoughts of the dead, was, as Mary Louise Kete has pointed out, a staple practice of the nineteenth-

century's culture of mourning and memorializing, and the "give and take, the circulation of affections" concretized in the gifting of poems was a common means of "structur[ing] a collaboration through which individuals join together in solving the seemingly local problem of grief in the face of death" (3). Moreover, such exchange results in "the conversion [of an individual] from the isolated, dysfunctional 'one' or 'I' [who mourns], into a 'we' able to act on and promote communal interests" (54). In other words, the exchange of poetry constitutes not only an acknowledgement of the ability of Whitman's poetry to aid Brown in the process of coping with grief, but it discloses the promise such a poetry had for becoming a means through which individuals might be "affectively annealed" across even the partisan lines (Northerner and Southerner) that divided a nation recently at war with itself. Their sentimental exchange becomes a catalyst for personal healing creating, in turn, an affective (U)/union that brings together individuals on either side of a partisan divide. As such, their affective "union" models the potential that Whitman's text had for invoking a shared sense of suffering and a collaborative mourning and memorializing of the dead which itself held the potential to heal individuals and a national social body otherwise torn asunder by the violence of war.<sup>35</sup> By mourning together, Whitman seemed to promise, we can find ourselves not only reconnected to the dead we have lost, but we can see ourselves as part of a larger social and national body whose citizenry is now affectively annealed through the shared pain of grief.36

Whitman's *Drum-Taps* might thus be seen in the context of (and perhaps in some ways in contrast to) much of the popular "sentimental soldier literature," that proliferated during the war. In such literature, as Alice Fahs has noticed, "it was not an abstract notion of country that made the individual deaths of soldiers meaningful but the reverse: the suffering and death of individual soldiers themselves provided a new way of understanding...nationhood" (Fahs 119). As Fahs suggests, the death of the soldiers themselves was the catalyzing force for a new "understanding," a new "affective" basis, for "Union."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Which once again gains traction through the idea of the "imagined community." If readers, like Brown, were capable of feeling an affective connection to their own lost soldier through the text and then imagining others having a similar response, then through that projection they might envision themselves

#### Conclusion

The extravagant death-toll of the Civil War and the relative inability of many individuals to mourn the loss of loved ones in traditional ways led Civil War society to seek out ways of fostering a connection to their dead that would allow them to grieve, mourn and heal. Whitman actively sought to provide a grieving Civil War public with such means by lacing his text with a vast array of images of soldiers remarkable for the fact that they were represented in stark anonymity. The anonymous soldier images haunt the poetic landscape of *Drum-Taps* – always drawing close or being drawn close to, but never given a voice with which to tell their story and assert their personal identity. They are, in this sense, the "phantoms" that Whitman speaks of in another *Drum-Taps* poem "Hymn of Dead Soldiers," where he writes, "I chant this chant of my silent soul, in the name of all dead soldiers. / Faces so pale, with wondrous eyes, very dear, gather closer yet: / Draw close, but speak not. / Phantoms, welcome, divine and tender!" (PP 599-600, italics mine). The choice to have these dead and dying soldiers physically present, and yet remaining mute and unable to tell their story is a crucial part of Whitman's aesthetic in *Drum-Taps* – and represents an important divergence from his previous mode of representation in *Song of Myself* where its subject "Walt Whitman" is given free reign to sound his "barbaric yawp."

But just as "Song of Myself" was an attempt to cast "Walt Whitman" as a "presence forever accessible to readers of the future. . .able still to confront him, interact with him, even though death and time and space separated them," *Drum-Taps* was a similar attempt to make the Civil War's "Million Dead Summ'd Up" accessible to a grieving national readership through the reader's writerly constructions of the text's most

vital images, images created from the "the hints, the clue, the start or framework" that the text provided ((Folsom, "Poets" 282; PW, 2:245, italics mine). Moreover, Whitman's poetic self was not absent in this process; it was as present as it was in Leaves of Grass working to invite readers to view the text with their own Civil War soldiers in mind, and mediating the encounter through his page and his persona in hopes of forging recuperative connections and healing painful divides. Moreover, in its physical construction, its binding colors, typography, and visual ornamentation, Whitman's book sought to provide the reader with a kind of surrogate "physical trace" to go along with the "end of life narrative" that so many mourners were missing. In doing so, *Drum-Taps* became a means of mediating "unprecedented anguish... & suffering," and of representing "the beautiful young men, in wholesale death & agony, everything sometimes as if in blood color, & dripping blood" (Miller, Letters 109). Like Bowditch's memorial volumes which sought to represent the life and identity of his beloved Civil War soldier, Whitman's book sought to provide a means through which individual mourners could access the deceased that mattered most to them. Carried in a jacket pocket, "beneath your clothing" next to the "throbs of your heart," or resting in a parlor near the mourning portraits, samplers, and quilts representing other deceased family members, this little volume was meant to be, like Bowditch's memorial amulet and volumes, a material means of fostering a sense of perpetual connection with a soldier sent off to but never returned from war (PP 271). Like the rest of the mourning objects that proliferated during the time period, this book was, as Whitman said, "unprecedently sad," but at the same time "truly also...[it] has clear notes of faith and triumph" (Miller, Letters 109), for it was designed in hopes of re-limning both the affective bonds that tied together not only the living and the dead, but through its recognition of the power of collaborative mourning, the very nation itself.

#### **CHAPTER VI**

# AGGREGATING AMERICANS: THE POLITICAL IMMORTALITY OF WALT WHITMAN'S TWO RIVULETS

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1866, less than a year after the end of the Civil War, Reverend John G. Ames, writing in *The Independent*, a periodical *Devoted to the Consideration of* Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts, struck a chord that would resonate soundly throughout the next decade as the nation approached its centennial. In his article, Ames claimed that "[f]or more than half a year the people of the land to whom justice, liberty, and truth are dear have been rejoicing over the return of peace... civil order and good government. We have sung our paeans of victory, and we have kept our days of thanksgiving....[But now,] are we not suffering other voices – the voices of ambition, of greed, of selfishness – to drown out the sound of the divine voice[?]...The Israelites bowed down before [their] golden calf at the very foot of the thundering and burning mount whereon God was publishing his righteous laws. Is there no danger that we may be persuaded to the commission of a similar offense?" (Ames, 6). Reverend Ames, as the above quote suggests, found himself worrying that the newly re-United States of America was finding itself enamored with worldly wealth, metaphorically bowing down to the "golden calf" of commerce, and increasingly courting a post-Civil War character of "ambition...greed...[and] selfishness" – actions and qualities of character that, in Ames's estimation, were largely anti-democratic and surely anti-American (6). Such "ambition...greed...[and] selfishness," as he went on to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In "The Incorporation of America" Alan Trachtenberg investigates at length the way in which "the years of explosive growth after the Civil War" ushered in "new economic conditions [that] in fact marked a radical discontinuity with the past" a discontinuity in which profiteering and increasingly industrialized modes of production, among other things, consolidated wealth, increased the power and prevalence of forprofit corporations, exacerbated the divisions of labor, and ushered in both a "new breed of business leader" who "conducted their daily business through a growing system of managers, accountants, supervisors, lawyers" and new breeds of "industrial laborers" who "now tended to be men and women

articulate, were a true threat to the nation's vitality, every bit as real as the just-quelled threat of political dissolution, for they threatened to alter, if not degrade altogether, the very character and nature of America and democracy, making them appear as "potent forces" for economic gain for some, instead of "potent [forces] for right...for the elevation of all, for the depression and debasement of none...[for] affording justice and protection to every man, the humblest as well as the highest... for impartial and universal freedom, for truth, for righteousness, [and] for whatever is good" (6).

The chord that Ames struck in 1866, the fear that "ambition...greed...[and] selfishness" presented a real threat to democracy and America, would, as mentioned, resonate throughout the nation's newspapers and magazines through much of the next decade, gaining strength as they did so. An 1868 article appearing in *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading* attests to this. In this article, which took aim at what the author felt was an unfair and unaccounted-for rise in the price of goods, he or she lamented the increasingly "careless, slap-dash style of living here...the extravagance of the well-to-do and the squandering of the rich; with waste of materials and resources everywhere" ("Prices" 273). As the author went on to claim, "[e]ight years of business invaded and controlled by chance, and the excitement of a long and fluctuating war, have deepened these national traits" so much so that "[t]radesmen look down on modest and moderate purchasers, who ask prices, examine goods, and reflect upon bargains....They prefer the new style of dashing customers, who fling money about like princes...Such is the spirit that has traversed trade and tainted it" ("Prices," 273). Under the auspices of such greed and avarice, this author went on to claim, "Business... becomes more than

without traditional skills, operators and machine *tenders*, with little hope of significant social improvement through their own talents and effort" (Trachtenberg 54). These conditions, as Trachtenberg points out, led to an "increasingly rigid social stratification that accompanied the dramatic rise in industrial productivity" one which "confused, angered, and frustrated masses of Americans," by placing more and more emphasis on the making and spending of wealth, while at the same time, limiting the opportunities for many of those who were part of the "masses" to do so (54).

ever a big game of grab," in which the lowlier classes are "ground small between the upper and nether millstone of employer on the one hand" paying less wages than ever in order to maximize profit, and "the shopkeeper on the other" who "quadruples their old charges, and grumble[s] at that" – a problem that had become so severe that by 1874, John Swinton, labor advocate and editor for the New York *Sun*, claimed the national obsession with money and the growing disparity between rich and poor was tearing at the very fabric of our national society and undermining the fundamental ideals of a democratic America (273). In his words, "the moneyed classes...have [now] become alarmed at what they call the lower classes. The power of money has become supreme over everything. It has secured for the classes who control it, all the special privileges and special legislation which it needs to secure it complete denomination...[and this] will utterly crush the [common American] people" ("Free Thinkers," 8).

Whitman, like each of these post-Civil War Jeremiahs, was increasingly concerned with a national social body obsessed with, divided by, and finally defined by wealth. For him, democracy was not about providing a populace with opportunities to garner material wealth or "pecuniary gain," but rather, it was, in his words, a "trainer" or training ground "for immortal souls," one which served to "elevate and improve" all by bringing individuals to recognize the inestimable value, inherent worth, and immortal nature, what Whitman termed the "towering self-hood," of every individual, a training ground that was under threat because it was being misinterpreted and used more as a political means of encouraging, advancing, and securing wealth for some, rather than as a powerful means of elevating all ("Democratic Vistas" 22-23, 48). This, 'mis-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as DV, By way of note, most citations of Whitman's primary work in this chapter are taken from the *Two Rivulets* volume which itself includes the following sections, all with their own separate pagination (a fact which necessitates the following method of citation): "Two Rivulets" (hereafter TR), "Democratic Vistas" (hereafter DV), "Centennial Songs – 1876 (hereafter CS), "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free (hereafter SB), "Memoranda During the War" (hereafter MDW), and "Passage to India" (hereafter PI).

interpretation' of the true nature of democratic America and, perhaps, of what it meant to be a truly democratic American, was responsible, in Whitman's eyes, for a myriad of social problems. Indeed, by 1868, Whitman, also in *The Galaxy*, penned the first installment of what would become *Democratic Vistas* – a long prose treatise on the challenges facing democracy. In it, he detailed the ills that had arisen from the country's obsession with wealth, claiming that America's lust for "pecuniary gain" was leading its people to become "canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten" and threatening to turn them into little more than "a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians" (DV 12). As he went on to say, he felt society was becoming more and more "saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, [and] mal-administration," that America's "great cities reek[ed] with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism.... flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all," a "spectacle" he found "appalling," and one which he repeatedly claimed might be ameliorated by the songs of some "Divine Literatus" chanting – curiously enough – some "great Poem of Death" (DV 68). Whitman did not specify precisely why he felt this "great Poem of Death" would aid democratic America, nor did he, in 1868, claim to wear this mantle of "Divine Literatus" himself. Rather, he clearly stated that he felt such songs would be sung only "by some great coming Literatus, who, while remaining fully poet, will absorb whatever science indicates, with spiritualism, and out of them, and out of his own genius, will compose indeed, the great Poem of Death" (68, emphasis mine). However, by 1876, the year of the nation's centennial, the need for this "Divine Literatus" and "great Poem

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Democratic Vistas was Whitman's longest prose work on democracy, and he would republish it as a separate book in 1871 before finally giving it a home in Two Rivulets (Whitman's centennial gift to the nation in 1876, and the volume which will be the main focus of this chapter). Its original appearance was in The Galaxy, where it was slated to appear as a trilogy of essays. The first two of three essays that eventually comprised the entirety of the 1871 version of Democratic Vistas were published, the first appearing just before the 1868 New Year and entitled "Democracy," the second appearing in May of that year and entitled "Personalism." The third installment, which was written and submitted but never published in The Galaxy, was entitled "Orbic Literature."

of Death" had apparently grown so pressing that Whitman himself stepped forward to embrace this task, once again putting pen to paper to create what is arguably his most important and compelling, although until recently largely inaccessible and therefore understudied, post-Civil War volume, Two Rivulets. In this volume, his "gift" to the nation on its centennial, Whitman sought to bring his readers to an awareness of the urgent need for Democracy to be understood in light of death and immortality – something he felt would rectify the devolution of American society and democracy – and he relied extensively upon conventions and practices of mourning and memorializing in order to facilitate just such an understanding. In short, casting about for a way to counter democratic America's post-Civil War ills and provide it with the "chyle and nutriment" that it would need to enjoy "many a coming centennial," Whitman invoked the conventions integral to a nineteenth-century culture of mourning and memorializing to produce a text that, with "chants of Death and Immortality" ringing, would counter the increasing materialism, greed and social inequities of his age, working to "fuse, tie, and aggregate all" Americans together (TR 5, DV 24). Ultimately, in doing so, Whitman was working not only to preserve what he felt was the unique "democratic identity" of America and Americans, but to propel America towards the type of democratic utopia he felt it was destined to become.

#### "Something to Remember Me By:" Immortal

### Re(-)presentations of Self

Whitman's gift to the nation on its centennial was a rather curious one. For any reader familiar with the conventions of the mourning and memorial volumes that proliferated during the time period, the most striking thing about Whitman's centennial "gift," the aforementioned volume of poetry and prose entitled *Two Rivulets*, is the way in which it suggests itself, in its initial introduction as well as in its material design, as a

kind of memorial volume – in Whitman's words, a kind of "Death's book" (*TR* 5). Indeed, in the volume's opening preface Whitman asserts that he has produced this volume "[a]t the eleventh hour, under grave illness" by "gather[ing] up...pieces of Prose and Poetry" in order to leave it "to you, O unknown reader of the future 'as something to remember me by" (*TR* 5, 7). Whitman's practice of "gather[ing] up," or as he characterizes it elsewhere in the preface, "re-collat[ing]," these works in order to form a memorial object through which readers can "remember" or re-member him (i.e., reconstruct or perceive as an intact, vital entity), certainly marks the similarities between the creation of this "Death's book," and those "Death's book[s]" produced by individuals such as Harriet Gould, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. And like those "Death's book[s]" this one worked diligently not only to preserve a sense of the identity of the one being memorialized, but to assert the perpetual immortal nature of that individual, and engender a sense of affective connection between the one who possessed the volume and the one it represented (*TR* 7).

That Whitman was relying on the conventions of a culture of mourning and memorializing, specifically the conventions associated with the production of memorial albums such as Helen Eliza Garrison's, becomes apparent almost as soon as one opens the volume. The volume's first printed page, its title page, is itself preceded by a frontispiece that resonates, in curious ways, with a memorial photo like the one William

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most salient idea here is that the text serves the function of countering what death threatens to do. If death threatens an individual with the dissolution of his identity, the disintegration of every part, particle and "member" of his being, then a memorial text which calls to mind a sense of the ongoing vitality of an individual despite his material dissolution works to imaginatively "re-member" the deceased and "re-present" him, again if only affectively or imaginatively, in the temporal moment inhabited by the one doing the "remembering." The effect of such "re-membering," as nineteenth century Americans copiously testified to in their mourning poems, memorial quilts, hair weavings, etc., was essentially to assert the immortal nature, the ongoing vitality, enjoyed by the deceased, and to hold open the possibility of enjoying a continued affective connection to them. This, as the previous two chapters have shown, was certainly the work of the mourning and memorial volumes produced by Harriet Gould, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch.

Lloyd Garrison tipped into the front of the volume he produced after the death of his wife Eliza (a memorial volume printed, curiously enough, in the same year, 1876) (See fig. 28, fig 34.). Arguably, both portraits serve as a kind of visual icon through which the reader can call up the "form and look" of him or her whom they otherwise cannot see, and broker a kind of affective connection to that individual (Fox 16).<sup>5</sup> But the resonances that indicate that Whitman's presentation of this portrait is intended to serve a function similar to that which Eliza's does in hers – namely that here, in this text, what you are being presented with is intended to aid you in seeing this individual as an immortal being and facilitate a sense of affective connection to the unique individual represented – is made even clearer when he combines it with that which would foster an "intuitive apprehension of the essence of...[any] human being," namely his autograph, something which, according to the nineteenth-century's logic of handwriting as a medium of "self" expression, was capable of affecting "an almost mystical encounter between the writer of the hand and the reader of the hand, an intimate rendezvous of one soul with another" (Thornton, *Handwriting* 81). Taken together, these elements worked, as Poe suggested they would for any author in his 1841 article "A Chapter on Autography," "to bring him before us," in essence to re-present him in a reader's temporal moment and allow that reader to enjoy the aforementioned "mystical encounter" or "intimate rendezvous of one soul with another" (Poe, "A Chapter" 225; Thornton, Handwriting 81). Thus, by dedicating his book to some "unknown reader of the future," as well as tipping in his

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The most immediate way in which this connection is brokered in the Whitman photo may actually have to do with what lies at Whitman's elbow. Indeed, because *Two Rivulets* was sold with a "companion volume" (essentially a reprinting of the 1871 *Leaves of Grass*), the photo – taken in 1872 – works to encourage a kind of affective if not material connection between Whitman and the reader as it suggests the idea that perhaps the volume that the reader now holds in his or her hands is one of the very copies of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman himself had been editing, constructing, or perusing, copies which he has just set down at his elbow prior to the photo being snapped. Thus, the photo works, in essence, to collapse the temporal and physical distance between the reader and the viewer through the medium of the book itself, priming the reader to understand this text as a means whereby he or she can foster a sense of connection to Whitman despite his own bodily absence.

photograph and inscribing his signature, Whitman primed his book to function, like most mourning and memorial albums did, as a means whereby he could be seen as a kind of vital, reachable presence – a perpetually accessible being – despite what he felt was his impending physical dissolution.

Whitman's photo, signature, and the dedication of his book to "you, O unknown reader of the future as 'something to remember me by'" suggest that he anticipated that readers would be accessing this text when he was no longer physically available to be "communed" with, when he was, in a word, dead (TR 7). This realization makes the inscription that he chose to pen on each tipped-in photo even more provocative in its implications. Underneath his autograph, still in his own hand, Whitman carefully inscribed what was, in essence, the first half of the traditional epitaph that conventionally marked many a tombstone throughout the nineteenth century (and still does today), namely the date of his birth, "born May 31 / 1819." Whitman's choice is a curious one, for certainly he had the option of inscribing any date he wished – the date of the centennial, the date when he signed this particular book, the date when he officially "published" this volume – but he chose to call attention to the date of his own birth, and he did so making use of a rhetorical construction that, when read in connection with his name appearing immediately above it, "Walt Whitman / born May 31 / 1819," is identical to that which appeared on a significant number of contemporary grave markers. By choosing to invoke this construction and supply readers with that which would give them a sense of the "beginning" of the "life" of "Walt Whitman," he tacitly (or rhetorically) foreclosed the possibility of his own dissolution, holding open the "life" of "Walt Whitman," asserting his perpetual viability, his "immortality," as it were, while at the same time knowing that his readers would understand that he had, in fact, died. It is a construction, in short, that subtly asserts that regardless of whatever date a reader may, in

fact, be able to assign to the latter half of this epitaph, "Walt Whitman" is an entity essentially incapable of nonexistence.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the next line of text, the first printed line in the volume, further contributes to the notion that Whitman, regardless of his material embodiment, is destined to enjoy a kind of perpetual existence, an ongoing immortality. Directly beneath the photo lies the following bit of information, printed in type, which, following the intimate script with which the poet inscribed his "self" and proclaimed his birth, seems almost stark and impersonal, "Photo'd from life, Sept. '72, Brooklyn, N.Y. / by G.F.E. Pearsall, Fulton St. / (Printed by C.F. Spieler, Phila.)." It is the initial phrase of this added inscription, "Photo'd from life" that is itself most provocative. This phrase signifies in at least two ways, both of which are crucial to bringing readers who would have accessed this text believing or knowing Whitman to be dead to feel themselves not only connected to the individual who stares out of the text, but to envisioning him as still vital, still living, still affectively reachable regardless of whether or not he is "alive." In one sense, the phrase "Photo'd from life" connects the reader/viewer to Whitman by inviting them to "step in" to this photo and this moment of temporal existence. It invokes the viewer's imagination, asking them to see Whitman as a living, active, breathing being through the assertion that this photo represents "life." But at the same moment, the phrase "Photo'd from life" seems largely gratuitous or extraneous unless, of course, the individual depicted in the photo is no longer living. Indeed, asserting overtly that something was "Photo'd from life" really only makes sense or gains relevance when the thing depicted is no longer alive, can no longer be "Photo'd from life." Thus the printed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The dissonance between a reader's thoughts of Whitman's death and his inscription's tacit assertion that "life," in essence, persists, becomes central to the overall work that this portrait and inscription carry out, as the ensuing paragraphs will show.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This argument perhaps becomes more clear when one pauses to ask the obvious question that seemingly arises when hearing the phrase, namely "photo'd from life as opposed to what?" The answer is, of course,

phrase acts, in some sense, like the latter half of the epitaph. It asserts that what is valuable about this photo itself is the fact that the opportunity for this particular individual to be "Photo'd from life" is no longer available.

Curiously, the kind of dissonance inherent in Whitman's scripted and printed phrases (and the dissonance within the phrase "Photo'd from life" itself), now grafted onto the "living" picture, leaves the reader with the impression that Whitman is at once an accessible, vital entity, regardless of whether or not he is perceivable in the material embodiment (his body) that is depicted in the photo itself. Another way of putting this would be to say that while the portrait and the phrase "Photo'd from life" would, should they be the only elements to appear on the page, leave the reader with a sense that Whitman is being represented here as "Photo'd from life" because such a thing is no longer possible, the additional inclusion of his personal script and autograph, which "represents" his self and allows for a kind of affective or "intimate rendezvous of one soul with another," asserts his ongoing vitality, his apparent immortality and accessibility, despite his implied "death." In short, all of these elements work to create a kind of subtle dissonance that makes Whitman appear simultaneously living and dead – a dissonance that is really only resolved by granting the validity of both ideas simultaneously. Somewhat like the poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," then, Whitman's word- and imageplay here encourages a sense of haunting presence when it insinuates the fact that he is dead while at the same time leaving the reader with the impression that he is still somehow vital, vibrant, even accessible. Therefore, the work of this portrait was, when considered alongside the print and inscriptions accompanying it, remarkably similar to

<sup>&</sup>quot;photo'd from death." Thus, when Whitman makes this assertion that in this picture he has been "Photo'd from life" he is, at the same moment, always also calling to mind, however subtly, the obverse of that assertion at the same time. In other words, such a statement proclaims that this photo taken "from life" has special value because it represents something that can no longer be captured in this way, something that is, in essence, no longer capable of being "photo'd from life."

the type of work performed by most mourning portraits, such as those of Camille Mount or Virginia Poe. Certainly, Whitman is not inviting the viewers of his portrait to think of him, as Camille's or Virginia's did, in heavenly garb and enjoying an embodied, glorified afterlife, but he does assert the idea that he is a perpetually accessible individual, that regardless of his material "presence," he is still in some way vital, accessible, living or 'living on.'

The culmination of Whitman's invocation of the conventions associated with mourning and memorial volumes comes when he places an epigraph on the page directly opposite the photo, an epigraph which, again, shares noteworthy resonance with the types of epigraphs that frequently marked memorial volumes, focusing, as they overwhelmingly do, on the idea of an individual's perpetual existence, his or her "immortality." The epigraph written for Eliza Garrison is a good touchstone for comparison; hers reads, "There's not a charm of soul or brow, —/ Of all we knew and loved in thee, —/ But lives in holier beauty now, / Baptized in immortality!" In contrast, Whitman's epigraph, sitting roughly opposite his outwardly gazing visage reads, "For the Eternal Ocean bound, / These ripples, passing surges, streams of Death and Life" (Garrison i, *TR* i). Both epigraphs speak of immortality, Garrison's using the word itself in relationship to her being "now," and Whitman's more subtly, referencing an existence

Portraits are central to Whitman's work in making this book appear to a reader as a kind of "memorial" volume. Indeed, the above referenced picture is but one of three that Whitman places within the two-volume work – together forming a kind of visual memorial of the poet himself – including the 1855 McRae portrait (it also included an new engraving by English engraver William James Linton based on an 1871 photograph). Whitman's original plan was to bring together all of the previous portraits of himself that had appeared in his printed texts, thus forming a kind of narrative memorializing his own physical progression from his emergence as a poet through what he called his "physical bloom" and then decline, but he was unable to obtain the plates to the Stephen Alonzo Schoff engraving of a portrait painted by Charles W. Hine which formed the frontispiece of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (an image in which Whitman appears in an almost Byronesque pose and style of dress). The new Linton engraving substitutes for it. Taken collectively, these portraits thus not only enact a kind of visual memorial and re-collection of Whitman for any reader who peruses them, but when seen in context of the opening photograph detailed above, asserts that regardless of the progressive aging of this body and the approach of or fact of death, "Walt Whitman," in some form will, indeed does, persist.

in some "Eternal Ocean." However, when one reads Whitman's epigraph as a kind of continuation of the ideas and script laced on the previous page where he tipped-in his portrait and signature and added the phrase "Photo'd from life," this epigraph asserts Whitman's perpetuity in terms every bit as provocative as Garrison's does, essentially claiming something like, "Walt Whitman / born May 31 / 1819," here "Photo'd from Life," is now "For the Eternal Ocean bound," an identity "passing," as it were, through the "ripples" that are "Death" and "Life" along the way.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The above mentioned examples of the way in which Whitman makes use of the conventions of mourning and memorial albums in constructing Two Rivulets, or the way in which he overtly spoke of this album as a kind of mourning or memorial volume, are not the only ones. Indeed, as Whitman goes on to assert in the preface of the volume, the production of this album had, for him, many of the same effects that the production of other mourning albums did for their producers. Not only did it function to assert his own immortality, but it quite literally assuaged the pain and grief associated with death. As Whitman goes on to say, among other compelling reasons, he sought to produce and "re-collate [these writings] now...in order to partially occupy and offset days of strange sickness, and the heaviest affliction and bereavement of my life" (TR 6). Curiously, the terms which Whitman chose to describe the practice and effect of creating this volume mirror those employed by Henry Bowditch as he produced the memorial volume (discussed in the previous chapter) for his son Nathaniel. Henry Bowditch described his "collation of the letters, journals &c illustrative of [Nat's] dear young life" as assuaging bitter and bereaved feelings, and becoming a "labor [that] was a sweet one" since "[i]t took me out of myself" (as qtd. in Faust, 170). Arguably, both volumes achieved these successes by producing similar effects for their producers. Bowditch's album assuaged his grief and affliction by creating an object that preserved something of his son's identity, asserted his immortal vitality, and fostered a sense of affective connection to him, and Whitman's object assuaged thoughts of his encroaching death and his heavy "affliction and bereavement" by embodying something of his own identity in the text, an act which he used to assert his own ongoing perpetuity and foster a sense of interconnectedness between himself and "you, O unknown Reader of the future." The "affliction and bereavement" that Whitman apparently assuaged by "re-presenting" his self in this way actually references several events that had occurred over the last decade. In one sense, the "affliction and bereavement" references the effects of a stroke ("the physical affliction of a tedious attack of paralysis, obstinately lingering and keeping its hold upon me, and quite suspending all bodily activity and comfort") he suffered in January of 1873, one which had left him partially paralyzed on his left side and brought him closer to his own death than he had arguably ever been before. In this sense, Whitman's use of direct address in order to "re-present" himself and broker a kind of personal affective connection to any number of contemporary or future readers, known and unknown, also reads like an attempt to console himself about his own potential material dissolution with thoughts of his continued personal viability and existence, enjoyed, if in no other way, through the production and reading of the pages of this text. At the same moment, however, Whitman goes on to point out that the production of this text served a dual purpose in that it also assuaged his grief at the loss of his mother, a loss which had occurred in May of 1873, shortly after his own stroke. As Whitman says, "I occupy myself, arranging these pages for publication, still envelopt in thoughts of the death two years since of my dear Mother, the most perfect and magnetic character, the rarest combination of practical, moral and spiritual, and the least selfish, of all and any I have ever known, and by me O so much the most deeply loved" (TR 7). This was a devastating loss for Whitman, and yet something about his ability to "re-present" himself in this text, also allowed it to serve as a "mourning" volume that helped him deal with the grief experienced by losing her, as well. In short, Whitman's ability to "re-present" and

If on the surface Whitman's "gift" to the nation in honor of its centennial appears to be an act of extreme hubris (initially appearing to amount to little more than an "immortalization" of his own self), it was, as Whitman explained, one he engaged in for less egotistical than political reasons. 10 Indeed, in the opening preface, in fact in the very same paragraph where he characterizes the volume as a kind of personal memorial album, a "Death's book" of sorts, Whitman claimed that a volume like this, performing the work that it did, provided a most needed "chyle and nutriment to that moral, Indissoluble Union" of States, a source of nourishment capable of ensuring "many coming Centennials" for the nation that he loved (TR 5). Indeed, as Whitman said in the preface, he felt compelled to lace this book "with thoughts, or radiations from thoughts, on Death, Immortality, and a free entrance into the spirit world" because, "[i]n those thoughts....[is] set the keystone to my Democracy's enduring arch" (TR 7). However, as he went on to assert, it was not merely a sense of his immortality that was key for formulating Democracy's much needed "chyle and nutriment," but rather a sense of the immortality of all individuals. In Whitman's words, "it is no less than this idea of Immortality, above all other ideas, that is to enter into, and vivify, and give crowning religious stamp, to Democracy in the New World" (TR 6). 11 It was, for this reason, Whitman claimed, he

envision himself as a perpetually viable, affectively reachable entity also assuaged the grief of losing his own mother – arguably because such a sense of perpetual connection not only reinforced Whitman's own belief in his own immortality, but it implied something similar about his mother's, as well. For "much the same reason," Whitman also claimed that the volume would be incomplete if it did not include "the pictures from the hospitals during the war" (TR 7). Thus, the production of the volume helped assuage the grief associated with not only Whitman's impending death and his mother's actual death, but, much as Drum-Taps had done for the readers mentioned in the last chapter, this volume apparently also helped assuage Whitman's lingering grief, his latent "bereavement," over the "Million Dead" of the Civil War (7).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> In this sense the volume shares a certain resonance with the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which, as an attempt to "express my own distinctive era and surroundings, America, Democracy...was to radiate" from and "return" to, "straying however far a distance," a "body and soul, a personality" that Whitman understood had to be himself, "indeed could not be any other" (Poetry, 894).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that when Whitman calls for a more "religious" democracy and more "religious" individuals he is not arguing for greater social adherence to or participation in religious services, religious

had chosen to produce this book, Two Rivulets, and to lace in it "two altogether distinct veins, or strata" of thoughts, "Politics for one, and for the other, the pensive thought of Immortality" (TR 6). These, as he went on to explain, he had commingled broadly in the "mélange" that was the text, woven them, as it were, into its various sections (TR 5). Thus, thoughts of "Politics" were to be "found in the prose part of 'Two Rivulets,' in 'Democratic Vistas,' in the preface to 'As a Strong Bird,' and in the concluding Notes to 'Memoranda of the Hospitals,'" and the other in which thoughts of "Immortality" and "the fact of Death is admitted" was to be found in the remainder of the sections, such as "the realistic pictures of 'Memoranda,' and the free speculations and ideal escapades of 'Passage to India'" (TR 7). Bringing these together, allowing an understanding of the one to temper an understanding of the other, or, in Whitman's words, seeing them as "an interpenetrating, composite, inseparable Unity" (TR 10), held to the potential, he felt, to allow the "New World...[and] its Politics...to ascend into atmospheres and regions hitherto unknown" and to help the "Union...enter on its full Democratic career" (TR 7-8). This, then, was the larger function of this book, as Whitman asserted it, to help readers come to an understanding of their immortal nature, an understanding that, when merged with their thoughts of democracy and "Politics", would "vivify," enliven, or as he said elsewhere in the preface, "stamp the coloring finish" on, be "terminus and temperer" to, and provide the "flush and proof of our America" (TR 5-6). Such a literary project was certainly not without its challenges for a reader, for Whitman, as the above description

denominations, or particular religious doctrines. As he says in "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free," his desire for a more religious society, individuals, and poems is not "with an eye to the church-pew, or...conventional pietism, or the sickly yearnings of devotees," but rather, he hopes to activate, enliven, or tap into what he believes is that "sound Religious germenancy in the average Human [Being]" one which is found in "the widest sub-bases and inclusions of humanity, and [which always] tally[s] the fresh air of sea and land" (SB viii). Thus, for Whitman, the term signifies a kind of fundamental sense that he believes we all share, composed of "native [spiritual] yearnings and elements" and a recognition that we are all drawn from a "hardy common fibre," that we are, in Whitman's words, "as boundless, joyous, and vital as Nature itself" (SB viii).

suggests, had not simply limned out these connections for his readership, had not told them what it was specifically about an understanding and appreciation of "Immortality" that held the ability to usher in a more utopian "Democracy." But he had, he felt, provided them with what they would need to come to such an understanding for themselves and begin the process of ushering the "New World…into atmospheres and regions hitherto unknown" (*TR* 7), had given them, as he stated elsewhere in the *Two Rivulets* volume, "the hints, the clue, the start or framework" for realizing such a grand literary, political and even social project (*DV* 76).

## Natural, Spiritual Immortality

By invoking the conventions of mourning and memorial volumes in his paratext – his frontispiece, inscriptions, epigraph, and even his preface – Whitman was, in a sense, working to "prime" his readership to think of an otherwise "mortal" human as moving towards enjoying an inevitable immortality, an immortality that his poetry not only went on to claim as the unquestionable privilege of all, but which it worked to expand, nuance, and, ultimately, disclose the political potential of. Perhaps one of the most notable sections in which Whitman performs such work is "Passage to India," one of *Two Rivulets*' longest. Here, over the course of its one hundred and twenty pages, Whitman asserted the notion that every human being was possessed of an immortal soul, a soul that, like those depicted in Poe's *Eureka*, was destined to endure forever, expanding and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Indeed, of the seventy-three poems found in this particular section, Whitman speaks overtly of the "Soul" in twenty-eight of them, oftentimes at length. Moreover, the section's epigraph which Whitman prints on the section's title page, raises into the reader's mind the idea of the perpetuity and immortality of the human soul when it claims, "Gliding o'er all, through all, / Through Nature, Time, and Space, / As a Ship on the waters advancing, / The Voyage of the Soul – not Life alone, / Death – many Deaths, I sing" (*PI* i). The notion here, that we die not one, but "many Deaths" makes death, of course, not a moment of radical cessation, annihilation or dissolution, but a moment of seeming perpetual transition.

filling the cosmos as it merged into and once again became part of the larger "Oversoul" (for lack of a better term) from whence it had been drawn.<sup>13</sup>

Such ideas are an integral part of the first poem in this section, a poem which shares the larger section's title "Passage to India." As mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, this poem moves from describing the progression and advancement of human civilization to the progression and advancement of the human soul as it essentially resolves itself back into the cosmic Oversoul. Such expansive resolution of soul is

 $<sup>^{13}</sup>$  Poe, in what is perhaps a nod to his Christian upbringing denominates this Oversoul "Jehovah" – an entity that he claims we are all composite parts of and one that has dispersed itself across the universe into a myriad of spiritual/material objects (including individual human beings). However, Poe also states rather clearly (as the end of chapter two demonstrated) that this "Jehovah" was only one of an unlimited number of divine beings who have similarly dispersed themselves into their own cosmic universes. Thus, according to Poe, each universe is little more than the momentarily dissolution of a "Jehovah," a God, or an Oversoul, a dissolution inevitably marked by a corresponding resolution as the dissolute parts coalesce back into the divine being from whence they have sprung. Whitman's articulation of our pre- and after-life is remarkably similar to this idea, and, like Poe, he at times makes use of Christian imagery in order to couch these ideas in such a way that they will seem familiar, or perhaps more accessible or even less offensive, to contemporary "Christian" society – something which suggests Whitman's desire to make use of contemporary conventions (social, literary or religious) in order to find common ground upon which he could stand with readers as he led them towards what he felt was greater understanding of our immortal nature. It is important to note, however, that other scholars have seen Whitman's characterization of the afterlife in more conventional terms than those which I am proposing here. Most notable among these is Harold Aspiz in his So Long! Walt Whitman's Poetry of Death in which Aspiz proffers the idea that in his poetry Whitman tends to depict himself as "a Christ-like intervener with death....He confronts and challenges Death as an equal....[and] melts effortlessly into the realm of Death, where he loses neither his identity nor his capacity to benefit humanity nor to retain a mystic contact with generations of the living" (22). While I certainly agree with Aspiz's contention that Whitman, when imagining himself dead, conceptualizes of himself as a kind of god-like figure, I argue here (as will be seen) that Whitman is attempting to lead readers to a conceptualization of "immortality" that does not include a kind of individualized, spiritual afterlife in which every being persists solely in their own individuality, perpetually cordoned off as a individuated, personal "identity" distinct from every other, but rather that every individual self is only a kind of momentary formulation, a temporary material and spiritual articulation that has cohered as an individual for a time, but which is destined to merge back into the great well of Soul and Nature (the physical and spiritual which, in Whitman's formulation are perhaps merely grades of the same thing, fundamentally inextricable from one another) from which they have been momentarily drawn. Death, in such a formulation, thus becomes less a source of dissolution than re-solution, freeing us to expand from being merely individuated material and spiritual units to being coterminous with the perpetual Life ("God," Jehovah," the "Oversoul") filling the Kosmos – an idea that makes Whitman's bombastic claim to be "Walt Whitman, one of the roughs, a Kosmos" perhaps more understandable (PP 28).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> For those unfamiliar with the poem, its initial sections are marked by a kind of celebration of the voyage of Columbus as he takes ship and sails for "India," the "New World." However, as the above section indicates, this historical voyage quickly becomes, in Whitman's hands, a starting point for his own

described by Whitman in the eleventh section of the poem where he suggests, using language that maintains the trope of "exploration" that marks the initial sections of the poem, that at the moment of death, when the soul "launch[es] out on trackless seas," it essentially suffuses "through the regions infinite" becoming part of the "Nameless... / Light of the light," "mightier center of the true, the good, the loving!... / motive of the stars, suns, systems," the Cosmic Oversoul or omnipresent "God" (13). As the soul thus becomes part of the "Nameless" "Light of the light," the immortal Oversoul, "center of the true" and "motive of the stars," it moves beyond being merely an integral part of one individual, "Walt Whitman," to become the "kosmos" mentioned in "Song of Myself." Whitman reiterates this idea only a few pages later when again imagining the moment "ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd / (The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done)" are "[s]urroundest, copest, frontest [by] God," "filled, with friendship, love complete, [as] the Elder Brother found, / The Younger melts in fondness in his arms" (14). Such suffusion, merger or "melt[ing]" essentially allows the "soul, thou actual Me" to expand as seemingly wide and effusively as the Oversoul does, the one now indissociable from the other, a fact which permits that S/soul to "gently masterest the orbs, / ... smilest content at Death, / And fillest, swellest full, the vastness of Space" (13). It is a vision of expansive immortality so enticing that the still body-bound poet imagining it cries out for his own immediate death in ecstatic anticipation, proclaiming, "Passage – immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins! / Away, O soul!, hoist instantly the anchor! / Cut the hawsers – haul out – shake out every sail!... / Sail forth! steer for the deep waters only!... / O farther, farther, farther sail!" (15).

Several other poems in the "Passage to India" section also describe the immortality of the soul and assert its ultimate destiny to become an integral part of the

exploration of death, the afterlife, and what he feels must be the voyage of the "soul" from individual to "kosmos."

larger Oversoul. Perhaps one of the most salient examples is "Poem of Joys." This poem, which declares itself one of many "carols of Death," begins by asserting the imminent "joy of my spirit" to be experienced when "it is uncaged" and freely "darts like lightning! / ...to have [not only] this globe, or a certain time – / ...[but] thousands of globes, and all time" (43). Freed from the limits of the body, allowed to "dart" forth at death to become part of "thousands of globes" and to exist for "all time," the individuated soul "emerge[s]...[to] be of the sky – of the sun and moon, and the flying clouds, as one with them" and "to realize space! The plenteousness of all – that there are no bounds" that can now rein that S/soul in. Such immortality, enjoyed, as Whitman says, when death makes one "indeed a God" permeating all (51), also marks a poem like "Darest Thou Now, O Soul" in which Whitman, again speaking to his "soul" in the way he had done in the poem "Passage to India," asserts that his soul, at death, "walk[s] out...toward the Unknown Region" where all "the ties loosen, / All but the ties eternal," and where neither "darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds, bound us." The unbounded soul, much as it was described in "Poem of Joys," thus "burst[s] forth... / In Time and Space" and becomes "equal" or coterminous with them, immortally and immeasurably suffused in them, able "them to fulfill" (i.e, "fully fill them") at last (64). 15

 $<sup>^{15}</sup>$  In addition to the poems just brought forward, I would like to call to mind those "Passage to India" poems, "Chanting the Square Deific" and "Assurances," which I mentioned briefly in chapter two, poems which also confirm the notions I am exploring here. As mentioned previously, in "Chanting the Square Deific" Whitman claims that his destiny, like that of all living, is to be an integral component of "the light, lighter than light" the "Ethereal, pervading all," the "I, the general Soul" (62). Indeed, in that poem he claims that "I" am a central component of this "general Soul," this Oversoul or "God" that permeates all – a component so central that, in his words, "without me, what were all? what were God?" (62). "Assurances" similarly claims that "I do not doubt I am limitless, and that the universes are limitless... / I do not doubt that the orbs, and the systems of orbs, play their swift sports through the air on purpose – and that I shall one day be eligible to do as much as they, and more than they" for, as he goes on to say, "I do not think Life provides for all, and for Time and Space – but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all" (65-66). In short, Whitman asserts, our "Heavenly Death[s]" will certainly provide a means whereby we will "transcend" the limits of our own bodies and our own mortality to become part of the divine Oversoul that permeates even the very "systems of orbs" that constitute the universe throughout all "Time and Space," and in becoming this Oversoul, the poem says, we will one day "be eligible to do as much as [these orbs], and [even] more than they" (65-66).

Whitman forwards these ideas in other sections of *Two Rivulets* as well. Indeed, the poem "Song of the Universal," found in the "Centennial Songs" section, makes the claim that all are destined to enjoy an existence in which they merge into the larger "Universal" Oversoul when it claims in its opening stanza that it is the purpose of this poem to "Sing me the Universal" (or, in other words, "Sing me[,] the Universal," another reiteration, of sorts, of Whitman's claim in "Song of Myself" to sing "Walt Whitman...a kosmos"). 16 Whitman goes on to expand upon this otherwise succinct assertion when he claims that it is the destiny of "the Soul" to undergo what he here terms a "mystic evolution," in which individuals are freed from their bodies, "from their masks, no matter what," and allowed "to emerge" "[e]lectric...cleaving, suffusing all," by becoming part of the "Universal" Oversoul, one that enjoys "deific...amplitudes" and is capable of "absorbing, comprehending all" (16). 17 Moreover, the "Two Rivulets" section of the larger volume also brings forward this notion in poems like "Eidolons" and "Two Rivulets" (the latter of which I will return to shortly). Indeed, "Eidolons" essentially asserts that the destiny of every unique individual being is to fuse "the real I myself, / An image, an Eidolon," or idealized soul, into the larger Universal "Eidolon" – i.e., the "God," or Oversoul spoken of elsewhere in his *Two Rivulets* poetry. As Whitman states in the poem, at death, it is the destiny of "thee, My Soul" to experience "[j]oys, ceaseless exercises, exaltations" as it "meets, / Thy mates, Eidolons" in the merge of soul(s) into

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> A synonym for what Whitman sometimes calls "God" and what I have been calling the "Oversoul."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> A similar notion of individuals becoming or suffusing themselves into the "Universal" Oversoul is found in "The Mystic Trumpeter," part of the "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free" section. In this poem, Whitman, looking for something to "Rouse up my slow belief" asks to be given "some vision of the future / ...its prophecy and joy" (*SB* 11). In response, Whitman hears the voice of the "divine" "trumpeter" tattooing forth a "glad, exulting, culminating song!," "[m]arches of victory – man disenthrall'd – the conqueror at last," "Hymns to the universal God, from universal Man" (12). The suggestion that "Man" is ultimately as "universal" as "God" leads Whitman to end the poem with exclamatory ejaculations of "Joy! Joy! all over Joy!" (12).

Oversoul, a re-union out of which a "round, full-orb'd Eidolon," "rising at last and floating" forth as the aggregate of all emerges.

This poem is an especially curious one because it appears in the initial section of the volume, also entitled "Two Rivulets," a section in which Whitman's invitation to readers to bring their understanding of the joint immortality to be inherited by all to bear upon their political thinking is most overtly and provocatively realized. Indeed, this poem appears, as all the poems in the initial "Two Rivulets" section do, on the same page as a "rivulet" of prose does (thus the page itself visually represents an aspect of the "Two Rivulets" spoken of in the section's and volume's title) (Fig. 35). However, while the "rivulet" of poetry speaks overtly of death and immortality – which Whitman indicated it would in the preface – the prose speaks of "politics," asking where is that "glowing, blood-throbbing, religious, social, emotional" idea that can produce a "fusion or mutuality of love" between the members of "these States," a "fusion or mutuality" capable of mending society's ills by fostering a "rapport of interest, between the comparatively successful rich, and the great masses of the unsuccessful, the poor" (TR 17). It is an unusual presentation of prose and poetry which, when conflated, reads something like a call and answer with the query propounded by the prose at the bottom of the page answered, as it were, in the poem above, which proclaims that perhaps the "fusion or mutuality of love" that is wanting, the thing capable of fostering a "rapport of interest" between otherwise disparate individuals and classes lies, at least in part, in the recognition that we have all derived from and are destined to be resolved back into that "round, full-orb'd Eidolon" that aggregates all.

As the poetry of "Eidolons" and its accompanying prose paragraph hint, Whitman believed that bringing readers to a realization that we are all destined to enjoy a kind of joint immortality held important political implications for democracy and America. But

the kind of "spiritual" immortality that has been illuminated so far was really only one half of the immortality that Whitman wished his readers to understand and to bring to bear upon their political thinking. Indeed, if there was – in the "Passage to India," "Centennial Songs," "As A Strong Bird on Pinions Free," and the "Two Rivulets" sections of the volume – a demonstrated desire on Whitman's part to bring readers to a sense of the soul's ongoing, perpetual immortality, the "mystic evolution" in which that soul suffuses into Oversoul, there was an equally provocative and profound attempt on Whitman's part to help readers see and appreciate their "immortality" in light of "Modern Science." Indeed, in the very same section quoted from previously, wherein Whitman stated that he wished to "end my books with thoughts, or radiations from thoughts, on Death, Immortality, and a free entrance into the Spiritual world" because in these was "set the key-stone to my Democracy's enduring arch" he specifically claimed that "[i]n those thoughts" he would "make the first steps toward the mighty theme" of immortality by addressing it not only from the point of view of the ongoing spiritual vitality of every individual, but "from the point of view necessitated…by Modern Science" (*TR* 6-7).

The "point of view" afforded by "Modern Science" is arguably that found in those "Passage to India" poems such as "Leaves of Grass: A Carol for Harvest, 1867," "Poem of Joys," "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing," and "Camps of Green," as well as in his prose section "Memoranda During the War." Taken together, these suggest to readers that they are not only destined for an immortal existence, but that their material bodies, the physical "stuff" from which they are literally made, will and in fact already does enjoy a kind of perpetuity, a "material" immortality that complements the spiritual immortality that Whitman illumined elsewhere in the section. "Poem of Joys" raises this into view for a reader when it proclaims, rather boldly, that death is essentially the "discharging [of] my excrementitious body, to be burned, or render'd to powder, or buried" (*PI* 50).

Thus the "beautiful touch of Death," Whitman goes on to claim, allows "my voided body, nothing more to me" to return "to the purifications, further offices, eternal uses of the earth" (50). These "eternal uses of the earth" are spelled out more specifically in a poem like "Leaves of Grass: A Carol for Harvest, 1867," where the body is essentially transmuted into new forms of life. Indeed, in this poem, Whitman sings "a song of the good green grass! / A song no more of the city streets; / A song of farms – a song of the soil of fields. / A song of the smell of sun-dried hay... / A song tasting of new wheat, and of fresh-husk'd maize" (PI 87). And while initially it appears as though this "Carol for Harvest' exists only to celebrate the agricultural fervor of a new generation of post-Civil war farmers, its continued insistence on the tie between "[f]ecund America" and the soldiers of the Civil War operates to bring into view the fact that the "soil of the fields," the "new wheat" and the "fresh husk'd maize" have emerged, as it were, in response to the deaths of the soldiers who died there. As Whitman says, in those "red, shuddering fields" upon which the battles of the war were fought, "[m]elt, melt away, [the] armies! Disperse, [the] blue-clad soldiers" (PI 91). These, he goes on to say "fit well in Nature; / They fit very well in the landscape, under the trees and grass, / And along the edge of the sky, in the horizon's far margin" (PI 90), an idea that Whitman endorses not only in his poetry, but in his prose as well. Indeed, in "Memoranda During the War" Whitman ends the main body of his text by proclaiming that "ten years and more have passed away since that War...[with] its wholesale deaths, burials, graves," deaths which have resulted in "grass, clover, pine trees, orchards, forests," and have made "even the battle trenches" "peaceful and...beautiful" as they "trace" the "line, over which so many brave soldiers pass'd to...eternity" (58). 18 Such poetry and prose raise into view the idea that on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> In a curiously resonant and suggestive moment which reinscribes the cyclical nature of Nature, the immortality of its material, the "Centennial Songs" poem "Song of the Redwood Tree" depicts the voice of the dying redwood singing out that it yields its life not "mournfully…/[But] [w]ith Nature's calm content, and tacit huge delight, / We welcome what we wrought for through the past, / And leave the field for them /

most elemental of levels, our bodies enjoy a kind of immortal perpetuity. They are not "destroyed" at death any more than our souls are, but, as "Modern Science" would suggest, they serve "further offices," the "eternal uses of the earth" as immortal material "traces" that persist, and are perpetually recycled, in the wake of our individual lives (*PI* 50).<sup>19</sup>

While a poem like "Leaves of Grass: A Carol for Harvest, 1867" depicts the bodies of the dead transmuting into the "good green grass," the "new wheat" and the "fresh huck'd maize," the most important of these "further offices" and "eternal uses" that Whitman seeks to bring to readers' minds is found, perhaps, in "Camps of Green" where the celebration of the "grass" grown from the "red-shuddering fields" into which the bodies of the dead "fit well" essentially serves to tie the living to the dead on a molecular level, making us essentially the "afterlife" of those who have gone before us. In the poem, the "camps of white" that once marked where the soldiers bivouacked, fought, and subsequently died in the battles of the Civil War, have, as Whitman narrates it, been transmuted into "camps of the tents of green," camps which "the days of war [kept] filling" and which, perhaps even now, "the days of peace keep filling" (PI 28). These "tents of green," the "green grass," "new wheat," and emergent "maize" mentioned previously, spring from the earth to be eaten, and to become part of "the parents, children, husbands, wives...young and old" that exist now (28). In these now-living

<sup>....</sup>In them these skies and airs – these mountain peaks – Shasta – Nevadas, / These huge precipitous cliffs – this amplitude – these valley's grand – Yosemite, / To be in them absorb'd, assimilated" (13). Bringing this poem together with one like "Carol for Harvest" thus provides a reader with an image of the emergence and return of the earth's "immortal material" across time, space, and even species.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> A fact which also suggests to a reader the notion that the much longed for and desired "trace" of the otherwise lost dead – even the dead of the Civil War – is to be found not only in a book like *Drum-Taps* or even *Memoranda During the War*, but may be found virtually everywhere, even in the very air that they breathe, for the entirety of Nature, the very earth itself, functions, according to what Whitman suggests here, somewhat like a mourning object, using "traces" of the deceased to link together the living and the deceased.

individuals, Whitman claims, you can nevertheless "[b]ehold the mighty bivouac-field," the "corps and generals all, and the President over the corps and generals all." Here, embodied in the living, as it were, the deceased "President," or "generals," or "corps," and the living wife, husband, parent, or child "without hatred...all meet" (28). Nor is this all, for as Whitman goes on to say at the poem's end, it is only "presently...[that] we too camp in our place in the bivouac-camps of green" (*PI* 29), for like the soldiers, generals and President, "we" will one day give our own bodies to these "tents of green," we will bequeath our own material "selves" to the ground to serve the aforementioned "eternal uses of the earth" while our souls go on to become part of some indescribably grand "mystic army" (*PI* 28).

Such ideas are also at the core of Whitman's famous poem "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing, I Heard the Mother of All," also included in the "Passage to India" section.<sup>20</sup> Here, the otherwise unidentified "Mother of All," charges the earth to "lose not my sons! lose not an atom" (*PI* 30). Indeed, in the requiem that follows, the "Mother of All" sings out to the earth, pleading with it to do as follows:

[Y]ou streams, absorb them well, taking their dear blood; And you local spots, and you airs that swim above lightly, And all you essences of soil and growth – and you, my rivers' depths; And you, mountain sides-and the woods where my dear children's blood, trickling, redden'd;

And you trees, down in your roots, to bequeath to all future trees,
My dead absorb – my young men's beautiful bodies absorb – and their
precious, precious, precious blood;

Which holding in trust for me, faithfully back again give me...,
In unseen essence and odor of surface and grass, centuries hence;
In blowing airs from the fields, back again give me my darlings – give my immortal heroes...

2

As noted in the previous chapter, this poem was originally published as part of *Drum-Taps*, where its meaning was framed by the occasion of its production, its situatedness with the rest of the *Drum-Taps* poems, and the materiality of the text itself, which, as the last chapter showed, encouraged a reader to interpret the poems in certain ways. Relocated in this collection a decade later, a collection which itself was constructed to respond to a somewhat different set of concerns than those that preoccupied him in 1866, the poem of a necessity takes on a certain resonance that was perhaps more muted, though arguably nevertheless present, in the 1866 version.

Exhale them perennial, sweet death, years, centuries hence. (*PI* 30)

This poem, when seen in light of the other poems that Whitman laces throughout the "Passage to India" section – poems specifically designed, as he stated in the preface, to bring individual readers to contemplate the idea of "Immortality" – raises into view the idea that our otherwise "mortal" bodies are nevertheless made up of perpetual, immortal stuff. Taken together, poems such as "Camps of Green," "Song of Joys," "Leaves of Grass: A Carol for Harvest, 1867" and "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing," along with the prose of "Memoranda During the War," collectively work to bring readers to recognize that despite death, we "lose not an atom" of our material bodies, that rather these are transmuted into the very "essences of soil and growth" and give rise to the aforementioned "green grass," "new wheat," "fresh-husk'd maize," or even the sweet "odor" of the "air" itself. Such ideas, framed by the preface as a kind of discourse on "Immortality," assert to readers that the "atom[s]" of their material selves are not only essential parts of their own "selves," but that they have been, and will be, essential components of other individuals as well.

Throughout "Passage to India" and in "Memoranda During the War" then, Whitman worked to help readers understand and appreciate both themselves and all others as joint-inheritors of what might be termed a "material immortality," one in which the very materiality of their physical bodies held the potential to link them to countless others in the past, present, and future, because those bodies were made of the very elements of the earth that had sprung from the death of other plants, animals, even other human beings. In doing so, he was striving to open up to view the radical possibility that "you" and he might share atoms, and which is more, that "you" and those around you, if even by virtue of the fact that you both breathe the air which Whitman suggests is laced with the atoms of the dead (from, perhaps, the world over), descend, in effect, from the same material being. Moreover, since you will both bequeath your bodies back to the

earth, there is the potential that "you" will be united with that "other" in some future moment as both of you materially "become" another being – a being that, despite being a unique, individual "self" will also be, in essence, an aggregate of many former material "selves."

While such thoughts proliferated throughout the "Passage to India" section, and even "Memoranda During the War," this was not the only location in which they were to be found. Indeed, the very first poem of the volume, also entitled "Two Rivulets," is a short fourteen line meditation that resonates strongly with these central ideas (a poem from which Whitman excerpted the epigraph spoken of early in this chapter). Indeed, the poem revolves around the idea that "In you, whoe'er you are, my book perusing, / In I myself – in all the World" flow "Two Rivulets" or "ripples, passing surges, streams of Death and Life" (TR 15) These "streams of death and life," the immortal material and previously mentioned immortal spirit that supposedly make up who we are, serve to carry "you," "I Myself" and indeed, "all the World," as Whitman articulates it, towards "some mystic Ocean" that arguably represents the larger well of Nature and Oversoul from whence we are drawn and to which we return (15). Such thoughts, which are laced throughout the volume from its opening poem to its closing section, were not, however, merely intended to serve as metaphysical and materialist flights of poetic fancy, for as Whitman asserted in his preface and as I mentioned earlier, he wished for readers to bring such thoughts to bear upon their political thinking – something that Whitman made obvious in regards to this poem when he penned a second "rivulet" of prose beneath it (fig. 36).

In this prose section, Whitman complemented his poetic discourse on the joint material and spiritual immortality we share with a paragraph entitled "Thoughts for the Centennial." In it, Whitman asserted that thoughts of immortality, despite the fact that

they have preoccupied "all nations, all civilizations, all centuries and times," are now in need of being "receive[d]...cheerfully, and...give[n]...ensemble, and a modern American and Democratic physiognomy" (*TR* 15). Thus, when taken together, Whitman's "Two Rivulets" poem suggests itself as the much needed "modern American and Democratic" understanding of "immortality" that Whitman claims we stand in need of. Moreover, since the poem and the prose foster a kind of unity of meaning when brought together – a unity easily perceived when placed in such close proximity to one another – the poetry and prose of this section functions like a primer, priming a reader to do the larger work Whitman suggests they do in the preface, namely read "across" the various genres and even sections of the work bringing the insights they gain from reading one section of poetry or prose, such as "Passage to India" or "Memoranda During the War," into their reading of other sections of his work, such as "the prose part of 'Two Rivulets,'" the "preface to 'As a Strong Bird," the "concluding Notes to 'Memoranda of the Hospitals,'" and, perhaps most importantly, "Democratic Vistas.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Arguably the entirety of the initial section of *Two Rivulets* works in this fashion, with the poetry and prose laced together to produce, for the reader willing to weave together the meanings of both, new cumulative meanings. While I have demonstrated this with the "rivulets" found accompanying poems such as "Two Rivulets" and "Eidolons," similarly provocative meanings arise for virtually all the poems in the section. "Out From Behind This Mask" is another compelling example. The poem itself, in which the individual, in language that metaphorically resonates as a moment of death, steps "[o]ut from behind this bending, rough-cut mask" this "condensation of the Universe," in order to "launch and spin through space revolving," becoming at one with the "round full orb'd Eidolon" or Oversoul mentioned previously, is matched with a section of prose that declaims that the existence of any "Individualities" ultimately "depends on a compacted Imperial ensemble," a fact which is of "importance... [to] the identities of These States" and demonstrates the necessity of their existence as "a thoroughly fused, relentless, dominating Union" (TR 24). This poem and prose mélange is also interesting because it overtly ties itself to a portrait of Whitman and his poem "The Wound-Dresser" in Two Rivulets's companion volume Leaves of Grass, when it states underneath its title that it is "to confront My Portrait, illustrating 'The Wound Dresser' in Leaves of Grass" (TR 24). Such an statement invites the reader to continue to bring the insights gleaned when reading "Out From Behind This Mask" and its accompanying prose section to bear on a poem like "The Wound Dresser" (commented on at length in the last chapter), which depicts Whitman ministering to the soldiers of the Civil War. Such an invitation not only suggests that perhaps Whitman felt that this type of "political" understanding of "self" and "immortality" bore some direct relation to the work he did in the hospitals during the Civil War, but is also serves to invite readers to continue engaging in the type of reading practices that he has "primed" them to engage in the preface and page structure of Two Rivulets reading not only across the genres and sections of this volume, but across volumes as well. Such an

# The Politics of Death

It was in this last work, *Democratic Vistas*, quoted in the introduction to this chapter, that Whitman delineated most forcefully the challenges that he felt faced the nation in the wake of the Civil War, and, in doing so, ultimately suggested to his readers how the insights gleaned from hearing his chants of "Death and Immortality," or as he denominated them in this work, "Poems of Death," might help the nation overcome these challenges. In its opening pages, it will be remembered, Whitman articulated his belief that a post-Civil War obsession with "pecuniary gain" was turning America into a society "canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten" and Americans into little more than "a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians" (DV 11). This, according to Whitman, was leading to a society marked by "corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration," "reek[ing] with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism" as well as "flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims," and a great disparity between the rich and the poor (DV 12). Nothing, Whitman believed, could counter the devolution of society into such "vulgarism" short of bringing individuals to an understanding, in his words, of "the fresh, eternal qualities of Being" – in short, a recognition of that "immortal" nature, both spiritual and material, which they possessed (DV 48). In Whitman's words, coming to a sense of these opened up to view the "towering self-hood" of every individual, a "self-hood" he described as "not physically perfect only" nor "satisfied with the mere mind's and learning's stores," but one "religious, possessing the idea of the infinite" and acknowledging "that, finally, the personality of mortal life is most important with reference to the immortal, the unknown,

expansive and provocative invitation, which I have done little more than expose in this analysis, is worthy of a more lengthy and substantive investigation than I can possibly conduct here and will be returned to at some future moment (fig. 37).

the spiritual, the only permanently real, which as the ocean waits for and receives the rivers, waits for us each and all" (DV48).

A recognition of this "towering self-hood" erected, according to Whitman, "a lofty and hitherto unoccupied framework or platform, broad enough for all, eligible for every farmer and mechanic – to the female equally with the male" (48). Seeing oneself and others in this larger, more "towering self-hood" – as "selves" whose material and spiritual nature quite literally "towered" over the bounds of their own mortality – would, if only realized and understood, Whitman felt, act as a "rudder and compass sure amidst this troublous voyage, o'er darkest, wildest wave, through stormiest wind, of man's or nation's progress" for it would provide all "known humanity, in deepest sense...[a] fair adhesion to Itself' (48). In short, Whitman believed that as we came to see each other in our larger, towering "self-hood[s]" – as beings whose physical bodies were drawn from a common, immortal source and as souls destined to "shine out again" "more immortal even than the stars," fused, merged, "melt[ed]" together in the larger Oversoul, as it were - it would, despite differences of class, gender, occupation, race, etc., allow us to see ourselves as existing on a common "platform" and catalyze a "fair adhesion" of one individual to another, encouraging individuals to feel themselves "bound," via a shared material inheritance and a common spiritual and material destiny, to every other (PI, 84). Feeling bound to one another in this way would ultimately foster a sense of appreciation, or in Whitman's words, "love" for one another, that would rectify democracy's and America's current ills. As Whitman stated, it was the "development, identification, and general prevalence...[of this] adhesive love" that would "counterbalance and offset...our materialistic and vulgar American Democracy, and [work] for the spiritualization thereof' (DV 61). Such adhesive love, in his words, not only "underlies the lessons and ideals of the profound saviors of every land and age...[but] seems to promise, when

thoroughly developed, cultivated and recognized...the most substantial hope and safety of the future of these States," for when run "like a half-hid warp through all the myriad audible and visible worldly interests of America," it would bind individuals with "threads of...friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown," threads of friendship or love which, he confidently asserted, would not only give "tone to individual character...making it unprecedently emotional, muscular, heroic, and refined" but would do the same for "general politics" as well (*DV* 61).

Ultimately then, Whitman believed that the solution to America and democracy's ills lay in cultivating an "Adhesiveness or Love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades, and fraternizing all," an "Adhesiveness" Whitman went on to say, that was birthed, enlivened, or "vitalized" when an appreciation of both the "material....[and] religious element[s]" of our nature, a sense of the shared immortal nature and destiny of all, was "at the core of Democracy" (*DV* 24). Such an understanding and adhesiveness, Whitman felt, held the potential to "bind...all men...into a brotherhood, a family," a family less concerned with "pecuniary gain," "robbery and scoundrelism," "flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, [and] small aims," as a love and appreciation of one another and a desire to create a more utopian social sphere that, in essence, encouraged, appreciated, and reflected the "towering self-hood" of each of its members – a "towering self-hood" Whitman had worked diligently in the poetry and material construction of the larger *Two Rivulets* volume, to bring them to sense and understand (*DV* 24).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Whitman's use of the term "family" in this instance is a curious one simply because of the way it expands the idea of the word, making it resonate not only with the more standard scientific and perhaps religious idea that humanity has descended from a kind of common ancestor, but also the idea that we are tied together through our shared molecular makeup and our spiritual identity and destiny. These, as much as genetic inheritance, Whitman seems to assert, make humanity into "a family," according to the logic he proffers here.

This larger democratic family, bound together in body and spirit, was copiously and eagerly described by Whitman in *Democratic Vistas* and elsewhere, and served as a kind of prophetic literary vision of what America's democratic society might be like if individuals were brought to see themselves and others in light of their own "towering self-hood," their own immortal identities. Indeed, Whitman explained, at length, as follows in *Democratic Vistas*:

[I]n These States, for both man and woman, we must entirely recast the types of highest personality...[and while allowing] the old undying elements [to] remain...adjust them to new combinations, our own days. Nor is this so incredible. I can conceive of a community...in which, on a sufficient scale, the [se] perfect personalities, without noise, meet; say in some pleasant Western settlement or town, where a couple of hundred best men and women, of ordinary worldly status, have by luck been drawn together, with nothing extra of genius or wealth, but virtuous, chaste, industrious, cheerful, resolute, friendly, and devout. I can conceive of such a community organized in running order, powers judiciously delegated, farming, building, trade, courts, mails, schools, elections, all attended to; and then the rest of life, the main thing, freely branching and blossoming in each individual, and bearing golden fruit. I can see there, in every young and old man, after his kind, and in every woman after hers, a true personality, developed, exercised proportionally in body, mind, and spirit....[S]ome such community...practically fulfilling itself, and thus outvying...cheapest vulgar life, [would surpass] all that has been hitherto shown in the best ideal pictures. (DV 47)

As Whitman explained to his readers, when brought to a sense of their "highest personality," their "towering self-hood" in which "the old undying elements [spiritual, and material] remain" visible, men and women will form communities that, reflecting the aggregate selves that people them, will be "virtuous, chaste, industrious, cheerful, resolute, friendly, and devout" (47). Peopled with such individuals, such communities cannot fail, Whitman suggests, to run in an orderly manner with "powers judiciously delegated" and "all [needful things] attended to" (47). Indeed, such communities, he assures, cannot help but succeed in "outvying...[the] cheapest vulgar life" that he had previously lamented too many Americans were living, ushering in a kind of social and

political utopia that would surpass "all that has been hitherto shown in the best ideal pictures" (47).

Whitman articulated similar ideas throughout the various sections of *Two* Rivulets, inviting readers to share in his faith that an understanding of their larger, more "towering self-hood" would inevitably result not only in a more "virtuous, chaste, industrious, cheerful, resolute, friendly, and devout" people, but a nation as well. Indeed, in the culminating paragraphs to his "Notes" to "Memoranda During the War" (one of several sections Whitman drew to his reader's attention in the preface, claiming that the thoughts brought forward here and the understanding of immortality cultivated in the volume's other sections needed to be seen as an "interpenetrating, composite, inseparable Unity" (TR 10)), he claimed that an "individual becomes truly great who understands well that, (while complete in himself in a certain sense,) he is but a part of the divine, eternal scheme...[with] life and laws...adjusted to move in harmonious relations with the general laws of Nature...and sublimed with the creative thought of Deity, through all time, past, present and future" (MDW 67). Such individuals, Whitman said, will not only "expand to the amplitude of their destiny, and become splendid illustrations and culminating parts of the Kosmos, and Civilization" but so too will "those Nations, and so the United States" when peopled with such individuals (67).<sup>23</sup> Whitman returned to this idea in "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free" when he claimed that an understanding of

the day when...qualified Mechanics, and young men will reach Congress and other official stations, sent in their working costumes, fresh from their benches and tools, and returning again to them with dignity. The young fellows must prepare to do credit to this destiny, *for the stuff is in them*" (*TR* 30, emphasis mine).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Similar ideas mark Whitman's other "Political" sections of *Two Rivulets*. For example, in "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free" Whitman claimed that an understanding of "the life of the present and the future makes undeniable demands upon us each and all....[and] will help put the United States (even if only in imagination) hand in hand, in one unbroken circle in a chant – To rouse them to the unprecedented grandeur of the part they are to play, and are now even playing" (*SB* ix). And while the following quote from the opening "Two Rivulets" section is more cryptic, it too seems to suggest that an understanding of our intrinsic nature (our material and spiritual immortality) would foster remarkable social and political change. In a section entitled, "Rulers Strictly Out of the Masses," Whitman claimed that "I expect to see

"Thee in thy future; / Thee in thy only permanent life...thy own unloosen'd mind – thy soaring spirit" will engender an "America – radiant" full of "larger, saner breeds of Female, Male," a "[l]and tolerating all – accepting all.../[a] [l]and in the realms of God" (4-5). It was an America, Whitman went on to proclaim, that would thus be marked by an "[e]quable, natural, mystical Union," one whose ability to unify society socially and politically (as *the* "Union") is derived not so much from any legal document, but from those affective bonds which Whitman believed would inevitably arise as we realize that materially and spiritually we are, in essence, aggregates of a larger whole (a "Universal" "Union") (6). Or, as he suggested in the "Centennial Songs" poem "Song of the Exposition," it would be a "Union" capable of "fusing, absorbing, tolerating all" because it would be peopled with a "swarm of offspring towering high" in their self-hood – i.e., their shared immortality, their knowledge of "[o]ne common indivisible destiny, for All" (9).

This, then, was the promise of coming to a greater understanding and recognition of the "towering self-hood," the spiritual and material immortality, that all shared. Feeling "bound" to one another (through the very material "stuff" from which they were made and through their shared spiritual immortality) would foster, so Whitman believed, a sense of "fair adhesion" powerful enough to counter their obsession with "pecuniary gain," their tendencies towards "corruption, bribery, falsehood... robbery and scoundrelism... small aims, or no aims," and lead them to "expand the amplitude of their destiny" and "become splendid illustrations" of individual and collective humanity. As individuals "expand[ed] the amplitude" of their thinking about themselves and others – appreciating all for their larger "destiny," becoming more "divine, eternal" examples of humanity – so too, Whitman believed, would America itself, by virtue of her people, "expand the amplitude of [Her] destiny," becoming what Whitman, and individuals like

Ames, Swinton and others longed for Her to be – in essence, a more utopian democracy, a more "splendid illustration" of democratic "Civilization" itself (DV 67).

## Conclusion

It is very fitting that Whitman, in working to produce some "chyle and nutriment" capable of ensuring "many coming centennials" for the nation, would produce what overtly appears as a kind of mourning object (*TR* 5). Just as these objects were intended to foster communal bonds and affective connections between individuals by essentially working to assert the immortality of an individual, so too, did Whitman's larger volume work to bring his readership to a recognition of the immortal nature of those with which it was concerned – namely the American people – fundamentally believing that such a recognition could not help but place them "on a common platform" as it were, a platform from which they could gain a larger appreciation, a sense of love, a "fair adhesion" for and to one another. In the glow of such an adhesive love, Whitman felt, the otherwise materialistic tendencies that threatened to polarize social classes, inspire corruption, and reduce America and democracy into vehicles for producing wealth instead of powerful reflections of the inherent worth of every individual would be countered, a more democratic, utopian nation would be realized, and the true nature – the true "identity" – of what it was to be a democratic American, would be, in essence, secured.

Thus, just as he had done in *Leaves of Grass*, and *Drum-Taps*, Whitman worked throughout *Two Rivulets* to preserve, even promulge, a sense of identity, although in this case, rather than the "identity" of one, "Walt Whitman...a kosmos," or even the identities of the "Million Dead" of the Civil War "Summ'd Up," it was mankind's ultimate, aggregate identity, as a "Summ'd Up" "kosmos," sharing both the joint inheritance of "material immortality" and a joint destiny to become part of the larger "Universal" Oversoul that he sought to secure. As he had done throughout works like *Leaves of* 

Grass, and Drum-Taps, Whitman relied considerably upon the conventions of mourning and memorializing to do so, creating a memorial volume which sang songs of "Death and Immortality" in an effort to bring those who heard these songs to a sense of the immortality (spiritual and material) of those to whom such songs were directed, an immortality which, when understood, would foster a sense of democratic identity capable of counteracting those materialistic, social and political forces that might otherwise threaten to distort both self and nation. This then was his gift to the nation on its centennial – a text which might work, not only in Whitman's contemporary moment, but in almost any moment throughout the coming centuries, to bring readers to a realization of "self" and identity that Whitman felt was at the core of democratic practice. A sense of "self" and identity in which he felt was set "Democracy's enduring arch," and one which would surely ensure "many coming centennials" for the nation and people he loved (TR 7).

Such a text, crafted to act as a catalyst for inculcating a kind of democratic appreciation of every self, was, in a sense, a culminating poetic moment for Whitman, and in more ways than one. Not only did it mark his attempt to use the conventions of mourning and memorializing on the grandest scale yet – seeking to preserve, protect and promulge no less than the democratic sensibility and identity of an entire nation – but in a very material sense, *Two Rivulets* and its companion volume represent the first time that virtually all of his literary works, including *Leaves of Grass*, *Passage to India*, *Democratic Vistas*, *As A Strong Bird on Pinions Free*, *Centennial Songs*, *Memoranda During the War*, and *Two Rivulets* were brought together and offered to his reader as a comprehensive whole.<sup>24</sup> Given the scope of this project, its aims to preserve and

<sup>2</sup> 

While *Two Rivulets* as a stand-alone volume encouraging readers to read in the way I have delineated here was never again published in this way (either as a complete volume or with its unique "rivulet" format preserved in its entirety), Whitman's later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, into which the prose and poetry of *Two Rivulets* was folded, included much of this work dispersed through various sections. For example, in

promulge the democratic potential of America's citizens and its work to usher in a more democratic utopian civilization, one wonders why it was that Whitman, in the years which followed (1882 and 1892) essentially let this curious mélange, this literary incarnation, essentially crystallize, become static, "die" even, as he refused to republish it as he had, and would continue to do, with Leaves of Grass. However, much in Whitman's later life, such as his grand designs for his own elaborate and ostentatious tomb, in which he had himself hermetically sealed, effectively refusing to "bequeath [himself] to the dirt, to grow from the grass [he] love[d]" perhaps signal a belief, on his part, that he did not feel he had found a body of lovers, comrades, or readers large and "active" enough to receive the fullness of that which he had to offer, and so refused to bequeath it to them with the urgency he might have otherwise. Certainly, the reviews of Two Rivulets suggested that this was the case, for many readers expressed some measure of grudging appreciation, but also a general puzzlement as to how to interpret the volume, with one provocative, perceptive, and curiously anonymous reviewer claiming that "tens of thousands" will inevitably "throw down [this volume] in disgust," before going on to admit that perhaps they will do so because of "the deficiency [that] is in them, not in [the work or poet]" ("Review of Two Rivulets"). Whitman, perhaps sensing that despite his best efforts such "deficiencies" prevailed, decided that, like his own body, Two Rivulets, should be effectively shelved away, perhaps in anticipation of the day when a larger, more "active" group of democratic readers or subjects would seek it out, drag forth the

1882 he (with Rees Welsh as publisher) issued a kind of "comprehensive" *Leaves of Grass* (which essentially included the body of poetry that was in *Two Rivulets*) along with *Specimen Days and Collect* (which contained "Memoranda During the War" and "Democratic Vistas") which together once again attempted to gather up all of his previous writings (something he would do again in his 1888 *Complete Poems and Prose*). Moreover, *Two Rivulets*, while not only having the honor of being the first of these "comprehensive" editions, is arguably the most overt in its claims regarding the ability of this poetry and prose, when read as a "composite, inseparable unity," to serve as the much needed "chyle and nutriment" that Whitman felt individuals and the nation so desperately needed.

precious literary remains, and claim them, as he suggested they should throughout *Two Rivulets*, as the stuff out of which they could grow new, larger, more democratic selves.

**APPENDIX OF IMAGES** 



Figure A1. *Portrait of Camille Mount* (Painted by Shepard Alonzo Mount in 1865. Housed at the Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages.)

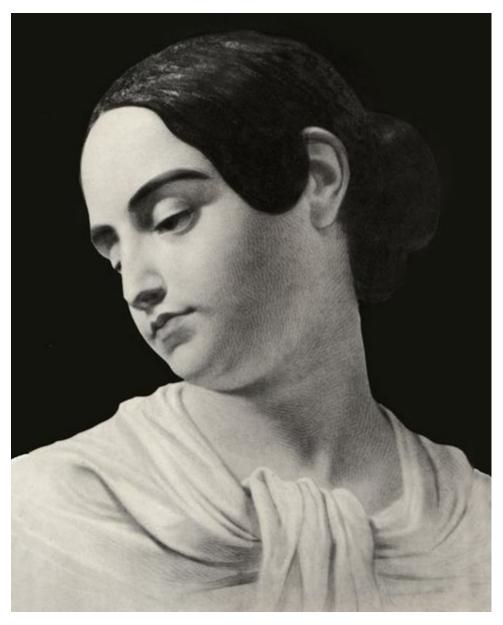


Figure A2. *Portrait of Virginia Poe*. (Painted posthumously in 1847. Artist is unknown although suspected to be Mary Louise Shew. In private collection.)



Figure A3. Album Quilt (Detail). (Central square of larger album quilt produced by Eliza Howell circa 1848. Housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.)

The Spirits of the Dead -Thy soul shall find itself alone, Mid dark thoughts of the grey tombs Not one, of all the crowde to pry) Into thine hour of secrecy -Which is not Concliness - for then The spirits of the dead who stood on life before thee are again In death around thee , and their will Shall then sers hadow thee - be still. The night-the clear shall frown And the stars shall look not down From their high thrones in the A eaven With- light-like of one to mortals give But their red orbs, without beam, To they weariness shall seem ess a burning & a fever Which would cling to thee forever

Figure A4. "Spirits of the Dead" (Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1828. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)

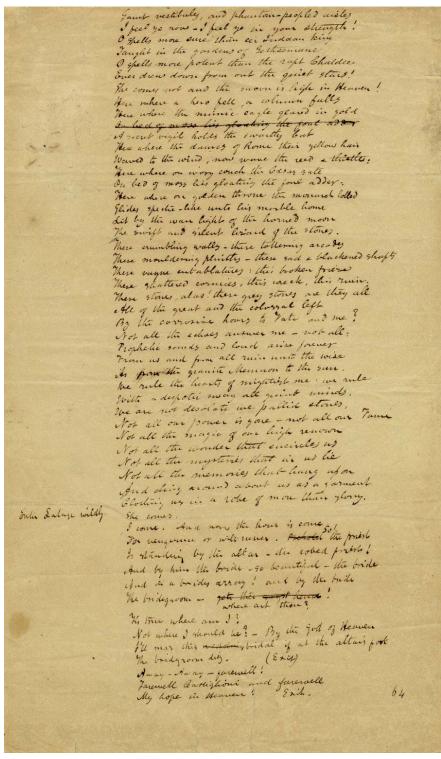


Figure A5. "Politian" (Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1835. Image appears courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin. Housed at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin)

The Coliseum Type of the antique Rome! Rich religuary of lotty contemplation left to Time By buried centuries of pemp and power: At length, at length - after so many days of weary hilgrimage and burning Wirst -Final in he drings of love that in the lie -I meet an attered and an humble man Whin they chaloux, and so drink within My very tout the grandeur, stoom, and glore Pasities, and cosi, and Memories of Bit! Pilene, and Desolution, and dim except. Sound restibules, and phontom- peopled aitlet I del se now - I bed so in your thenoth -& spells more sure than eer Judgan kins Thursh's in his garners of Jecusemane! O thams more potent than the rapt Shaller Ever drew down from out the quiet thand! Here where a hero bell, a column fails ; How , where he mimis eagle glaved in sold It midnight vigil holds the swarfer bat; Here where the dames of Rome their section have Waved to the wind, now wave the reed and thiste; Here, where on iron hirone the Garar sale, On bed of moss hier glowling the four adder; Here, where on gother couch the monarch which Fliked spectre-like out his marble home, Lit be the wan light of the huned moon, The swift and silent wand of the stones. These crumbling walls; here tottering areades; These mouldering plinter; these sad and blackened shafts These vague entablatures; this broken frieze; These Shattered cornices - this wreck - this ruin -These stones - alas, These gray stones - are they all ell of the great and the collossal left By the corresise hours to fait and me!

Figure A6. "The Coliseum" (Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1841. Image appears courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin. Housed at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin.)

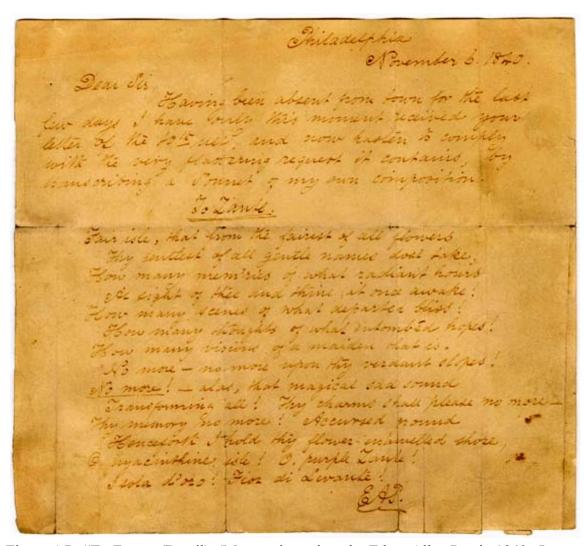


Figure A7. "To Zante" (Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1840. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)

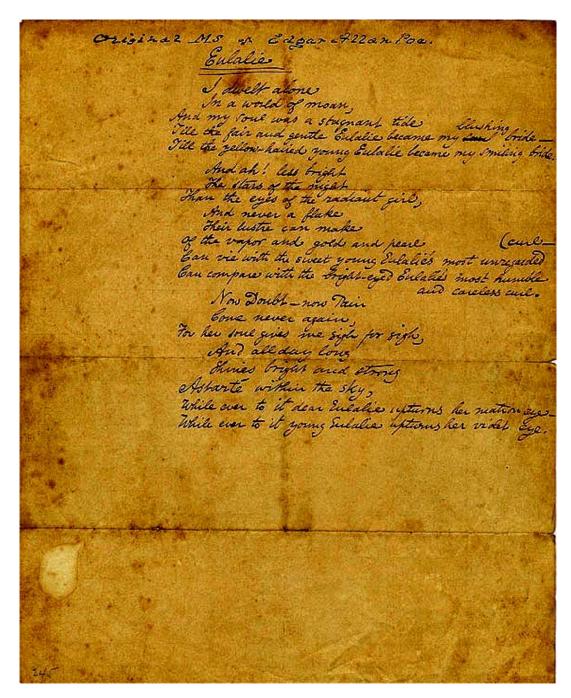


Figure A8. "Eulalie" (Hirst Copy – Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1844. Image appears courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin. Housed at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin.)

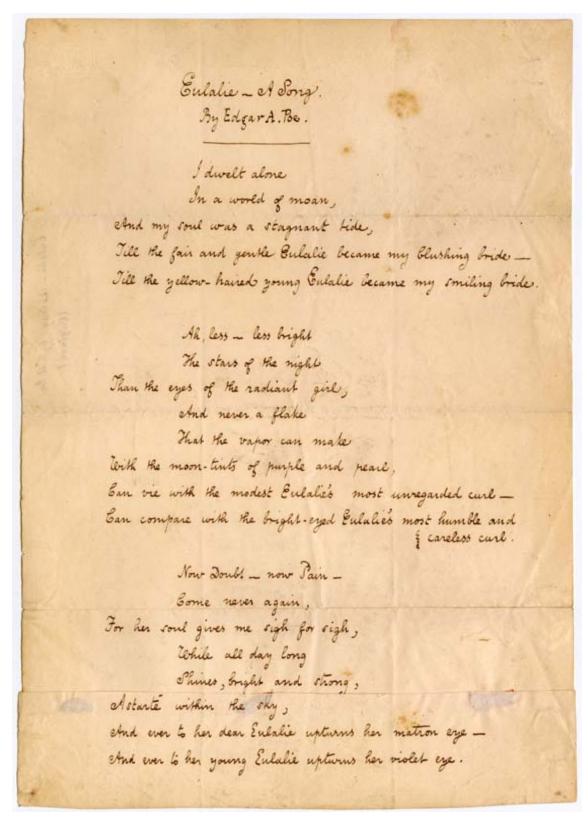


Figure A9. "Eulalie" ("Fair" Copy – Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1845. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)

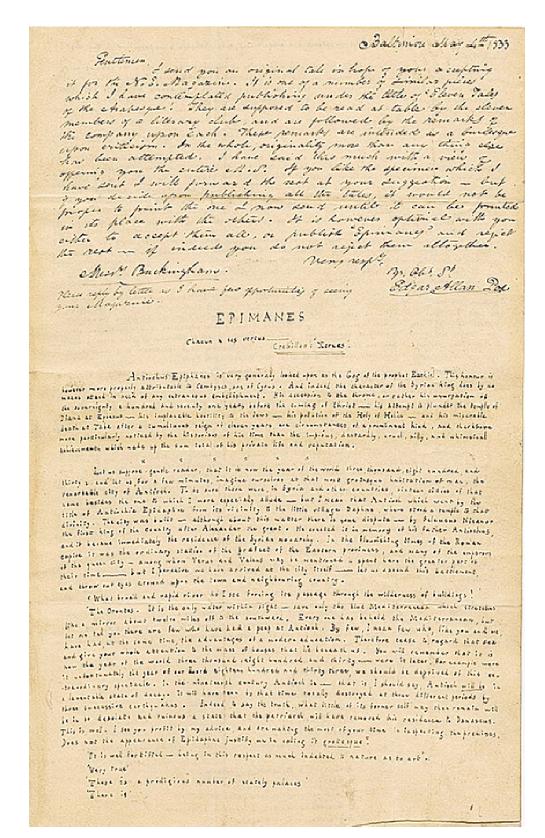


Figure A10. "Epimanes" (Detail). (Manuscript written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1845. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)

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Figure A11. Woodblock Reproduction of the Signature of Charles Anthon. (As it appeared in *The Southern Literary Messenger*'s 1841 printing of Edgar Allan Poe's "A Chapter on Autography".)

## A CHAPTER ON AUTOGRAPHY.



UNDER this head, some years ago, there appeared, in the Southern Literary Messenger, an article which attracted very general attention, not less from the nature of its subject than from the peculiar manner in which it was handled. The editor introduces his readers to a certain Mr. Joseph Miller, who, it is hinted, is not merely a descendant of the illustrious Joe, of Jest-Book notoriety, but that identical individual in proper person. Upon this point, however, an air of uncertainty is thrown by means of an equivoque, maintained throughout the paper, in respect to Mr. Miller's middle name. This equivoque is put into the mouth of Mr. M. himself. He gives his name, in the first instance, as Poseph A. Miller; but, in the course of conversation, shifts it to Joseph B., then to Joseph C, and so on through the whole alphabet, until he concludes by desiring a copy of the Magazine to be sent to his address as Joseph Z. Miller, Esquire.

The object of his visit to the editor is to place in his hands the autographs of certain distinguished American literati. To these persons he had written rigmarole letters on various topics, and in all cases had been successful in eliciting a reply. The replies only (which it is scarcely necessary to say are all fictitious) are given in the Magazine, with a genuine autograph fac-simile appended, and are either burlesques of the supposed writer's usual style, or rendered otherwise absurd by reference to the nonsensical questions imagined to have been propounded by Mr. Miller. The autographs thus given are twentysix in all - corresponding to the twenty-six variations in the initial letter of the hoaxer's middle name.

With the public this article took amazingly well, and many of our principal papers were at the expense of re-printing it with the wood-cut autographs. Even those whose names had been introduced, and whose style had been burlesqued, took the joke, generally speaking, in good part. Some of them were at a loss what to make of the matter. Dr. W. E. Channing, of Boston, was at some trouble, it is said, in calling to mind whether he had or had not actually written

him in the article. This letter was nothing more than what follows :-

DEAR STR,

No such person as Philip Philpot has ever been in my employ as a coachman, or otherwise. The name is an odd one, and not likely to be forgotten. The man must have reference to some other Doctor Channing. It would be as well to question him closely.

Respectfully yours,

W. E. CHANNING.

To Joseph X. MILLER, Esq.

The precise and brief sententiousness of the divine is here, it will be seen, very truly adopted, or "hit off."

In one instance only was the jeu-d'esprit taken in serious dudgeon. Colonel Stone and the Messenger had not been upon the best of terms. Some one of the Colonel's little brochures had been severely treated by that journal, which declared that the work would have been far more properly published among the quack advertisements in a spare corner of the Commercial. The colonel had retaliated by wholesale vituperation of the Messenger. This being the state of affairs, it was not to be wondered at that the following epistle was not quietly received on the part of him to whom it was attributed :-

NEW YORK, -

DEAR SIR,

I am exceedingly and excessively sorry that it is out of my power to comply with your rational and reasonable request. The subject you mention is one with which I am utterly unacquainted. Moreover it is one about which I know very little.

Respectfully,

W. L. STONE.

JOSEPH V. MILLER, Esq.

These tautologies and anti-climaces were too much for the colonel, and we are ashamed to say that he committed himself by publishing in the Commercial an indignant denial of ever having indited such an epistle.

The principal feature of this autograph article, although perhaps the least interesting, was that of the editorial comment upon the supposed MSS., to some Mr. Joseph Miller the letter attributed to regarding them as indicative of character. In these

Figure A12. Opening Page of Poe's "A Chapter on Autography" Including Poe's Signature. (As printed in 1841 in *The Southern Literary Messenger*.)

Figure A13. Nannie Kern Autograph Album (Detail). (Earliest inscriptions are from 1864. Image appears courtesy of the Iowa Women's Archives housed at The University of Iowa Library. Album located in the Iowa Women's Archives housed at The University of Iowa Library.)

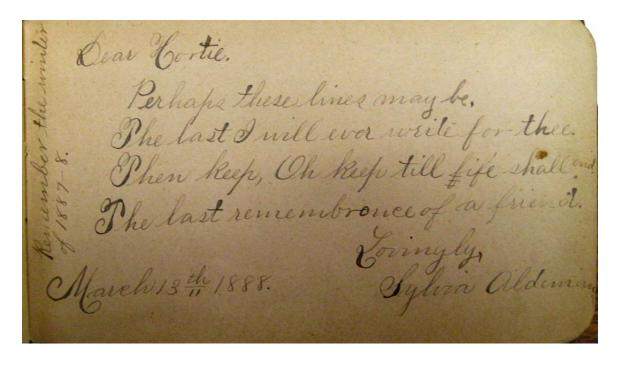


Figure A14. Hortense Autograph Album (Detail). (Earliest inscriptions appear in 1888. Image appears courtesy of the Iowa Women's Archives housed at The University of Iowa Library. Album located in the Iowa Women's Archives housed at The University of Iowa Library.)



Figure A15. Woodblock Reproduction of the Signatures of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Anthon from "A Chapter on Autography" (Detail). (As each appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger's* 1841 printing of Poe's "A Chapter on Autography".)



Figure A16. Woodblock Reproductions of the Signatures of Fitz-Green Halleck, Edward Everett, Charles Anthon, and Edgar Allan Poe from "A Chapter on Autography" (Detail). (As each appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger's* 1841 printing of Poe's "A Chapter on Autography".)

## POETS & POETRY OF PHILADELPHIA. NUMBER IL The Postfault engraved, and the Biographics written expensely for the Postada, Saturday Museum. Edgar Allan Poe. For the materials of the present bingraphy, w are indebted, partly to information derived from the Ing Thomas W. White, Proprietor of the "Southern Literary Messanger," but, principally. to memoranda furnished us by the well known nother of " Clinton Bradshow,".- Frederic W. Thomas, Eq -who has rejayed a better opportunity of intimate acquaintance with the subject of nor sketch, than, poshaps, any man in America REGIN ALLES Page is descended from one of the oldest and most respectable families in Baltimore. His great-grandfather, John Poe, married, in England, Jane, a daughter of the British Admiral McBride, and through her, the family claim connexion with many of the muliost in England.--Baltimore, was Quartermester General in the Maryland Line," during the Revolution. General Poe, was, in the true sease of the word, a patriot. To furnish provisions, forage and cloth-ing to the destitute Government troops, he stripped bimself of his entire patrimony. For this he never instituted a claim, nor for services randered to the United States as an officer; but for actual money loaned, he claimed \$40,000. Owing to technical informalities in the vouchors, (which consisted principally of letters from Wassexwood and La Fararra,) he received no portion of the sum. The Maryland Legislature, however, subrequently allowed his widow a pension, and, in the preamble of the act, expressed their satisfaction of the squity of the claim, while they deplor-

Figure A17. Portrait and Woodblock Reproduction of the Signature of Edgar Allan Poe appearing in *The Saturday Museum*. (Printed in1843.)

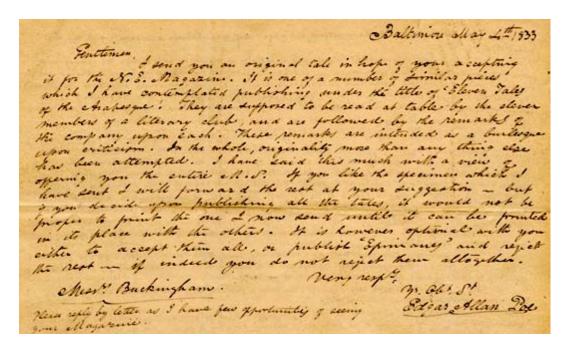


Figure A18. Poe's Letter to the Buckinghams. (Manuscript written 1833. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)

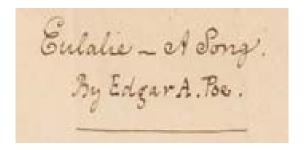


Figure A19. Poe's By-Line Signature ("Eulalie" Detail). (From the "Fair" Copy manuscript written in 1845. Image appears courtesy of Susan Jaffe Tane. In private collection.)



Figure A20. Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Isaac Lea. (Manuscript written in 1829. Image appears courtesy of Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin. Manuscript housed at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin.)

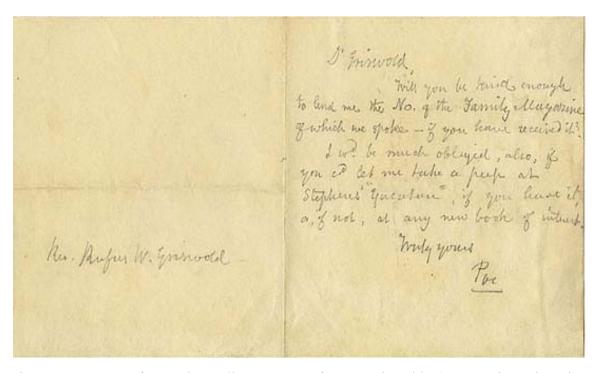


Figure A21. Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Rufus W. Griswold. (Manuscript written in 1841. Image appears courtesy of Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin. Manuscript housed at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center The University of Texas at Austin.)

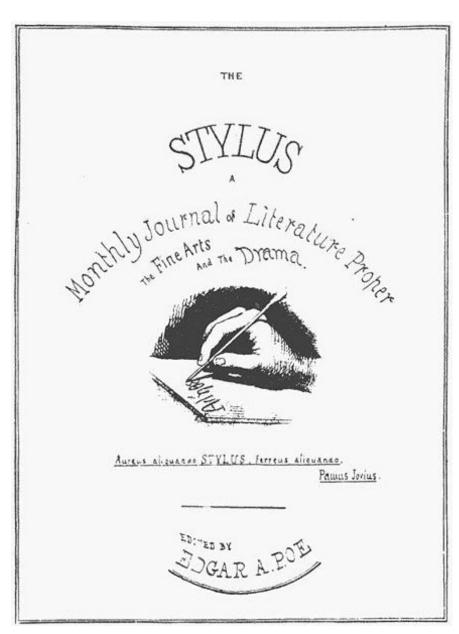
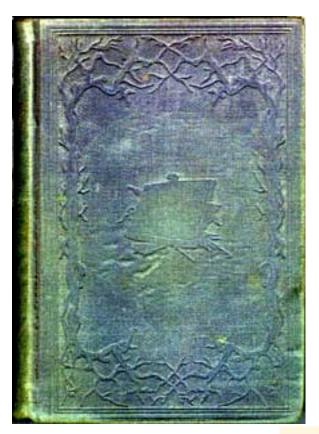


Figure A22. Poe's Cover Design for *The Stylus*. (Produced circa 1843.)



Figure A23. Nineteenth-Century American Mourning Card. (Card produced circa 1865.)



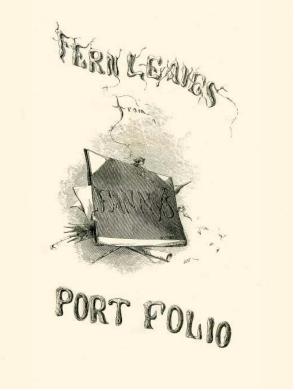


Figure A24. Fern Leaves From Fanny's Portfolio. (Cover and Title Page. Written by Sarah Willis Parton, published 1853.)

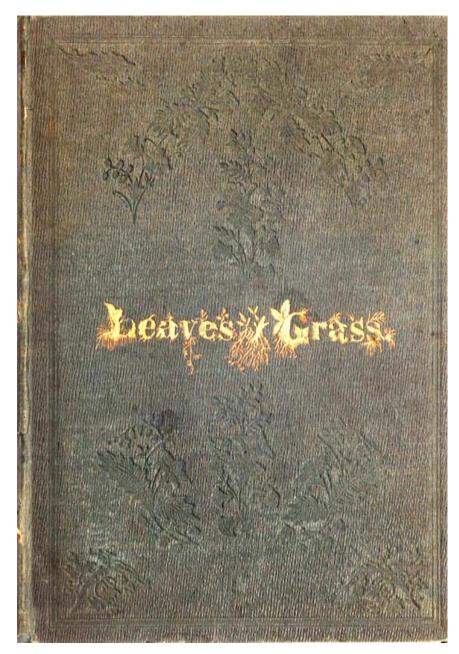


Figure A25. Leaves of Grass. (Written by Walt Whitman. Embossed cover of the 1855 edition.)

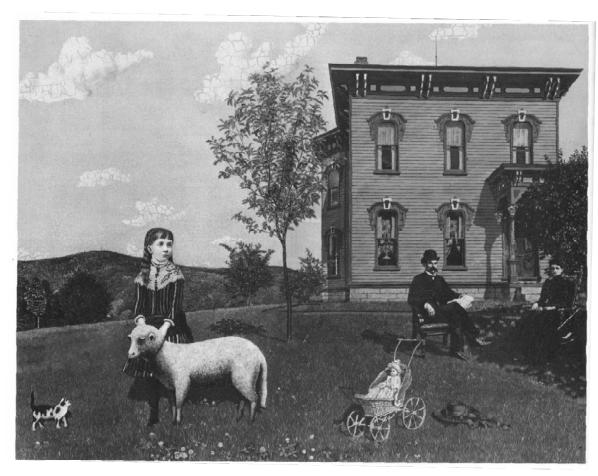


Figure A26. *Mourning Picture.* (Painted by Edwin Romanzo Elmer in 1890. Housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.)



Figure A27. Posthumous Mourning Picture. (Photo'd 1879, subject unknown. In private collection.)



Figure A28. Helen Eliza Garrison Memorial Photo. (Frontispiece to Memorial Album published by William Lloyd Garrison in 1876).

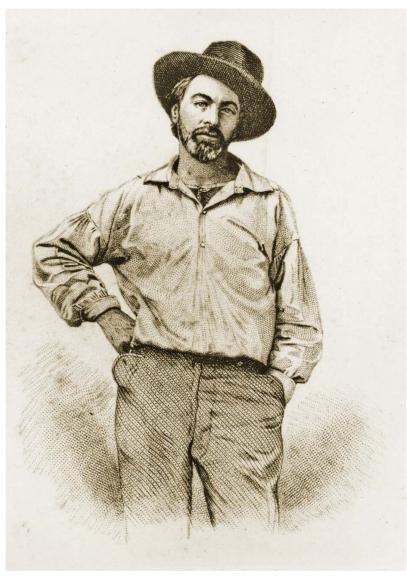


Figure A29. Frontispiece Engraving to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

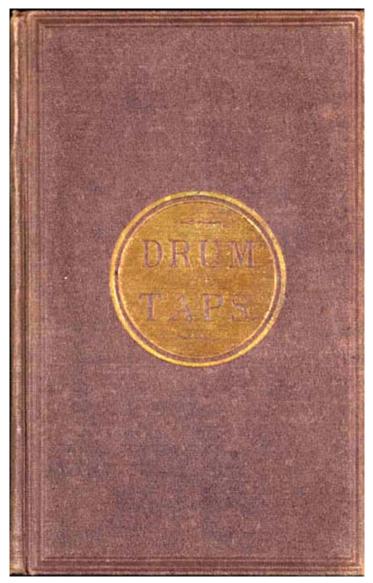


Figure A30. *Drum-Taps*. (Written by Walt Whitman. Embossed cover of the 1865 edition.)



Figure A31. Civil War Coffins. (Circa 1863. Photo in Library Of Congress.)

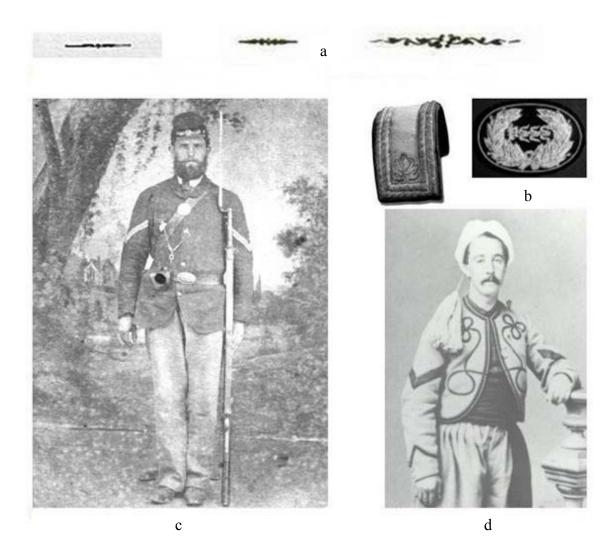


Figure A32. Typographical Ornaments in *Drum-Taps* and Common Civil War Uniforms and Uniform Decorations. (Photos from Library Of Congress)

(a) Typographical ornaments employed in the first printing of *Drum-Taps*(b) Civil War uniform decorations

(c) Soldier of the 177<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania

(d) Soldier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Zouave Batallion Louisianna

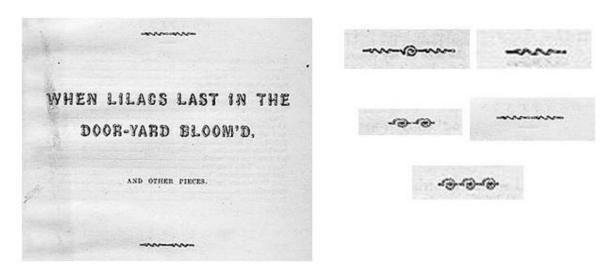


Figure A33. New Type and Typographical Ornaments Employed in the Second Printing of *Drum-Taps* (in the "Sequel to Drum-Taps" Section).

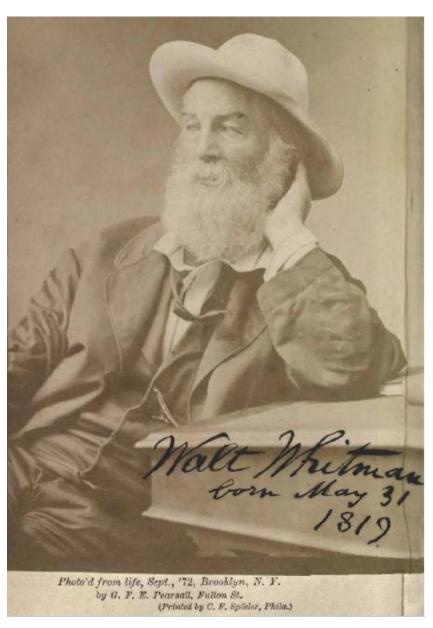


Figure A34. *Two Rivulets* Frontispiece. (Published as part of Walt Whitman's *Two Rivulets* in 1876. Photo originally taken 1871.)

## Two Rivulets.

17

### FIDÓLONS

I MET a Seer,
Passing the hues and objects of the world,
The fields of art and learning, pleasure, sense,
To glean Eidólons.

Put in thy chants, said he,
No more the puzzling hour, nor day—nor segments, parts,
put in,
Put first before the rest, as light for all, and entrance-song
of all,
That of Eidólons.

Ever the dim beginning;
Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle;
Ever the summit, and the merge at last, (to surely start again,)
Eidólons! Eidólons!

Ever the mutable!

Ever materials, changing, crumbling, re-cohering;

Ever the ateliers, the factories divine,

Issuing Eidólons!

Lo! I or you! Or woman, man, or State, known or unknown; We seeming solid wealth, strength, beauty build, But really build Eidólous.

The ostent evanescent;
The substance of an artist's mood, or savan's studies long,
Or warrior's, martyr's, hero's toils,
To fashion his Eidólon.

2. So far, in America, our Democratic Society, (estimating its various strata, in the mass, as one.) possesses nothing—nor have we contributed any characteristic music, the finest tie of Nationality—to make up for that glowing, blood-finebbing, religious, social, emotional, artistic, indefinable, indescribably beautiful charm and hold which fused the separate parts of the old Feudal societies together in their wonderful interpenetration, in Europe and Asia, of love, belief and loyalty, running one way like a living weft—and picturesque responsibility, duty and blessedness, running like a warp the other way. (In the Southern States, under Slavery, much of the same.)...In coincidence, and as things now exist in The States, what is more terrible, more alarming, than the total want of any such fusion and mutuality of love, belief and rappert of interest, between the comparatively few successful rich, and the great massess of the unsuccessful, the poor?.....As a mixed political and social question, is not this full of dark significance? Is it not worth considering as a problem and puzzle in our Democracy—an indispensable want to be supplied?

Figure A35. "Eidolons" and Accompanying Prose Section.

## Two Rivulets.

Two Rivulets side by side, Two blended, parallel, strolling tides, Companions, travelers, gossiping as they journey.

For the Eternal Ocean bound, These ripples, passing surges, streams of Death and Life, Object and Subject hurrying, whirling by, The Real and Ideal,

Alternate ebb and flow the Days and Nights. (Strands of a Trio twining, Present, Future, Past.)

In You, whoe'er you are, my book perusing, In I myself—in all the World—these ripples flow, All, all, toward the mystic Ocean tending.

(O yearnful waves! the kisses of your lips! Your breast so broad, with open arms, O firm, expanded shore !)

Thoughts for the Centennial, (as for others, certainty waiting folded in bilden train, to duly round and complete their circles, mightier and mightier in the future,) do not need to be, and probably cannot, be, literally originated, (for all thoughts are old.) so much as they need to escape from too vehement temporary coloring, and from all narrow and merely local influences—and also from the coloring and shaping through European feudalism—and still need to be averaged by the scale of the Centuries, from their point of view entire, and presented thence, conformably to the freedom and vasiness of modern science.....And even out of a Hundred Years, and on their scale, how small were the best thoughts, poems, conclusions and products, except for a certain invariable resemblance and uniform standard in the final thoughts, theology, poems, &c., of all nations, all civilizations, all centuries and times. Those preclous legacies—accumulations! They come to us from the far-off-from all eras, and all lands—from Egypt, and India, and Greece and Rome—and along through the middle and later ages, in the grand monarchies of Europe—born under far different institutes and conditions from ours—but out of the insight and inspiration of the same old Humanity—the same old heart and brain—the same old countenance yearningly, pensively looking forth... Strictly speaking, they are ladeed none of them new, and are indeed not ours originally—ours, however, by inheritance. What we have to do to-day is to receive them cheerfully, and to give them evsemble, and a modern American and Democratic physiognomy.

Figure A36. "Two Rivulets" and Accompanying Prose Section ("Thoughts for the Centennial").

# Two Rivulets. 24 OUT FROM BEHIND THIS MASK. To confront My Portrait, illustrating 'the Wound-Dresser,' in Leaves or Grass. Our from behind this bending, rough-cut Mask, (All straighter, liker Masks rejected—this preferr'd,) This common curtain of the face, contain'd in me for me, in you for you, in each for each, (Tragedies, sorrows, laughter, tears—O heaven The passionate, teeming plays this curtain hid!) This glaze of God's serenest, purest sky, This film of Satan's seething pit, This heart's geography's map—this limitless small continent—this soundless sea; Out from the convolutions of this globe, This subtler astronomic orb than sun or moon—than Jupiter, Venus, Mars; This condensation of the Universe—(nay, here the only Universe, Here the IDEA—all in this mystic handful wrapt;) These burin'd eyes, flashing to you, to pass to future time, To launch and spin through space revolving, sideling—from these to emanate, To You, whoe'er you are—a Look. of such Individualities, in my opinion, wholly depends on a compacted imperial Ensemble. The theory and practice of both sovereignties, contradictory as they are, are necessary. As the centripetal law were fatal alone, or the centrifugal law deadly and destructive alone, but together forming the law of eternal Kosmical action, evolution, preservation, and life—so, by itself alone, the fullness of Individuality, even the sanest, would surely destroy itself. This is what makes the importance to the identities of These States of the thoroughly fused, relentless, dominating Union,—s moral and spiritual Idea—subjecting all the parts with removeless power, more needed by American Democracy than by any of history!s hitherto empires or feudalties, and the sine qua non of carrying out the Republican principle to develope itself in the New World through hundreds, thousands of years to come. Indeed, what most needs development through the Hundred Years to come in all parts of the United States, North, South, Mississippi valley, and Atlantic and Pacific coasts, is this fused and fervent identity of the individual, whoever he or she may be, and wherever the place, with the idea and fact of American Torality, and with what is meant by the Flag, the Stars and Stripes.—We need this conviction of Nationality as a faith, to be absorbed in the blood and belief of the people everywhere, South, North, West, East, to emanate in their life, and in native literature and art. We want the germinal idea that America, inheritor of the past, is the custodian of the future of Humanity.....Judging from history, it is some such moral and spiritual ideas appropriate to them, (and such ideas only,) that have made the profoundest glory and endurance of nations in the past. The races of Judea, the classic clusters of Greece and Rome, and the Feudal and Ecclesiated distinctive ideas, ingrained in them, redeeming many sins, and indeed, in a sense, the principal reason-why for their whole eareer. Then, in the thought of Nationality especially for

Figure A37. "Out From Behind This Mask" and Accompanying Prose Section.

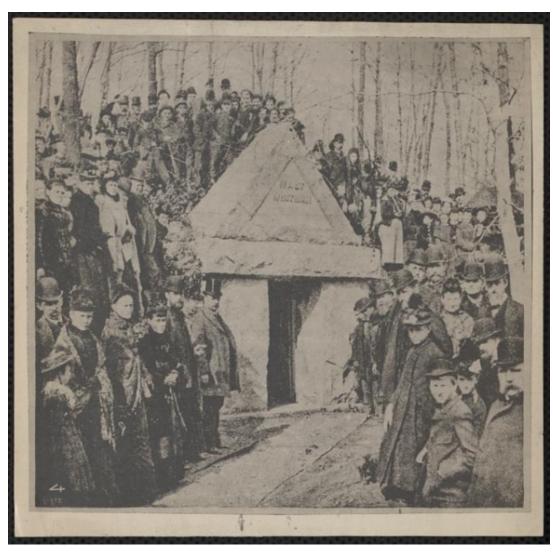


Figure A38. Walt Whitman's Tomb and Funeral Attendees (Photo'd in 1892. Photo in Library of Congress.)

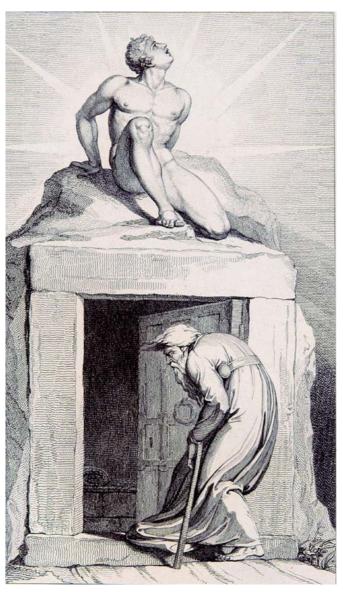


Figure A39. *Death's Door* (Original sketched by William Blake in 1808. Published in Alexander Gilchrist's 1881 *Life of William Blake*).

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