AMERICA AND THE PERVERSE SHAKESPEAREAN IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

I argue that each of the five American authors in my study of the antebellum era in American literature had dissident responses to Shakespeare's perverse sexual energies. These reader responses took the following forms, with significant consequences for American history:

1. *Conversion As Perversion*. This strategy, demonstrated by Emerson and Whitman, employs the structure of perversion by affirming, in Emerson, the healthy imagination, in Whitman, healthy sexuality. In doing so, it commits itself to a confident rhetoric of health that evades and so magnifies anxiety about perverse sexual disease. It attempts to "convert" the reader to its view of the healthy imagination as a way to ward off the perversion it sees everywhere.

2. *Perversion As Conversion.* This strategy, employed by Hawthorne and Melville, initiates a descent into the terrors of the perverse imagination as a means of exorcising it and reconciling the individual to the consolations of the hearth and home of middle-class American society.

3. *Perversion As Subversion.* This is the strategy employed by Dickinson in her tense, dramatic lyrics. It employs Augustinian non-being in order to subvert progressive American projections of meaning into the future through a form that I call "perverse reading." It eschews all identities, and remains menacing, dangerous, and, in my view, profoundly ethical.

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AMERICA AND THE PERVERSE SHAKESPEAREAN IMAGINATION

THE SHADOW OF SHAKESPEARE

The shadow of Shakespeare looms large over the American literary landscape. It is the shadow of a mythic figure, first forged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the American cultural imagination – and it became one of the central, defining symbols of American national identity.

Another Shakespeare exists, though: furtive, dangerous, strange, diseased, and menacing: this figure and its conservative double are captured in the literature produced by America's first great generation of writers. These two versions of Shakespeare, like Freud's symbolic father of the Law and the perverse father of the "primal horde," lived uneasily side-by-side in the American imagination.[1] But Freud's myth offers too simple a dichotomy. A Shakespearean example is more apposite. For it is more true that Shakespeare exists as the ghost of King Hamlet and Claudius in the American imagination. Just as the ghost of King Hamlet and Claudius are not always easily and neatly separable, so the two Shakespeares, like twin brothers, are sometimes bewilderingly entangled with one another. The Shakespeare who is the symbolic founder of the American nation can suddenly reveal a volatile and disturbing interior and the perverse Shakespeare can prove to be profoundly ethical and humane.

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[1] Sigmund Freud, *Totem And Taboo, Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), especially chapter 4, pp. 124-142.

Since F. O. Matthiessen's founding book of American Studies, *The American Renaissance*, the scope and depth of Shakespeare's influence on the major American literary figures of the mid-19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, has been clear. Emily Dickinson followed shortly after. Shakespeare's influence on American literature is still a lively and constantly evolving topic. A new anthology entitled *Shakespeare In America*, edited by James Shapiro, published for the four hundred fiftieth anniversary of Shakespeare's birthday, reveals Shakespeare's influence on literature, poetry, short-fiction, satire, and historical documents, from 1776 to the present day. Its forward, by former American president Bill Clinton, places the volume squarely in the history of Shakespeare's relationship to American national identity.[2]

The Shakespearean scholar Julian Markels anticipates my own work with his full-length reading of *Moby-Dick* and *King Lear* in *Melville And The Politics Of Identity, From King Lear to Moby-Dick*. Markels traces the split between Shakespeare, as the symbol of American national identity, and what he calls the "demonic" Shakespeare that awakened Melville's creative powers. Where Markels sees these two Shakespeares as a confrontation between competing political philosophies, Locke's and Hobbes', I regard the Shakespearean underbelly as pathologically sexual, in ways that were reflected in emerging American discourses about sexuality and that exceeded these. I also find the struggle between the perverse Shakespeare and the Shakespeare of cultural mythology in five major American writers: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson.

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[2] James Shapiro and Bill Clinton, *Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now* (New York: Library of America, 2014).

The term "struggle," though, is misleading; for the perverse cannot be completely personalized in the way that the word "struggle" implies. It is my contention that the perverse is *itself* a *structuring force* in American history. It was an available tool in the formation of American identity; one derived, in part, from American millennialism, most significantly the Second Great Awakening in the early to mid nineteenth century. America's messianic drive, which embodied a teleological view of history rooted, in part, in Augustinian and Thomistic theology, was translated readily into the unprecedented fervor of social reform movements across American society. This impulse towards reform included the construction of a psychiatric apparatus, with a newly professionalized psychiatric profession and asylums, intended for the humane treatment of the insane, in almost every major American city; it inspired sexual purity reform; it was evoked in the rhetoric of racial purity, rationalized by a Lamarckian theory of eugenics; and it was even evoked in the pseudo-science of phrenology and the free love movement. In order to articulate their response to perverse Shakespeare, American writers had a tapestry of available discourses. As I shall argue, Shakespearean perversity also exceeded all of these discourses, and produced an anarchic and dissident counter-discourse of its own, most clearly, through Emily Dickinson.

I have ordered my study both according to the psychological strategy with which each author attempts to structure perverse Shakespeare and according to the degree to which the perverse Shakespearean imagination acts as a de-structuring and undermining force against the American myth.

To summarize, I find three kinds of attempts to structure the American perverse:

1. *Conversion As Perversion*. This strategy, demonstrated by Emerson and Whitman, employs the structure of perversion by affirming, in Emerson, the healthy imagination, in Whitman, healthy sexuality. In doing so, it commits itself to a confident rhetoric of health that evades and so magnifies anxiety about perverse sexual disease. It attempts to "convert" the reader to its view of the healthy imagination as a way to ward off the perversion it sees everywhere.

2. *Perversion As Conversion.* This strategy, employed by Hawthorne and Melville, initiates a descent into the terrors of the perverse imagination as a means of exorcising it and reconciling the individual to the consolations of the hearth and home of middle-class American society.

3. *Perversion As Subversion.* This is the strategy employed by Dickinson in her tense, dramatic lyrics. It employs Augustinian non-being in order to subvert masculine projections of meaning into the future. It eschews all identities, and remains menacing, dangerous, and, in my view, profoundly ethical.

I also order my chapters according to the degree of perverse infiltration:

1. In Emerson and Whitman, Shakespeare as the symbol of American national identity is dominant, though the ferocious and unruly Shakespeare exhibits an unmistakable presence.

2. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the attempt to use Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to create a vision of America's fortunate destiny backfires when the ghost from *Hamlet* haunts Dimmesdale's disturbingly incestuous fantasies about his daughter, Pearl.

3. In Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the perverse de-structuring force of non-being in *Macbeth* becomes an all-consuming presence that irreconcilably splits the protagonist, Ishmael. This is only barely contained by Melville's duplicitous device of displacing Ishmael's perversity onto Ahab. Melville's great work, though, struggles to evade the very structuring force of the perverse that it uses to exorcise its demons. I theorize that an inconsistent and self-divided Ishmael establishes a dramatic relationship with the reader that foreshadows Dickinson's fertile negativity.

4. In Dickinson, the perverse becomes a fully articulated anarchic and subversive force that I call "perverse reading": it explodes the identity categories upon which progressive American culture is built.[3]

This sequence of chapters reflects the complex tension between Shakespeare, the symbol and cultural myth, and the perverse and dangerous Shakespeare. It is important, though, to shed light on Shakespeare's role in developing American national identity in the Jacksonian period and the cultural history of the perverse

[3] During the time that I developed my theory of "perverse reading," I had numerous informal conversations with Professor Ewan Fernie that were extremely helpful. I have also been strongly influenced by his book, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience*, particularly chapter 1, "Dark night of the soul," chapter 4, "DEMONIC MACBETH," and chapter 16, "ANGELO," and chapter 17, "CLAGGART."

itself in order to understand how these two forces interact with such fertility and volatility.[4]

It is crucial also for me to acknowledge here my own unique role in relationship to the very forces that shape my project. I am an American completing a PhD thesis in Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of Shakespeare and home of the Royal Shakespeare Company. I not only attend the Shakespeare Institute, but the apartment in which this thesis was composed is within twenty yards of Trinity Church, the very church in which Shakespeare is buried. The church steeple rises above my courtyard fence, and is clearly visible from every window in my apartment, except the one facing towards the Parish Office. The psychological implications of being in Shakespeare's fatherly presence – and the, by turns, comic and threatening phallic connotation of the church steeple – is not lost upon me. My thesis is inevitably partly driven by an attempt to understand the forces that brought me here to Stratford-upon-Avon to live and write in this apartment under the shadow of Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL

Kim Sturgess has demonstrated the way that the myth of Shakespeare, along with the story of American Independence and the Mayflower, helped to consolidate America's national identity. This extended, in the Jacksonian period, to every aspect of America's national project. The legend of the volume of Shakespeare as the

[4] Throughout this thesis, I use "Jacksonian" and "antebellum" interchangeably. "Antebellum" generally suggests the period prior to the American Civil War, but "Jacksonian" captures the individualism so prevalent in the literature of this study.

central book, along with the bible, accompanying the pioneer on the American frontier was not only part of the national iconography, it was a historical fact. At the "coonskin library" in Athens, Ohio, which emerged from the trading of wagon-loads of coonskins for books, Shakespeare's works were one of the very first acquisitions.[5]

Shakespeare existed as a ghostly presence in the very geography; he was honoured, according to Jennifer Lee Carrell, by prospectors who gave mines names like "Shakespeare," "Ophelia," "Cordelia," "Desdemona," and "Timon of Athens." A Montana rancher, Philip Ashton Rollins reported that a cowhand, after listening to the 'dogs of war' speech in *Julius Caesar*, exclaimed, "Shakespeare could sure spill the real stuff. He's the only poet I ever seen was fed on raw meat."[6] In 1863 Jim Bridger, described as a "mountain man" and "Indian fighter," traded a "yoke of cattle, then worth about $125, or almost a month's wages," for a copy of Shakespeare, from a passing wagon on its way west.[7] He did this in spite of the fact that he couldn't read.

Shakespeare's Jubilee, a festival organized by David Garrick in Stratford-upon-Avon on September 6-8, 1769, celebrated the bicentenary of Shakespeare's birth (despite the fact that it missed the real date by five years). Garrick adapted the festival into a play, which premiered on October 14, 1769 at London's Drury Lane theater and later was performed around the world.[8] The play, known as Garrick's *Jubilee*, became, a decade later, an important symbol of America's growing bardolatry. It was produced in New York in 1788, in Charleston in 1793, and later

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[5] Julian Markels, *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
[6] Quoted in, Kim C. Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pg. 90.
[7] Sturgess, pg. 89.
[8] Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 114.

in Philadelphia in 1814.[9] Starting just before Emerson's birth, through his formative period, between 1800 and 1835, twenty one Shakespeare plays were produced: *Richard III* sixty times, *Hamlet* forty-three times, *Macbeth* forty-two times, and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *The Merchant of Venice* almost as frequently.[10] During the antebellum period, competing productions of *Hamlet* could open up on the same night in New York; *Macbeth* could be seen in three different theaters; ten different *Hamlets* were produced between 1857-1858. Lawrence Levine has established the intimate relationship between these Shakespearean theatrical productions and American popular culture.[11]

Shakespeare's works were abundantly pillaged and bowdlerized for primary school books on elocution, including John Walker's *Elements of Elocution*, published in nine American cities in 1810. Children's primers, including the most prominent, McGuffey's, were packed with quotations from Shakespeare.[12] Almost sixty-four American editions of Shakespeare's plays were published between 1781 and 1865; Shakespeare criticism, ranging from Dr. Johnson (excerpted in Melville's copy of Shakespeare) to Schlegel, Goethe, Madam de Stael, and Coleridge, was read by almost every American intellectual of the period.[13] Charles Knight, for example, the editor of Emily Dickinson's volume of Shakespeare, quotes Coleridge and Goethe, at length.[14]

Sturgess reveals the way that a Shakespearean mythology, extrapolated from Shakespeare's abundant cultural presence, was used by proponents of American

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[9] Markels, pg. 39.
[10] Ibid, pg. 39-40.
[11] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
[12] Markels, pg. 40.
[13] Ibid, pg. 41.
[14] William Shakespeare, *The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and Poems of William Shakespeare with a Biography and Studies of his Works*, ed. Charles Knight (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1853).

racial superiority, to claim an idiomatic allegiance to Shakespeare. Ultimately, these proponents of America's superiority went further, skipping over America's British inheritance and affirming a common Anglo-Saxon culture with Shakespeare, which they felt was only fully realized in America.[15] This Anglo-Saxon creed is present everywhere in Emerson's references to Shakespeare ("the union of Saxon precision and oriental soaring, of which Shakespeare is the perfect example").[16] Sturgess quotes a passage from a sermon from the American Home Missionary Society in 1851 which conveys the affinity with Shakespeare claimed by these advocates of American superiority:

> Europe is but a congregation of Nations of different languages, habits and religions. But power, as it passes into our hands, comes to one people, speaking the same language, the language of Milton, Shakespeare, and the English Bible, having one literature, and one common soul.[17]

As I have observed, Shakespeare's emergence as a powerful cultural force that shaped American identity coincided with the messianic fervor of the Second Great Awakening, in the early to mid nineteenth century. As Richard Niebuhr and Martin Marty show, this period involved a transition from the project of converting the American multitude to forging America into a society that would redeem the Old World of Europe.[18] Shakespeare was regarded as a prophet of the New World who would achieve moral perfection in the crucible of American poetry.[19] Emerson voiced a popular opinion when he denigrated Shakespeare "the player" and

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[15] See also, Henry Cabot Lodge, *Shakespeare's Americanisms* in, Shapiro, pp. 254-265.
[16] Quoted in, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Joel Porte, *Essays & Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the U.S., 1983), pg. 895.
[17] Sturgess, pg. 114.
[18] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper, 1959).
[19] Despite the fact that Shakespeare could *symbolize* the threat of the Old World, the writers in this study regarded their engagement with Shakespeare not as a betrayal of America through an allegiance to the Old World, but as quintessentially American and even patriotic. Even Whitman, who, as we shall discover, argued that Shakespeare's entrenchment in the caste system of the Old World was precisely what American poetry had to reject, was an enthusiastic and unselfconscious connoisseur of Shakespearean theater.

asserted that Shakespeare's creative genius still required the moral regeneration of American Protestantism:

> . . . the world still wants its poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves with Swedenborg the mourner, but who shall see, speak, and act, with equal inspiration. [20]

Michael Bristol charts, in meticulous detail, the American establishment of institutions in the twentieth century to answer Emerson's call for a "poet-priest," and to continue the Jacksonian project of the consolidation of American identity through Shakespeare.[21] Failing to find the American poet who would fully answer this calling, America responded, according to Bristol, by constructing an elaborate institutional edifice of textual editing, libraries, academic scholarship and pedagogy. The Folger Shakespeare library, founded by Henry and Emily Folger, is the greatest symbol of this national project. Not only does it house eighty two of Shakespeare's First Folios, approximately one third of the world's two hundred twenty eight copies, but the handsome building is situated in close proximity to the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Houses of Congress. The symbolic meaning of this location of the library is unmistakable. William Slade, the library's first director, explains:

> A line drawn from the site of the Folger Shakespeare Memorial through the Capital building and extended onward, will all but touch the monument to Washington and the memorial to Lincoln – the two Americans whose light also spreads across the world. The amount of deviation of the extended line will, in fact, be only great enough to indicate the alteration from the older order which finds its summation in the name of Washington, for more than half his lifetime an English subject, albeit an English colonial, and which again finds its summation in the name of Lincoln. [22]

The Shakespeare Library permanently enshrined at the heart of America's capital what was already a popular conviction in Jacksonian America. Bristol finds

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[20] *Representative Men*, in *Essays and Lectures*, pg. 726.
[21] Michael D. Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 13-91.
[22] *Ibid.*, pg. 76.

America's Shakespearean heart of darkness in its excessive focus on the preservation of a stable and authoritative Shakespearean text (what he calls the "Deuteronomic Shakespeare") at the expense of the subversive and anarchic energies of theatrical production.[23] I find the division is deeper, within Shakespeare's texts themselves, in the historical structuring force of the perverse and its violent conflict within the American imagination.

THE PERVERSE AMERICAN JEREMIAD

As Sacvan Bercovitch has described it, American identity is predicated upon the first American literary art-form, the jeremiad. A jeremiad is a sermon lamenting society's imminent downfall. It is intended, paradoxically, not so much as a harbinger of the demise of society, but as a rebuke whose purpose is to renew the ideals upon which society has been founded. In *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch methodically traces the structure of the jeremiad in the sermons of America's Puritans through its metamorphosis into the concept of American democracy as the "last best hope" for humanity, in perpetual peril of becoming depraved and perverted. While the jeremiad is an invective rebuking society for its backsliding from its founding principles, it also contains a powerful and sincere element of dissent. This dissent,

[23] "The historical success of textuality and of the powerful institutional apparatus that supports it coincides with the virtual collapse of theatre as a strong, independent center of cultural authority. In the case of the canonical, that is to say, the Deuteronomic Shakespeare, the power of the text has been used against the theater, disabling its capacity as a site of cultural and social institution making, and cancelling its function in the creation of an alternative agential space." *Ibid.*, pg. 97.

however, is viciously circular: it cannot envision a solution to America's problems other than the idea of America itself.[24]

In addition to being neatly self-referential, American ideology is also teleological. Like the New Testament that has was written to fulfil the Old Testament, America is associated with "futurity itself." American progress can never be fulfilled by anything as concrete and self-limiting as Manifest Destiny. It must always be moving towards a promise that can only be realized in a perpetual future. Such a teleological view of history produces perverts: those, in every generation, who assume the symbolic role of the murderers of America's future. As Lee Edelman has understood (though without explicitly building on Bercovitch's research), it is for this reason that the Queer in America has taken on the symbolic function of the Death Drive. Following Leo Bersani's dictum that "the value of sexuality itself is to demean the seriousness of every attempt to redeem it," Edelman argues that it is the burden of the Queer to take on the role of the Death Drive.[25] Edelman uses a Lacanian root, "sinthome," combined with "homosexual," to create the original coinage: "sinthomosexual," to describe this figure. By evoking this figure, Edelman attempts to avoid the identity politics of the word "homosexual," and the consequent trap of splitting, displacement, and scapegoating that Bersani finds in the liberationist project he calls the "redemptive reinvention of sex."[26] Rather than using "sinthomosexual," I prefer simply to use the word "pervert,"

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[24] Bercovitch describes this process as taking place not from above, but from below: "through long-nourished rites of assent in which charges of social abuse took the form of appeals to social ideals;" Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pg. xviii.
[25] Leo Bersani, "Is The Rectum A Grave?," *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* 43 (Winter 1987): pg. 222.
[26] Ibid, pg. 215, 222.

which evokes not the Lacanian Death Drive, but Augustinian non-being. [27] The Queer critic, for Edelman, does not assume a positive role, but a role that is best characterized by the ironic negation that I find in Emily Dickinson, who seems free of the identity politics that makes 19th century male American writers dewy-eyed. However, "irony" is too conceptually pure to describe fully Dickinson's dangerously dramatic engagement with her readers. I prefer the active, amoral, perhaps aggressively voyeuristic and complicit "perverse reading."

A confident assertion of *the* American ideology may sound passé at a time when critics dismiss concepts of American identity as part of the old "consensus history"[28] superseded by a criticism based upon an enlarged notion of American history which attempts to dispel the provincial myth of cohesive national identity with an analysis of America's diverse tradition and transnational affiliations.[29] [30] I disagree with Bercovitch's critics, though. It seems to me, on the contrary, that the politics of the American self was profoundly important in the Jacksonian era and it is even more important today. This may be because the American political system is structurally conservative, consisting as it does of only two political parties. It is

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[27] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pg. 58.

[28] David Harlan offers a spirited critique of Bercovitch's critical project, arguing that Bercovitch's notion of cultural hegemony "blights whatever it touches," that "for all the brilliance of his exegetical readings," Bercovitch "reduces classic works to historical documents;" his reading "homogenizes them," . . . "makes complex texts univocal, single-layered, one-dimensional." David Harlan, "A People Blinded from Birth: American History According to Sacvan Bercovitch," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 3 (December 1991), pg. 965.

[29] For examples of the transnational approach to American literary studies, see Sandra M. Gustafson, "The Cosmopolitan Origins of the American Self," *Early American Literature* 47 (November 2, 2012); Paul Giles, *Antipodean America: Australasia and the Constitution of U. S. Literature*; William C. Spengemann, *A New World of Words: Redefining* Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), *Early American Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[30] Of course, despite my adherence to Bercovitch, my own interest in the influence of Shakespeare on American literature can arguably be seen in this tradition of transational criticism.

tasked with the job of uniting a diverse country around a core set of principles, and these principles invariably reproduce, on the left, the dogma that seeks to rejuvenate America by appealing to a lost "American dream"; and on the right, a return to a version of the Puritan work-ethic, laissez faire capitalism, and Christian values that Tea Party Republicans regard as the true America of our founding fathers. In this circumscribed national dialogue, there is only room for a debate about the meaning of "freedom," narrowly defined by neoliberalism.

Transnational American criticism implicitly evades Bercovitch's challenge, thus making it susceptible to being coopted into the very feel-good politics of American progress that Bercovitch warns against. There is no opportunity to discuss what Slavoj Žižek calls the articulation of our "unfreedom."[31] In this climate, the ethical burden of the critic is not to attempt to rediscover the renewed promise of American freedom – and certainly not once again on the back of Shakespeare - but what Ahab calls the "mask" or the "wall" of our ideological prison.

To understand the role of the perverse in American history is to know how America's attempt to renew its identity through narratives of redemption takes place at the cost of the displacement of disease, death, and perversity upon a shadowy figure that has been invented for just that purpose.[32]

This is not, as Edelman implies, with his Lacanian framework, a transhistorical process. It is one rooted in the specific history of the rise of psychiatry and the building of asylums; it is also rooted in American social movements, as seemingly different as the free love movement and the sexual purity movement; it is in the translation of Lamarck's theory of soft inheritance into crude eugenic rhetoric advocating for physical and sexual health to insure pure offspring; and, most

[31] Quoted in: Bercovitch, pg. xi. Original citation is unavailable.
[32] For a lucid discussion of Girard's concept of the "scapegoat," see Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 41-69.

importantly for this study, it is rooted in the developing concept of the pathological imagination and the evolution of America's first sexual deviant: the masturbator. Emerson's project to convert the diseased imagination into a healthy one; Whitman's more ambitious project to convert sexuality itself into a form of what the publisher of *Leaves of Grass*, Orson Fowler called "mental hygiene," (which Fowler explicitly extended to include sexual hygiene in his book, *Sexual Science*, 1870); Hawthorne's haunting by Shakespearean incest in *Hamlet*; Melville's riven struggle to overcome the perverse *Macbeth*; and Dickinson's fertile, negative identification with Iago, are all associated with that specific American history.

Yet Edelman's adherence to the word "Queer," in his subtitle, "Queer Theory and the Death Drive," in my view, is too comfortably academic. In contemporary literary criticism, the word, "Queer," threatens to become so amorphous and all-encompassing that it can come dangerously close to meaning nothing at all. "Perverse," a word burdened with the weight of theological and sexological history is, in my view, less liable to risk becoming so unanchored. In my opinion Jonathan Dollimore was right to insist on this word, in *Sexual Dissidence*. [33] The perverse does its invisible work *within* the most feared cultural taboos in the past and present, and it is only through history that a confrontation and contextualization of these taboos can take place. Complimenting this historical matrix is the dramatic, dangerously open, existentially engaged "perverse reading" of Shakespeare. Both work in a productive dialectic that is sometimes an overt struggle for mastery by the perverse jeremiad, as in Emerson and Whitman; at other times, a richly disquieting interpenetration between the two modes, as in

[33] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Hawthorne and Melville; in Dickinson, perverse reading is at its purest, most gnomically resistant to history, and, as a result, its most menacing.

SEXUAL DISSIDENCE

As I have indicated above, the concept of "the perverse" has a long and rich history. In this section, I would like first to examine the meanings of the term that I will employ in this project. The *Oxford English Dictionary* finds a host of related meanings suggested by the classical Latin "pervertere," all hinging on the root "vertere," "to turn" which echo in seemingly divergent definitions. The various definitions of the word build a conceptual space that relates a seemingly innocuous concept "turning aside" to subversion and destruction. For example, the first definition given by the OED is "to turn aside (a process, action, text, etc.) from a correct state, course, or aim." The second definition, however, shows how this concept can be taken and used to mean something far more radical; it suggests not merely "turning aside," but destruction: "to turn upside down, overturn, or upset; to change for the worse; to subvert, ruin, or destroy."[34] This process of subversion extends with definition three into an attack on religious belief: "To turn (a person) away from a religious belief regarded as true, to one held to be false." Here not only is to "pervert" the direct opposite of to "convert," but perversion becomes the *mechanism* by which belief is lost. [35]

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[34] "pervert, v.". OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141685?rskey=CmDhBU&result=3 (accessed May 08, 2015).

[35] "Although they are all distinct, each of the historical definitions of 'perversion' rests upon essentialist assumptions about what is correct and incorrect, natural and unnatural, as well

Why would a seemingly harmless divergence of direction lead to "disaster" and "ruin"? For Dollimore, the answer is that the movement of "turning" away from the straight and narrow is the "original (if unintended) act of demystification."[36] Turning is dangerous because it reveals that the path dictated by a religious, psychiatric, or political authority is not natural, but human-made, contingent and historical. Such a turning consequently constitutes a form of forbidden knowledge about the underlying social structure that is disturbed by the act of demystification. Dollimore views this as a "violent, sometimes murderous hierarchy between dominant and subordinate cultures, groups, and identities."[37] What Dollimore calls "sexual dissidence" then indicates resistance that unsettles the opposition between the dominant and subordinate relationship. The act of demystification, whether intended or not, destabilizes the distinction between dominant and subordinate terms and this often provokes violent retribution from those whose authority depends upon the distinction between "the straight and narrow" and the perverse remaining unchallenged.[38]

Throughout this thesis, I will rely upon the conceptual space established by Dollimore. I will also extend this to analyse the interrelated meanings of the perverse in 1) Augustinian and Thomistic theology, including the opposition between

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as on ethical or theological notions of right and wrong behaviour. Similarly, every pathological construction depends on a norm against which it can be defined." Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3-4.

[36] I cite Jonathan Dollimore on Augustine not for his expertise in theology, but because his work is foundational in the history of sexuality and the study of Shakespeare. *Ibid.*, pg. 106.

[37] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, pg. 21.

[38] It is important to point out that Dollimore is not referring to "a straightforward opposition between unchanging, internally undifferentiated versions of the dominant and subordinate"; he is referring to a complex dynamic between "social process and representation" evolving over time in which "there emerge different conceptions of domination and dissidence." Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, pg. 27.

"conversion" and "perversion"; 2) 19th century medicine and psychiatry; 3) "perverse reading," an application of the perverse to reader response theory.

THE THEOLOGICAL PERVERSE

The tradition of "the perverse" that Shakespeare inherited is predominantly Augustinian – informed by the theological notion of "privative evil."[39] It also includes a profound generalized suspicion of "wayward movement" – associating it with as diverse notions as the "wandering wombs" of women, the danger of "masterless men," and the subversive deviousness of figurative language.[40] At its heart, though, was a metaphysical tradition unique to Western civilization - whose origin, as M. H. Abrams has shown, was deep within the unique structure of the biblical narrative itself.[41]

In order to understand the scope and depth of the perverse in Shakespeare's tradition, it is important to begin with Jonathan Dollimore's important chapter entitled "Augustine" in *Sexual Dissidence*. In that chapter, Dollimore discovers the key to what makes the perverse such a dynamic and volatile concept. For the perverse, as Dollimore shows, was originally a theological resolution to one of the most fundamental questions of all: "what is the origin of evil"? Augustine's solution to that

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[39] On the ontology "privative evil," see also: G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 11-17.

[40] Dollimore, pg. 119.

[41] I cite Abrams on biblical history in this chapter because his work offers a view of biblical history, as seen through the lens of British Romanticism, which heavily influenced America's literary reception of Shakespeare. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

question, though, was far from being a matter of pure metaphysical inquiry. It was the response to a specific historical threat to the early church. That threat played a fundamental role in shaping the history of Western civilization.

The threat that Augustine felt it his duty to answer was none other than the Manichean heresy. According to the Manicheans, evil is "coeternal and equal in force with the good," "antagonistic to God," and "fundamentally independent of him as well." Augustine here quotes the Manichean view:

> . . . that God was compelled to the creation of the vast structure of this universe by the utter necessity of repelling the evil which fought against him, that he had to mingle the nature of his creating, which was good, with the evil, which is to be suppressed and overcome, and that this good nature was thus so foully polluted, so savagely taken captive and oppressed that it was only with the greatest toil that he could cleanse it and set it free. And even then he cannot rescue all of it and the part which cannot be purified from that defilement is to serve as the prison to enclose the Enemy after his overthrow. (*City of God,* XI. 22 [454]; cf. XI. 13 [446])[42]

If God cannot prevent evil, then he is – as David Hume later argued, "impotent." If he is "able, but not willing," then he is "malevolent." If he is "both able and willing" to prevent evil, "whence then is evil"?[43] As Hume makes clear, this is a devastating indictment, and - as Augustine well knew – if the early church did not credibly answer it, its authority would have been profoundly compromised.

Augustine's answer was essentially to beg the question. He denied that evil had any positive existence:

> And I asked what wickedness was, and I found that it was no substance, but a perversity of the will, which turns aside from Thee, O God, the supreme substance, to desire the lowest, flinging away its inner treasure and boasting itself an outcast. (VII. xvi. trans. Bigg)[44]

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[42] All quotes from Augustine in Dollimore, Ibid, pg. 134.
[43] Ibid, pp. 134-5.
[44] Ibid, pg. 133.

Thus, the "privative" theory of evil was born. Evil, according to Augustine, is "essentially a defect, and its defectiveness lies in a freely chosen act of defection."[45] That defection is perversely to "abandon God," the origin of absolute Being, and to "come nearer to nothingness (XIV. 13 [572])." With that move, Augustine deftly shifts the "burden of proof" from the "accused" to the "accuser." He drives this home by elaborating upon his theory of "original sin" – which, it turns out, is based upon a mistranslation of a key biblical passage.[46] God's omnipotence and grandeur are preserved at the cost of making human beings *themselves* – with their vindictiveness and ingratitude – responsible for the wickedness in the world.

As Dollimore makes clear, the Augustinian view is predicated upon an understanding of human nature that is, at its core, a virtual carte blanche for the scapegoating and persecution of minorities. As Dollimore writes:

> Here is the beginning of a theory which will feed the violence of history: 'essentially', perversion becomes a negative agency within, at the heart of, [privative evil] . . . Augustine inaugurates a punitive metaphysic which remains influential to this day.[47]

Augustine engineers a worldview that claims that "corruption" is hidden in our midst – perhaps where we least expect it. Like Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, everyone is potentially an "angel on the outward side" (III. ii. 260) and a *pervert* within. Shakespearean critic Arthur Lindley disagrees with Dollimore, arguing that the Augustinian doctrine that "licenses coercive rule over an irremediably corrupt humanity also licenses dissent against a government that must share those vices it corrects."[48] The perverse jeremiad, however, as I will explain, is a structuring force that promotes a dominant group in American history, the middle class. "Perverse

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[45] Ibid, pg. 136.
[46] Ibid, pg. 147.
[47] Ibid, pg. 140.
[48] Arthur Lindley, *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1996), pp. 36-7.

reading" involves perverse identifications that are, by definition, excluded and often regarded as abject: the masturbator, the homosexual, the hysterical madwoman in the attic. These are figures isolated by the pathologies that have grown up around them, ostensibly in the service of "health." These categories also, though, possess a metaphysical lineage rooted in the theological perverse. Although a volatile negative energy is released through perverse reading, it seems to me dissident, menacing and isolated, like the figure of Iago at the end of *Othello* – rather than displaying the authority of those who possess an equal share of power.

Augustine's explanation for the origin of evil was not only well understood by the Elizabethans as theology, it was also retold as poetic mythology by Edmund Spenser. In the famous *Mutability Cantos* of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the goddess Mutability is a clear precursor of Milton's Eve who tempts Adam, thus bringing "death into the world and all our woe, With loss of Eden" (Par. Lost, I. 1-3). In her aspiration for "rule and dominion," the goddess "pervert"[s] the "meet order" of "Nature" and the "world's faire frame":

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For she the face of earthly things so changed,
That all which Nature had establisht first
In good estate, and in meet order ranged,
She did *pervert*, and all their statutes burst:
And all the worlds faire frame (which none yet durst
Of gods or men to alter or misguide)
She alter'd quite, and made them all accurst
That God had blessed, and did at first provide
In that still happy state for ever to abide.

VI

Ne shee the lawes of Nature onely brake,
But eke of Justice, and of Policie;
And wrong of right, and bad of good did make,
And death for life exchanged foolishlie:
Since which, all living wights have learn'd to die,

> And all this world is woxen daily worse.
> O pittious worke of Mutabilitie!
> By which we all are subject to that curse,
> And death, in stead of life, have sucked from our nurse.
> (italics added, Mutability, VI, v.-vi)[49]

In Milton's epic, it is Satan who, "in the serpent, perverted Eve" (Book 10, 3), [50] but here in one of the most famous poems of Shakespeare's era, it is Mutability that "pervert"[s] . . . "that which Nature had establisht first/ In good estate." Spenser adds to Augustinian theology the Elizabethan preoccupation with "wayward movement" that could, as I observed earlier, evoke such diverse ideas as the potential for subversion in literary language and the suspicion of "masterless men."

In *Twelfth Night*, for example, Sebastian's suspect status as a man wandering the world without direction is evoked with his line, "my determinate voyage is mere extravagancy" (II. i. 9-10) – "extravagancy" meaning to "diverge." Roderigo calls Othello an "extravagant and wheeling stranger" (I. i. 37).[51]

In a more religious vein, Elizabethan writers like Thomas Browne, in *Religio Medici*, worried about the "errors" his "extravagant and irregular head" is prone to: [52]

> I perceive every man's own reason is his best Oedipus and will, upon a reasonable truce, find a way to loose those bonds where – with *the subtleties of error* have enchained our more flexible and tender judgments . . . In philosophy, where truth seems double-faced, there is no man more paradoxical than myself, but in divinity I love to keep the road . . .
> (Book I, sect. 6)

Yet, Browne's account makes it clear the kind of corruption that the "perverse"

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[49] Edmund Spenser, Thomas P. Roche, and C. Patrick. O'Donnell, *The Faerie Queene* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
[50] John Milton et al., *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: Modern Library, 2007).
[51] All Shakespeare references throughout this thesis will be in, Shakespeare, William, Stanley Wells, and Gary Taylor. *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
[52] Thomas Browne and William Alexander Greenhill, *Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici Letter to a Friend, &c., and Christian Morals* (London: Macmillan, 1904)

entails:

> . . . these opinions, though condemned by lawful councils, were not heresies in me, but bare errors, and single lapses of my understanding without a joint *depravity of my will* . . .
> (italics added, Book I, sect. 7)

It is "depravity of will" that distinguishes "the perverse" from mere "error" – which is simply a result of human kind's exile in a fallen world. Here Browne observes:

> The bad construction and perverse comment on these pair of second causes, or visible hands of God, *have perverted the devotion of many unto atheism*; who, forgetting the honest advisoes of faith, have listened unto the conspiracy of passion and reason . . .
> (italics added, Book I, sect. 19)

And here he warns:

> I confess every country hath its Machiavel, every age its Lucian, whereof common heads must not hear, nor more advanced judgments too rashly venture on. It is the rhetorick of Satan; and may *pervert* a loose or prejudicate belief."
> (italics added, Book I, sect. 20)

The "perverse" is not merely a result of human error, but requires a "depraved will." Yet it can be actively employed to pervert the orthodox with heresy. How, though, one might ask, is "the will" protected from similitude between orthodox and heretical?

In the Geneva Bible, the word "perverse" is used by the translators to designate a seemingly absolute (though actually relative) Other – one who explicitly "turns aside" from a metaphysical order of the "straight waies of the Lord":[53]

> O full of all subtiltie and mischiefe, the childe of the deuill, and enemie of all righteousnesse, wilt thou not cease to *peruert* the straight waies of the Lord? [54]

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[53] In the instance I cite, the Vulgate uses the unambiguous "subvertio," to destroy or overthrow, rather than, "perverti," to turn upside down, overturn, overthrow. "Pervertio" gives room for ambiguity, whereas "subvertio" does not. See "Latin Vulgate. Com : Helping You Understand Difficult Verses*," Latin Vulgate Bible with Douay-Rheims and King James Version Side-by-Side+Complete Sayings of Jesus Christ, accessed March 08, 2014, http://www.latinvulgate.com/. "Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid," Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid, section goes here, accessed March 1, 2014, http://archives.nd.edu/latgramm.htm.

[54] Morison, Stanley. *The Geneva Bible*. London School of Print. and Graphic Arts, 1955.

(italics added, Acts, 13, 9-13)

The use of "the perverse" culminates in Galatians 1, when Paul rebukes backsliders for heresy, "peruert"[ing] the "Gospel of Christ":

> I maruiele that ye are so remoued away unto another Gospel, from him that had called you into the grace of Christ, Which is not another Gospel, saue that there be some which trouble you, and intend to *peruert* the Gospel of Christ.[55]
> (Galatians 1, 6-7)

But, even within the Geneva Bible, the paradoxes of the "perverse" render its meaning unstable – and ultimately threaten it with incoherence. For, it is perhaps, shocking to discover that, in Luke 23, Christ himself is accused of being a "pervert":

> Then the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We haue found this man *peruerting* the nation, and forbidding to pay tribute to Caesar, saying, That he is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Iewes? And hee answered him, and sayd, Thou sayest it. Then sayd Pilate to the hie Priests, and to the people, I find no fault in this man. But they were more fierce, saying He moueth the people, teaching throughout all Iudea, beginning at Galile, euen to this place . . . [56]
> (Luke 23, 1-6)

If the sacred and the perverse are so intimately connected, how is it possible to discern the difference between them? Is the sacred really so self-evident that one would be certain to recognize it, or is it contingent upon the point of view? Is the one who is accused of "perverting the nation," corrupting the "nation" from within, worthy of execution? Or is he the living Christ? The term "perverse" is partly used, to stave off a crisis of identity with absolute authority, but it subtly provokes precisely the crisis that it attempts to ward off.

M. H. Abrams has argued that the biblical narrative is finite, right-angled,

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[55] Here, the Vulgate uses "convertere," which retains the two sided religious connotation of "pervert," meaning to "adopt the monastic life" or, presumably, its antithesis, to commit heresy.

[56] Once again, the Vulgate uses the much more unambiguous, "subvertentem," to "destroy or overthrow."

sequential, and symmetrical.[57] It begins spectacularly – by "divine fiat" ("Let there be light"); it progresses towards the catastrophe of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. At its lowest point, the crucifixion of Christ, there is a sudden reversal of humanity's fortune – which leads to the Armageddon and the establishment, at the end of time, of a "new heaven and new earth" and the redemption of those who are saved. As Abrams writes:

> While the main line of change in the prominent classical patterns of history, whether primitivist or cyclical, is continuous and gradual, the line of change in Christian history (and this difference is pregnant with consequences) is right-angled: the key events are abrupt, cataclysmic, and make a drastic, even an absolute difference.[58]

This is why the perverse turn away from God in Augustine has such catastrophic moral consequences. The perverse "turn" towards "error" and non-being is associated not merely with estrangement from God, but with a departure from a linear path that is also an analogy for cosmic history itself. More, as Abrams shows, the Christian scheme of history is built upon symmetries, oppositions, and reversals. This is why "perversion" so easily becomes the antithesis of "conversion": the "pervert" is "one that is turned from good to evil," "to pervert" becomes to *corrupt* another - and a convert" is "the contrary."

More importantly for the later violent history of the perverse, the biblical exile of the Jews is traditionally figured as an illicit sexual encounter. As Augustine writes, "the soul is guilty of fornication when she turns from You" to seek what she will nowhere find "unless she returns to You" (II. vi.).[59] So that, infused in the climax of sacred world history, the nuptial "joining" of the Church with Christ is *already* the excluded perverse Other: the sin of "fornication" with the "whore of Babylon." Since marriage between man and wife, the soul and God, the Church

[57] Abrams, pg. 35.
[58] Abrams, pg. 36.
[59] Augustine quoted in Abrams, pg. 166.

and Christ, is cast in this imagery of "joining" together, the "perverse" is invariably associated with "unjoining" or "misjoining," as in Macbeth's murder and figurative rape of Duncan; Claudius and Gertrude's incestuous marriage; Bottom's cross-species liaison with Titania; Caliban's potential cross-species rape of Miranda; and Othello's interracial marriage with Desdemona, mediated, for the audience, by Iago's perverse fantasies.[60] Though "the perverse" in Shakespeare's era is by no means exclusively associated with sexual transgression, what Abrams reveals is that the biblical structure over-determines it from the start to conduct powerful currents of sexual dissidence.

AGAINST NATURE

The Medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas provides the most profoundly influential account of the perverse after Augustine. Taking Augustine's metaphysics of privative evil as self-evident, Aquinas develops an idea that would influence the development of the perverse into our own time: that of "natural law." He then uses his concept of natural law to develop a taxonomy of sexual sin.

Although he conceives of sin according to the ontological categories established by Augustine, which prescribe that the "perverse will" sinfully "turns away" from God ("the good" or "Being"), Aquinas emphasizes the Aristotelian notion of "teleology" in his account of good and evil. Thus, the decision to "avoid "the good" is a violation not only of the efficient cause of one's "nature," but an insult to the "final cause," God.

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[60] For a detailed discussion of the concept of "joining" in Shakespeare see Patricia A. Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 97-103.

Before we proceed, it is important to note that Aquinas's style of reasoning runs squarely into a philosophical point that is still hotly debated. This point must be clarified in order to place Aquinas's natural law in context. The problem is what British philosopher David Hume calls the "fact / value" distinction. Queer theorists use this argument to debunk the central unexamined premise of heterosexual authority, its "appeal to nature." Hume argues that conclusions about what "ought to be done" cannot be inferred from premises concerning what "is the case." In other words, it is absurd to argue that "nature" has a necessary claim to moral authority simply because it is "what is," so it is invalid to derive moral principles from "nature." Hume calls this the "naturalistic fallacy." As Edward Feser argues, though, this line of reasoning would have been irrelevant to Aquinas.[61] If a Christian God exists, "what is" *must be* inherently good, and, as such, there can be no moral distinction between what "should be" and "what is." It is only with a secular understanding of nature that the fact / value distinction has any meaning. As we will discover, though, even with the rise of science in the 18th and 19th centuries, Aquinas's teleological view of nature was still immensely influential.

In an Augustinian vein, Aquinas writes: "this is the first precept of law, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided " (I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2, Obj. 3). Yet he elaborates it into the teleological framework of "natural law":

> Since, however, good has the nature of *an end*, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a *natural inclination*, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the *natural law*.[62]
> (italics added, I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2, Obj. 3)

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[61] Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pg. 175.
[62] Thomas, *Summa Theologica First Complete American Edition* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947).

While the natural law has its ultimate origin in God, it does not, according to Aquinas, require any special knowledge of God or scripture. It is a self-evident truth that "nature has taught to all animals" (I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2, Reply Obj. 2). So, for example, Aquinas writes that the first precept of the "natural law" is the preservation of life:

> . . . inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law.
> (I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2, Obj. 3)

If the "preservation of life" is a self-evident "good," reasons Aquinas, an even *greater good*, is the preservation of the "species" – through the process of procreation. So, just, as Hamlet laments, the "Everlasting" has "fixed" his "canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (Ham. I. ii. 131-2), it is an even deeper sin to violate the injunctions that govern the perpetuation of the species. Arnold Davidson summarizes:

> wherefore just as the use of food can be without sin, if it be taken in due manner and order, as required for the welfare of the body, so also the use of venereal acts can be without sin, provided they are performed in due manner and order, in keeping with the end of human procreation.[63]

There are two such principles, therefore, upon which lawful sexual intercourse is based: one is the proper "manner;" and the other is the proper object determined by the "natural order" for the end of procreation. Deviance from the "natural manner" of copulation is a less heinous sin than violating the "natural order." So, for example, "adultery, rape of a virgin, incest, etc." are less serious than masturbation, sodomy, and bestiality because the former merely violate the proper "manner" of copulation while still observing its proper end, whereas the latter are "contrary to nature."

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[63] Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pg. 99.

Aquinas here not only converts Augustine's metaphysics into a hierarchy of sexual sins, but each type of sexual sin is categorized specifically according to its deviance from the natural order. As such, Aquinas is able to argue that sins "contrary to the natural order" constitute an affront to God himself:

> . . . just as the ordering of right reason proceeds from men, so the order of nature is from God Himself: wherefore in sins contrary to nature, whereby the very order of nature is violated, an injury is done to God, the Author of nature.[64]

Aquinas's reasoning moves elegantly here from the most general principle of life as "self-preservation" to a law that governs the most private and minute details of sexual intercourse. Even more importantly, Aquinas's argument is structured in such a way that non-procreative sex is turned into a direct "injury" to God himself. While Aquinas's argument will have a powerful impact on Shakespeare's plays – most significantly *Macbeth* – it is in the 18th century with its increasing scientific interest in "function" that Aquinas's more naturalistic style of reasoning will come to have a profound impact. This will have a specific influence on the 18th and 19th century "masturbation panic" and the budding psychiatric industry in America, which I will discuss later in my chapter on Hawthorne.

The perverse is a tradition that not only builds from Augustine to Aquinas, but has two distinct lineages. Aquinas's tradition describes specific types of sexual deviance according to the degree to which they "turn away" from God, whereas the Augustinian tradition defines sin as *itself* a form of sexual deviance. The Augustinian tradition emphasizes the ontological dilemma of the soul "turning away" from Being towards Non-Being – or as Antipholus of Syracuse might put it, turning from

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[64] Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pg. 100.

substance to "wander in illusion" (IV. iii. 43). Its imagery is derived from the soul's journey into "error" or exile and the promise of its ultimate "union" with God.

Aquinas's minute taxonomy of sexual transgression coupled with his teleological notion of sexual "purpose" is invariably associated with the specific problems of particular *types* of sexual transgression. Aquinas describes the sexual perverse not as a form of straying, but a form of *rebellion* not only against the principle of life, but against the species. For this reason, although a play like *Macbeth* has no explicit sexual transgression, Macbeth's murder of his king and guest, Duncan, is a precise enactment of Aquinas's view of the ungrateful and vindictive nature of sexual perversion. Macbeth, for example, cries:

> But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly; (III. ii. 17-19)

It is the impulse to "let the frame of things disjoint" that Aquinas would regard as the motive behind perverse sexual transgression.

Even more pertinently, Macbeth thunders: "though the treasure / Of nature's germens tumble all together / Even till destruction sicken" (Mac IV. i. 57-9). Here, Macbeth demands knowledge from the witches at the risk of destroying the very archetypal forms upon which nature is framed. As Aquinas argues, he would rather destroy his "species" than cede his fragile hold on power. That is the Faustian bargain that Aquinas establishes when he elaborates "natural law." For Aquinas, the sexual deviant is an agent of what Freud would later call the Death Drive – but, he is a specific kind of figure who wants, as Lee Edelman describes the "sinthomosexual," to *murder* the future.

Aquinas's teleological view of the "perverse" will also ghost the Romantic concept of the "imagination," strongly influenced by such Shakespeare plays as

Macbeth and *The Tempest* in the 18th and 19th centuries and it will subtly inform Krafft-Ebing's invention of "the sexual instinct" in the late 19th century.

Of course, *Macbeth* is deeply indebted to Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. *Dr Faustus* also has a profound impact on the American tradition, best exemplified in Melville's depiction of Captain Ahab and Hawthorne's depiction of Young Goodman Brown's perverse communion with the witches in the dark forest. Arthur Lindley writes eloquently about Augustinian non-being in *Dr Faustus* in his chapter, "The Unbeing Of The Overreacher," in *Hyperion And The Hobbyhorse*. While *Dr Faustus* has an important mythical presence in American literature, what most captured the anxieties of the antebellum period was *Macbeth* with its sustained atmosphere of dread and desire. My thesis will, therefore, focus primarily on *Macbeth* – though I do allude to the important mythic presence of *Dr Faustus* as well.

The Shakespearean perverse as a form of "joining," "unjoining," and "misjoining," exemplified, as I have argued, in *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Hamlet*, is also an active notion in the America's Shakespearean perverse. It compliments the Shakespearean perverse I have described in *Macbeth*.

PERVERSION IN SEXOLOGY

In the late 19th century, the sexologist Krafft-Ebing coined the term "sexual instinct" to link deviant sexual desire to personality. In the view of Arnold Davidson, this historical moment constituted the invention of "sexuality." As Ebing writes:

> These anomalies are very important elementary disturbances, since upon the nature of sexual sensibility the mental individuality in greater part depends.[65]

Ebing's intentions could not have been more different from Aquinas's. He was a humanitarian who did not want to demonize deviant sexual behaviour, but to understand it in a dispassionate, objective scientific manner. In fact, Ebing was at pains to separate the "perverse" legacy inherited from Augustine and Aquinas from that of his own project. For Ebing, "perversion" would have had a "functional" definition. It would, according to the Robley Duglinson's *Medical Lexicon* refer to: "one of the four modifications of function in disease; the three others being augmentation, diminution, and abolition."[66]

Yet, Ebing could not adequately describe perversion without inventing a new concept: he called this the "sexual instinct":

> *Perversion* of the sexual instinct . . . is not to be confounded with *perversity* in the sexual act; since the latter may be induced by conditions other than psychopathology. The concrete perverse act, monstrous as it may be, is clinically not decisive. In order to differentiate between disease (perversion) and vice (perversity), one must investigate the whole personality of the individual and the original motive leading to the perverse act. Therein will be found the key to the diagnosis.[67]

For Foucauldian scholars like Davidson, of course, it is immediately obvious what is happening here. One regime of power and knowledge, the juridical (with its

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[65] Quoted in, Davidson, pg. 21.
[66] Quoted in Davidson, pg. 14.
[67] Davidson, pg. 23.

theological rationale), is being usurped by another: the scientific. Rather than controlling behavior by merely criminalizing perversity, Ebing's humanitarian efforts to understand the perverse as a disease opens up the "whole personality" to investigation. Thus, we have the Foucauldian paradox: the humanitarian pursuit of scientific understanding in the service of life actually becomes the agent of a far more invasive form of power than had ever existed previously.

Or does it?

A qualification immediately springs to mind. Ebing does not concern himself with the "final cause" of procreation: glorifying God's designed world. He is merely concerned with the elemental mechanism by which an organism survives and perpetuates its species. However, Ebing's notion of the "sexual instinct" is inextricably associated with Aquinas's "natural law" because it uses precisely Aquinas's terms, "survival" and "perpetuation of the species" (which are also, coincidentally adopted by Darwin). These terms mean that the "sexual instinct" will be defined not just by its "function," but on its "purpose."[68] At the same time, Ebing's description of the "sexual instinct" is Augustinian – unintentionally evoking the logic of privative evil:

> The sexual instinct is a psychological phenomenon in every normal being endowed with life. It is a need of a general order and in consequence it is useless to look for its localization, as one has done, in any particular part whatever of the organism. Its seat is *everywhere and nowhere* . . . This instinct is therefore independent of the structure itself of the external genital organs, which are only instruments in the service of a function, as the stomach is an instrument in the service of the general function of nutrition.[69]
> (italics added)

Here embedded within an ostensibly scientific description is a "psychological function" that is explicitly metaphysical ("it is useless to look for its localization").

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[68] I do not mean to argue that Darwin was, in any sense, Augustinian or Thomistic. Quite the contrary. What I am pointing out is that, despite his intentions, a trace of Augustinian and Thomistic ideas inheres within the language that he uses.

[69] Davidson, pg. 13.

The supposedly objective hunt for the origin of the "pervert" within the personality, then, becomes a search for an object that is "everywhere and nowhere." At the heart of a supposed scientific inquiry, one has here a pursuit for an entity that is as mysterious and potentially threatening as the demon Christ cast out – who cried, "My name is Legion, for we are many." (KJ, Mark 5:9).

Although Davidson makes an extremely persuasive case that we ignore the genuine innovation of the sexologists – and, hence miss the "invention of sexuality" – when we imagine that "perversion" was merely a continuation of "perversity," it is my view that Davidson overstates his case. As Richard Sha has wittily observed, Davidson's rigid distinction between Victorian era sexology and the tradition that came before it "makes Romantic sex mere foreplay to the real thing."[70] While it is clear that a "search for the origins" of a concept can be misguided, it is also possible to err on the side of an inquiry that is too self-contained, and, therefore, fails to see connections across various historic periods.

By presupposing, for example, a strong hard line between the late Victorian era and the prior history of the "perverse," Davidson ignores not only Sha's later point – which is that the scientific origins of the "perverse" as "deviation from function" go back as early as 1750, but that the theological form of the perverse never disappears - but retains a ghostly presence 'within' the sexological perverse. In other words, what Foucault would call the "disciplinary" regime did not just displace the "juridical" regime. They operated alongside one another – and they did so for well over a hundred years prior to the time that Davidson assigns to the perverse.

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[70] Richard C. Sha, *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750-1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pg. 21.

PERVERSION IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

My study of American literature in the 19th century suggests that there is no clean line between the theological perverse and the emerging psychiatric form of the perverse. The Augustinian perverse and the Thomistic teleological view of sexual sin were an animating presence alongside the rise of antebellum American capitalism and what Foucault calls "bio-power," the life-affirming discourses of rationalist American psychiatry. These theological ideas manifested themselves in forms as diverse as the conservative Lockean psychology of Hawthorne, the Lamarckian eugenic theories of Whitman, and the phrenological "sexual science" of Orson Fowler.

As I have argued, the concept of America during the antebellum period was also profoundly rooted in a teleology structured by the Bible. In the antebellum period, as today, America was viewed as *the* fulfilment of the promise of Old World, most exemplified by Shakespeare. As such, works of art, structured to consolidate an emerging American identity, were unified by the same powerful theological forces that informed 19th century views of sexuality.

As in Renaissance England, the view of the individual body was quite readily displaced upon social body and vice versa. As we will discover in Emerson and Whitman, the health of the individual sexual body was regarded, quite literally, as essential to insuring that America fulfil its destiny. Emerson and Whitman structure this politics of the healthy imagination through a utopian interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

In Hawthorne and Melville, perversion of the sexual body is regarded more actively as a murderous assault directly on America's future. Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

is the play primarily enlisted for this dramatic enactment, but *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, and *Othello* also play an important role. I regard Emily Dickinson as the sole dissenter in America's mad perverse jeremiad. She dissents through an exultant identification with Iago and Augustinian non-being itself, undermining progressive identity politics from within. Dickinson exemplifies the return of Augustinian non-being as a positive, transfiguring force.[71]

THE PERVERSE IMAGINATION: A LICENTIOUS AND VAGRANT FACULTY

The budding of psychiatry beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries was an Enlightenment attempt to divorce mental illness from the theological view that held it was a form of demonic possession and to anchor it to a rational and humane treatment of the insane. Yet, the history of perversion demonstrates the persistence of metaphysical categories within ostensibly medical ones. For it was by using the eminently rational principles set out by John Locke that 18th century psychiatrists recreated the perverse in the image of the Enlightenment.

The imagination, first described by John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, as the mind's organizing principle for secondary ideas, carried to it through the nervous system, quickly came to be regarded as the skeleton key that would unlock the secrets of mental illness. As Thomas Laqueur writes, the imagination was, in the late 17th through the early nineteenth century:

> the central guiding principle of the continuity of the person which allowed us to connect our pasts, presents, and futures; the link between reason and the

[71] Fernie, pp. 3-33.

> senses or between the body and the mind; the foundation of art and of economic desire; the core concern of a new branch of philosophy – aesthetics; the key to how ideas were understood to be connected in associationist or perhaps any empiricist psychology, among much else.[72]

It also became the kinder, gentler face of a medical discourse through which the old theological terrors and paradoxes of the perverse would be revisited.

While Locke dedicates only a few pages in the *Essay* to the diseased imagination, this became the cornerstone for thinking about mental illness for almost two hundred years. For Locke, madness is not primarily based upon a problem with the reasoning faculty. Madmen reason coherently, but their reasoning is based upon false premises. The entertainment of false premises is the result of a negative feedback loop that is caused either by an overactive imagination or a fault in the nerves (or both) which carry simple ideas to the brain. What ensues is a "violence of the imagination" that sets up an independent realm that takes "fancies for realities":

> Thus you shall find a distracted man fancying himself a king, with a right inference require suitable attendance, respect, and obedience: others, who have thought themselves made of glass, have used caution necessary to preserve such brittle bodies. Hence it comes to pass, that a man, who is very sober, and of a right understanding in all other things, may, in one particular, be as frantic as any in Bedlam;[73]
> (Ch. 11, sect. 13)

Madmen, then, like Macbeth, usurp a kingdom to which they are not entitled. A "distracted man" might "fancy himself a king," but his kingdom is based upon an insubstantial void. As George S. Rousseau writes:

> [The Enlightenment] arrogated powers to the diseased imagination in its influence on the body that earlier had been reserved for the Deity himself; imagination, in obstructed and consequently diseased forms in the female or

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[72] Thomas Walter. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), pg. 319.
[73] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding; with Notes and Illustrations, and an Analysis of Mr. Locke's Doctrine of Ideas. 25th. Ed. with the Author's Last Additions and Corrections* (London: T. Tegg, 1925), pg. 94.

> male, could destroy the seed of life, the foetus at any stage of conception or gestation.[74]

If the imagination could take on power reserved for the Deity, it could also become associated with his nemesis, Satan. For the false epistemology associated with insanity would also come to be a central part of the indictment of masturbation. Consider, for example, this crucial passage in the *Onania*:

> For fornication and adultery itself, tho' heinous sins, we have frailty and nature to plead; but self-pollution is a sin, not only against nature, but a sin that perverts and extinguishes nature, and he who is guilty of it, is labouring at the destruction of his kind, and in a manner strikes at the Creation itself.[75]

The masturbator is also, like Lucifer, a usurper of pleasure that doesn't rightly belong to him. He creates the object of his unnatural desire, thus eschewing the social obligations that sexuality demands in favour of the boundless and insubstantial kingdom of the imagination.

It is not surprising, then, that Samuel Johnson, for example, calls the imagination a "licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint"[76] (chapter 44). The "licentious" and subversive potential of the imagination is there right from the beginning when Locke gives it a false epistemology.

The Lockean view of the imagination by the medical establishment was, throughout the Romantic period – and well beyond the mid-19th century in America – untouched by Kant's "Copernican revolution in reverse" which placed the subject at the centre of the "phenomenal" universe. It remained staunchly rooted in the empiricist, associationist tradition of Locke. Though it was Kant's move to make "nature" an extension of the individual mind rather than an external

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[74] G. S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture, and Sensibility* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pg. 94.
[75] *A Supplement to the Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self Pollution* (London, 1724), pg. 10.
[76] Samuel Johnson and Warren Fleischauer, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (Great Neck, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1962).

standard to imitate – and it was precisely Kant's shift that allowed for the Shakespearean imagination to become democratized by the German organicists – the rise of science and the burgeoning psychiatric tradition had a strong influence on critics like Coleridge. As Richard Sha observes:

> Coleridge, for example, read, owned, or had access to [a vast collection of books on science]. He not only often attended medical lectures (Coffman and Harris), but also wrote an essay on physiology called *Hints towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life*. Romantic culture's emphasis on feeling and on a mind-body reciprocity led scientists and poets to explore human sexuality in unprecedented ways. They asked what sexuality could tell us about the interaction between the body and mind, especially because many believed as did Coleridge that the "plastic life or the power of the Germ [seed] . . . is the manifestation of distinct essence in the all-common Matter." [77]

Coleridge delivered his lectures on Shakespeare in 1818. By 1822, the British doctor, John Mason Good, used the character of Hamlet as a template for his discussion of "melancholy attonita." He called Shakespeare "the highest authority in everything relating to the human mind and its affections." [78]This was followed up by the more systematic 1833 work of George Farren, 'Essays on the Varieties of Mania, Exhibited by the Characters of Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear, and Edgar."[79]

Given this eclectic atmosphere, it is understandable that we find Coleridge, in his *Lectures on Shakespeare*, offering what is essentially a medical diagnosis of a "mutilated" and "diseased" Hamlet emphasizing a typical psychiatric opinion of the time that madness was based upon an over-excited imagination and the loss of the "due balance between the real and imaginary worlds":

> In Hamlet [Shakespeare] seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a *due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses*, and our meditation on the workings of our minds, – an *equilibrium* between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet, this balance is disturbed: *his thoughts,*

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[77] Sha, pg. 24.
[78] Quoted in: Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 83-84.
[79] George Farren, *Essays on the Varieties in Mania, Exhibited by the Characters of Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear, and Edgar* (New York: AMS Press, 1975).

> *and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions*, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the 'medium' of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and colour not naturally their own. Here we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, consequent upon it, with all its *symptoms* and accompanying qualities.[80]
> (italics added)

For Coleridge, Shakespeare is not only "nature humanized," but he is capable of inventing characters with imaginations that can be pathologized. If the imagination possesses the "very powers of growth and production,"[81] "the images of fancy" can also become diseased through unnatural activity. It is the very "unconscious purposefulness" of the imagination that gives it scope for defection from "real action," allowing it to set up an unhealthy world of its own that upsets the "due balance between our attention to objects and our senses." Hamlet becomes a portrait of the artist whose "enormous intellectual activity" destroys his "equilibrium." If Shakespeare's imagination was freely available for the artist, then it was also the carrier of a disease that psychiatrists were only then beginning to diagnose.

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[80] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare and Other Poets and Dramatists* (London: Everyman's Library, 1909)
[81] Abrams, pg. 223.

EMERSON'S ENCHANTED ISLAND: AMERICA WITHOUT CALIBAN

There are people who read Shakspear [sic] for his obscenity as the glaucous gull is said to follow the walrus for his excrement.[82]

OVERVIEW

Ralph Waldo Emerson's debt to Shakespeare is one of the largest in this study. I first chart this profound influence, which extends from Emerson's most casual register to his moments of deepest distress and vulnerability. Shakespeare is also a sometimes hidden presence in Emerson's most characteristic passages. While, as I argue, Emerson generally eschewed the wide variety of identifications with Shakespearean persona typical of Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson, he consolidated his identity as the foremost American critic through an identification with Prospero.

Emerson became, in the romantic tradition, a champion of the deified imagination that Locke had originally pathologized both as a sign of mental illness and, implicitly, as a perverse usurpation by "fancy" of reality. Emerson, however, skips over the Faustian implications of the romantic imagination, by identifying with Prospero, who, in Emerson's mythology, is the benign lord of an enchanted American island, bleached of the presence of Caliban and his perverse menace. Emerson's Protestant background, though, forced him to qualify this deification of the imagination by emphasizing the distinction between the "healthy" and the

[82] Ralph Waldo Emerson and Lawrence Alan Rosenwald, *Selected Journals, 1820-1842* (New York, NY: Library of America, 2010), pg. 312.

"diseased" imaginations. Hamlet came to represent, for Emerson, the diseased and potentially perverse imagination that would stand in the way of America realizing its destiny.

SPIRITUAL FATHER OF AMERICA'S SHAKESPEARE

Emerson is, according to Michael Bristol, the great forebear of the Shakespeare of the American academy.[83] Certainly, Emerson's peculiar brand of transcendentalist Bardolatry was the wellspring of inspiration that drove the couple, Henry and Emily Folger, to amass over forty years one of the most impressive collections of Shakespeareana in history. It also drove them to establish jointly the Folger Shakespeare library at the heart of the US capital in 1932. In fact, Bardolatry in the style of Emerson, could justly be said to have fuelled Henry and Emily's courtship and later their entire marriage.[84]

The journalist James Waldo Fawcett, who worked closely with Mrs. Folger in the last years of her life, observed that Mr. Folger had only a "slight advantage" over his wife in his knowledge of Shakespeare, but after their marriage, Emily soon "adjusted the balance" by achieving an M. A. degree in Shakespeare under the tuition of one of the most eminent Shakespeare scholars of his day, Dr. Horace Howard Furness. Mrs. Folger "was [Mr. Folger's] librarian, clerk, and amanuensis," but more than that, after his sudden death in June 11, 1930, she assumed the full responsibility of the unfinished library. She "was thrust into the position of making

[83] See especially Bristol's chapter five, "Shakespeare In The American Cultural Imagination," in, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 123-143.

all major decisions about the final library design, staffing, and financing."[85] She also donated, out of her own savings, the additional funds needed to open the library.

While Emily certainly possessed equal if not greater knowledge of Shakespeare, it was Henry's job as president of Standard Oil, the company founded by John D. Rockefeller, that made the couple's devotion to collecting Shakespeareana possible. The connection between Emerson and Shakespeare was established early for Henry. In Christmas of 1875, when Henry returned home from Amherst College for Christmas vacation, he received from his younger brother Stephen Lane Folger, a single volume edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*. Folger filled the title page and blank pages with quotes from various authors about Shakespeare. By far the most generous selection of quotes came from Emerson, specifically passages from "Shakespeare; or the Poet" from *Representative Men* (1850).[86] As Emily Folger later recollected, Henry's already substantial enthusiasm was kindled when he attended a lecture by the man whose writing about Shakespeare he most idolized, Emerson. On March 19, 1879 at Amherst College Hall, Emerson gave a lecture not, as luck would have it, on the topic of Shakespeare, but on "The Superlative or Mental Temperance." Nonetheless, the chance to listen to the elderly Emerson lecture transformed Henry. According to Stephen H Grant, "Emerson packed so much thought and beauty into condensed sentences that Henry considered them to *sound* Shakespearean."[87]

After his death, Emily described the influence of Shakespeare on Henry:

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[85] Stephen H. Grant, *Collecting Shakespeare: The Story of Henry and Emily Folger* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pg. 35. See also Stephen H. Grant, "A Most Interesting and Attractive Problem: Creating Washington's Shakespeare Library," *Washington History* 24, no. 1 (2012): pp. 2-21.
[86] Grant, *Collecting Shakespeare*, pg. 29.
[87] Grant, pg. 30.

> Henry Folger's original interest in Shakespeare was instinctive. It was a natural expression of his own spiritual character. The inner light of his mind was reflected in the age-dimmed but still bright mirror of the poet's work. Science affords no satisfying explanation of such phenomena. Certain souls respond to certain other souls, but no theory yet evolved is competent to furnish a complete analysis of the relation.[88]

The notion of an ahistorical relationship with Shakespeare that is purely "instinctive," based upon a "natural expression of [Henry's] spiritual character" is richly Emersonian – as is typical of both Henry and Emily's remarks about Shakespeare. Speaking about her husband's passion for Shakespeare in 1932 at the Meridian Club in New York, Emily showed how this transcendental Shakespeare could be wedded with a vision of America's cultural origin and its unique destiny:

> [Mr. Folger] visioned [ibid] the cultural value, the ethical and social value of the beauty and idealism of Shakespeare. The poet is one of our best sources, one of the wells from which we Americans draw our national thought, our faith and our hope . . .[89]

As in Emerson, a personal and ahistorical Shakespeare blends with an "idealism" that establishes America's cultural authority. Emerson was the figure, above all others, who forged this connection for the Folgers. It is certainly no accident, then, that the Folgers spent decades attempting to acquire Emerson's own personal copy of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*. Emily finally succeeded in obtaining, on indefinite loan from the Emerson Memorial Association, one of Emerson's four copies of Shakespeare, one of only two with Emerson's signature. It was the copy that Emerson kept "in his bedroom, and from certain annotations it is obviously the one which he let his children take to school and use in their studies." For several months in 1934, this copy was displayed in the central case in the exhibition hall of the Folger Library.[90]

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[88] Grant, pg. 37.
[89] Grant, pg. 33.
[90] Grant, pg. 184.

Who can blame the Folgers for being inspired by Emerson's contagious enthusiasm about Shakespeare – which it is almost impossible to overstate? In his seminal essay in *Representative Men*, entitled, "Shakespeare; Or, The Poet," Emerson writes, in a typical vein, in which he compares Shakespeare to Christianity itself:

> It was not until the nineteenth century, whose speculative genius is a sort of living Hamlet, that the tragedy of Hamlet could find such wondering readers. Now, literature, philosophy and thought are Shakespearized. His mind is the horizon beyond which, at present, we do not see. Our ears are educated to music by his rhythm. Coleridge and Goethe are the only critics who have expressed our convictions with any adequate fidelity: but there is in all cultivated minds a silent appreciation of his superlative power and beauty, which, like Christianity, qualifies the period.[91]

In a manner consistent with contemporary critics, Emerson comes just short of deifying Shakespeare, but he also hails his own age as the one most suited to understand the great tragic protagonist, Hamlet. Emerson also demonstrates the range of Shakespeare criticism that American intellectuals had ready access to: from Goethe to Coleridge. However, Emerson was also well read in the entire European critical canon, which included, among others, Johnson, Hazlitt, Keats, the Schlegels, and Madame de Staël. He maintained a lifelong correspondence with Thomas Carlyle, who also published a book comparable to Emerson's own *Representative Men*: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, And The Heroic In History*. Carlyle included a chapter on Shakespeare and Dante, analogous to Emerson's own chapter on Shakespeare, "The Hero As Poet: Dante: Shakespeare," which was equally fervent in its praise of Shakespeare.

Yet, despite Emerson's well-known Bardolatry, the extent and depth of his assimilation of Shakespeare has only been hinted at. Melville may have been the most overt Shakespearean among Jacksonian writers, but his extensive

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[91] Ralph Waldo Emerson and Joel Porte, *Essays & Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the U.S., 1983), pg. 718.

Shakespearean allusions and language-experiments only extend to *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852). Emerson imbibed Shakespeare as a kind of second self. If Emerson's contemporary Shakespeare critic, Jones Very, could make the Keatsian claim that Shakespeare "may be said to have been most truly himself in being others," Emerson might be said to have been most truly himself when he was Shakespeare.[92] Emerson's very throw-away expressions are often quarried, sometimes unconsciously, from Shakespeare's plays. In Emerson's *Selected Journals*, during his formative period, from 1820-1842, Lawrence Rosenwald has indexed one hundred twenty-two separate allusions to Shakespeare. This, however, only scratches the surface. For, the undoubtedly conscientious Rosenwald only counts deliberate allusions to Shakespeare or his plays. He understandably overlooks the way that the very texture of Emerson's language is interwoven with Shakespeare allusions.

The word "pudder," for example, occurs only once in all of Shakespeare – in *King Lear*, in Act III, scene ii of *King Lear* – when Lear is on the heath:

> Let the great gods
> That keep this dreadful *pudder* o'er our heads
> Find out their enemies now.
> (italics added, III. ii. 49-51)

Emerson remembers it in a passing remark in his journal:

> *Great pudder* make my philanthropic friends about the children. I should be glad to be convinced they have taught one child one thing.[93]

Another word, "dislimn" occurs only once in Shakespeare –in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act IV, scene xiv – in Antony's soliloquy after he is defeated near Actium. Describing the clouds, Antony exclaims:

> That which is now a horse, even with a thought

[92] Quoted in, Julian Markels, *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pg.44.
[93] Emerson, *Journals*, pg. 438.

> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct,
> As water is in water.
> (IV. xix. 9-11)

Emerson remembers the word – and uses it in recollecting an observation by his brother, Charles:

> Charles remarks upon the nimbleness & buoyancy which the conversation of the spiritualist awakens; the world begins to *dislimn*."

During a long sea voyage in which he felt in peril of his life, Emerson recited Milton's, "Lycidas," to comfort him, but he describes the event echoing Clarence's famous speech from *Richard III*:

> O Lord! Methought what pain it was to drown!
> What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears!
> What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
> Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks;
> A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
> Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
> Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
> All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
> (I. iv. 21-28)

Here is Emerson in his journal:

> A long storm from the second morn of our departure consigned all the five passengers to the irremediable chagrins of the stateroom, to wit, nausea, darkness, unrest, uncleanness, harpy appetite & harpy feeding, *the ugly sound of water in mine ears, anticipations of going to the bottom, & the treasures of the memory.* I remembered up nearly the whole of Lycidas, clause by clause, here a verse & there a word, as Isis in the fable the broken body of Osiris. –[94]
> (italics added)

Even the most quintessentially Emersonian passages are often larded with concealed pearls stolen from the Bard:

> The great and crescive self, rooted in absolute nature, supplants all relative existence, and ruins the kingdom of mortal friendship and love.[95]

Again, "crescive" is a word used only once in Shakespeare. Compare this passage from *Henry V*:

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[94] *Ibid.*, pg. 217.
[95] Emerson, *Essays*, pg. 487.

> And so the Prince obscur'd in his contemplation
> Under the veil of wildness, which (no doubt)
> Grew like the summer grass, fasted by night,
> Unseen, yet *crescive* in his faculty.
> (I, i. 63-6)

For the man who claims in "Self-Reliance," that "imitation is suicide," or in his essay on Shakespeare, "Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare," did not mean that precisely. What he meant was that the original energy that Shakespeare tapped was now available for the individual. The American "poet-priest" could annex not only Shakespeare's life force, but his cultural authority to the self. Although Emerson had no inkling of the Shakespeare establishment that would develop in the twentieth century, his project foreshadowed it.

With the exception of Emerson's usurpation of the role of Prospero, his borrowings from Shakespeare almost never involve the dramatic identifications that we will find in Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson. They are passed through the sieve of a mind that was enamored by the expressive power of Shakespeare's language and, most importantly, thrilled by its power. The Faustian strain is, of course, concealed within Shakespeare's wizard, Prospero, who seems to have realized Faust's dream of acquiring power over all nature, without having to sell his soul to the devil. It is everywhere in Emerson's mystical concept of the Oversoul, which bestows upon the poetic imagination an occult relationship with nature, equivalent to that of Prospero, though it is Protestant American capitalism that does the magic rather than Ariel. To understand Emerson's identification with Prospero, though, we must first explore his relationship to the Lockean tradition outlined in the preceding chapter. Having done that, it will be important to recognize that, far from being untroubled, as he wanted to be viewed, Emerson's imagination became

implicitly pathologized by a discourse of health and sickness, with anxieties that are voiced through *Hamlet*.

Following Coleridge in the high romantic tradition, Emerson deified the imagination – though not unconditionally. He deified what he considered to be the *healthy* imagination – and, consequently, he internalized Augustinian non-being and the psychiatric categories of the healthy and diseased imagination that sexual reformers like Sylvester Graham, empowered by the Lockean American psychiatric establishment, endorsed.[96] In doing so, he actually advanced the process by which the perverse imagination was internalized much further than American psychiatrists could have ever have envisaged.

However, we must first address Emerson's legitimate differences from America's Lockean psychiatrists. Emerson follows Kant and Coleridge in the traditional romantic move of annexing God's powers to the imagination. Consider, for example, how America's Lockean psychiatrists would have regarded this passage from Emerson's most famous essay, "Self-Reliance," evoking the opening scene of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew:*

> The popular fable of the sot who was picked up dead drunk in the street, carried to the duke's house, washed and dressed and laid in the duke's bed, and, on his waking, treated with all obsequious ceremony like the duke, and assured that he had been insane, owes its popularity to the fact, that it

[96] The word, "psychiatry," (and its derivatives) was, according to the OED, first used in the North American Review in 1828. This term was not used routinely, though, in the early years of the profession. Generally, the term "psychology" is used. Also popular in the Jacksonian period, in place of our contemporary word, "psychiatrist," was the word "alienist." This word handily evokes the Lockean notion that the diseased imagination is estranged, operating in a factitious reality independent from the real world. I use "psychiatry," however, to emphasize the fact that the Asylum Superintendents were generally medical doctors who pioneered the psychiatric establishment we recognize today. "psychiatry, n.". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/153856?redirectedFrom=psychiatry> (accessed January 9, 2014).

> symbolizes so well the state of man, who is in the world a sort of sot, but now and then wakes up, exercises his reason, and finds himself a true prince.[97]

As we have seen, Locke uses a parallel example in order to describe the disordered ideas of an insane man. Emerson, on the other hand, can be positively ecstatic about the prospects of what, in a passage often quoted by American psychiatrists, Johnson would call in *Rasselas* the "realm of fancy."

The reason why the solution that Emerson and Coleridge found in German Romanticism didn't have any purchase in American psychiatry is that it evaded the intricate link between the mind and body, upon which the entire system of psychiatry was founded. By asserting a radical monism ("idealism saith: matter is a phenomenon, and no substance"), Emerson skips over the problem of the link between the mind and body entirely, allowing the mind not only to usurp the body, but all of nature as well.[98]

This move led to two accusations on the part of Emerson's literary enemies. First, he was accused of narcissism. This charge is most notably levelled by Hawthorne in a striking passage in his short story, "Monsieur du Miroir" – which we will revisit later:

> Thus do mortals deify, as it were, a mere shadow of themselves, a spectre of human reason, and ask of that to unveil the mysteries, which Divine Intelligence has revealed so far as needful to our guidance, and hid the rest.[99]

This should hardly be surprising when Emerson utters such untroubled lines as this, in "The American Scholar": "The world, — this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around;" or this from *Nature*: "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in

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[97] Emerson, *Essays*, pg. 268.
[98] *Ibid*. pg. 40.
[99] Nathaniel Hawthorne and James McIntosh, *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1987), pg. 405.

the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature."[100]

The second implicit accusation came from Melville. It is no accident that he turned the Faustian hero of *Moby-Dick*, captain Ahab, into a transcendentalist whose grim "sultanic" grandiosity is undercut by intimations of "naught beyond" at the heart of nature. Consider, for example, this passage by Captain Ahab:

> Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines.[101]

Now compare Emerson in the chapter, "Spirit," in *Nature*:

> Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite.[102]

Hidden in Melville's accusation of Emerson is the Presbyterian concern that Emerson was too naïve to recognize the way that the depraved will could manipulate his theory for its own ends. Indeed, Melville suggests that the perverse will was *already* operating unseen within Emerson's theory. As Harold Bloom observes, Emerson's progressive legacy was inherited by the educational reformer, John Dewey, but his legacy as the "primary theoretician of power" was inherited by auto tycoon Henry Ford.[103]

Although Emerson seems blissfully unaware (at least until his darker book *The Conduct of Life*, with its chapters, "Wealth" and "Power") of the potential for his ideas to be perverted by the acquisitive impulse that American psychiatrists inveighed against as "money-mania," it is no accident that he deliberately evades

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[100] Emerson, *Essays*, pg. 60, pg. 10.
[101] Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg.140.
[102] Emerson, *Essays*, pg. 41.
[103] Harold Bloom, *Emerson's Essays* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006), pg. 5.

this accusation by countering the Marlovian tradition of *Dr Faustus* and the Shakespearean tradition of *Macbeth* by identifying his poet-sage with Prospero, the beneficent wizard ruling an American island in which Caliban is conspicuously absent.

In fact, a close reading of Emerson reveals that in his pivotal book, *Nature*, he makes an intricate argument to solder his utopian claims for the soul to Shakespeare's Prospero, thus muffling the rebuke of Faustian tradition, which holds that the aspiration for infinite power is based upon Augustinian non-being. Before we examine this, it is worth considering that Emerson was aware that his assertion that the simple affirmation that the conversion of nature into "soul" produced "Being": "the vast affirmative, excluding negation" and that "Nothing, Falsehood" . . . "cannot work any harm," was open to criticism.[104] For, even in his most ecstatic mood in his essay, "Circles," he recognizes the "blindness" that Melville calls a "defect in the region of the heart." He notifies the reader that he has arrived at a "fine Pyrrhonism, or the equivalence and indifferency of all actions," . . . which asserts that "our crimes may be lively stones out of which we shall construct the temple of the true God!" This is merely an aside, though, which Emerson excuses by asserting, "I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back."[105]

More persistently, Emerson ignores the perverse implications of his theory of the imagination by using the mythic power of Shakespeare's Prospero implicitly to affirm the innate goodness of his poet / sage whose aim was nothing less than to democratize Shakespeare's poetic power and redeem American history. This led him away from the Lockean model that distrusted the diseased imagination as rooted in Augustinian non-being, and towards an affirmative view of the healthy

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[104] Emerson, *Essays*, pg. 299.
[105] *Ibid*., pg. 411-12.

imagination that was even more threatened by perverse pathology than American psychiatrists could have imagined.

THE AMERICAN PROSPERO

Emerson regarded his book *Nature* as making, for the first time, accessible to the individual a power that had been concealed within Elizabethan verse generally (he cites, among others, George Herbert) – and Shakespeare's verse, in particular.[106] Yet, Emerson and his contemporaries also believed he was liberating a power that he and his circle felt already resided in the American idiom – an idiom they felt corrupted by the polished rhetoric of polite speech. As his friend, Bronson Alcott observed:

> I remember hearing the same words, and was indeed accustomed to use them, in my boyhood and native village, into which the refinements of the brisk town had not found the way . . . They spoke the speech of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Ben Jonson. But now, if I would enjoy that pleasure of hearing my native tongue in its riancy and exuberance I must listen to the boys about our school-houses, or cast my eyes along the columns of the dictionary, there to recover the animal spirit which once sparkled and pranked itself forth in the buxomness and proud motions of our mother-tongue. What we have gained in elegance we have lost in thought and expression.[107]

If Emerson's project was to cast off the yoke of the "courtly muses of Europe," he was also equally interested in arguing that the very same "nature" that inspired Shakespeare's plays already resided in the speech of every-day Americans. All that this idiom needed was a poet able to capture its music.[108]

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[106] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1966), pp. 100-114.
[107] Matthiessen, pp. 36-37.
[108] Emerson, pg. 70.

Emerson regarded himself as a Prospero who gave the secret of his magic to American poets. It is no surprise, then, that in Bronson Alcott's celebration of Emerson's achievements, he evoked him as a Prospero with a "wand of Power" and a muse "Ariel-wise" that eschewed "argument" and "syllogism" in favour of enchantment:

> His rhetoric dazzles by its circuits, contrasts, antitheses; imagination, as in all sprightly minds, being his wand of Power. He comes along his own paths, too, and always in his own fashion. What though he builds his piers downwards from the firmament to the tumbling tides, and so throw his radiant span across the fissures of his argument, and himself pass over the frolic arches – Ariel-wise, - is the skill less admirable, the masonry the less secure for its singularity?[109]

Emerson deliberately cultivated this image of himself – both in his first book, *Nature,* and in his later essay, "Experience." In *Nature*, he explicitly links his own view that the poet possesses an occult knowledge of the radical correspondence between nature and the soul by evoking Shakespeare as a kind of wizard of language:

> Shakespeare possesses the power of subordinating nature for the purposes of expression, beyond all poets. His imperial muse tosses the creation like a bauble from hand to hand, and uses it to embody any caprice of thought that is upper-most in his mind. The remotest spaces of nature are visited, and the farthest sundered things are brought together, by a subtle spiritual connection. We are made aware that the magnitude of material things is relative, and all objects shrink and expand to serve the passion of the poet.[110]

Emerson then specifically cites *The Tempest* in order to further elaborate his vision of Shakespeare as himself a Prospero whose secret Emerson has made available to the American poet:

> I have before me the Tempest, and will cite only these few lines.
>
> The strong based promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
> The pine and cedar.

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[109] A. Bronson. Alcott, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Estimate of His Character and Genius* (Folcroft: Folcroft P., 1970), pp. 9-10.
[110] Emerson, pp. 34-35.

Again;

> The charm dissolves apace,
> And, as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason.
> Their understanding
> Begins to swell: and the approaching tide
> Will shortly fill the reasonable shores
> That now lie foul and muddy.

> . . . The perception of real affinities between events, (that is to say, of *ideal* affinities, for those only are real,) enables the poet thus to make free with the most imposing forms and phenomena of the world, and to assert the predominance of the soul.[111]

Emerson chooses Shakespeare's Prospero specifically to illuminate his theory of language's occult relationship to nature. In this way, he preserves the mystery of this relationship while, at the same time, freeing it by transmitting its principle.

In his masterful essay, "Experience," Emerson departs from his prior claim in *Nature* that the imagination is not merely subjective, but shares an absolute being with God himself. He instead asserts that subjectivity may simply be a "train of moods like a string of beads" . . . "many colored lenses which paint the world their own hue." [112] Perhaps recognizing that such an assertion makes him vulnerable to the Lockean criticism that the poetic imagination establishes merely a "reign of fancy," with no epistemological validity, he evokes the authority of Prospero, again:

> *Bear with these distractions*, with this coetaneous growth of the parts: they will one day be *members*, and obey one will. On that one will, on that secret cause, they nail our attention and hope. Life is hereby *melted* into an expectation or a religion. Underneath the inharmonious and trivial particulars, is a musical perfection, the Ideal journeying always with us, the heaven without rent or seam . . . as if the clouds that covered it parted intervals, and showed the approaching traveller the inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal meadows spread at their base;[113]

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[111] Ibid., pg. 35.
[112] Emerson, pg. 473.
[113] Emerson, pp. 484-485.

Of course, Prospero's "rough magic" does not give any final access to "nature," which is merely an "insubstantial pageant" (IV. i. 155), but, Emerson's rhetorical appeal to Prospero's authority gives the imagination an implicit grandeur, dignity, and authority. Even in the absence of God, Emerson still has Shakespeare.

More persistently, though, Emerson's vision of the democratized imagination was haunted not by the prospect that the poetic imagination lacked epistemological validity, which was the widespread opinion of psychiatrists, but that the imagination itself could become unhealthy.

For to annex the powers of "nature" to the self is also to make the most private recesses of one's identity an expression of the cultural ideas associated with the concept of nature. On the one hand, the organic metaphor could become an image associated with freedom and nonconformity. It could also potentially measure every impulse based upon a language of health and disease generally attributed to the flourishing of living organisms.

CONVERSION AS PERVERSION

Civilization was considered by leading medical authorities, during Emerson's time, to be a primary cause of mental illness. American psychiatrists widely accepted the dictum, "insanity is a disease of civilization, and the number of the insane is in direct proportion to its progress."[114] Tocqueville located this insanity in the cycle of "boom and slump" specifically in "democratic psychology":

[114] Quoted in, G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pg. 48.

> the return of these commercial panics is an endemic disease of…democratic nations… it cannot be cured, because it does not originate in accidental circumstances, but in the temperament of these nations.[115]

To display the robustness of one's private life might be an unruly "barbaric yawp," but it could equally be a kind of sterilized double of Hawthorne's "scarlet letter": a letter from a doctor giving notice to the world of an individual's "mental hygiene" (to use a phrase coined by William Sweetser, and later, employed by Isaac Ray, one of the founders of the American Psychiatric Association).

Though Emerson disparaged the most notable proponent of the sexual purity movement, Sylvester Graham, as "the prophet of bran bread and pumpkins" (for his strict dietary recommendations), his own vocation was shaped by the very social forces that inspired that movement – and those related to it: the temperance movement, the women's rights movement, and the abolitionist movement. [116]

Emerson has traditionally been seen as the "sage of Concord" – a role that, as we have seen, he himself fashioned, in part, through a Shakespearean persona. This role of poet / sage seems far removed from the turbulent populist social movements of his day. This view, however, has been substantially revised in the last two decades by a new tradition of criticism, called by Lawrence Buell, the "de-transcendentalizing" of Emerson – which "consists of stressing the material motives underpinning Emerson's writing and thus situates his transcendentalism within critical agendas that emphasize contextual and social issues."[117] This tradition cannot be explored in depth here. Suffice it to say, though, that in the 1830's, the specific social and economic changes in East Coast states like Massachusetts and New York that led to unprecedented anxiety about sexuality – also produced the

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[115] Quoted in, *Ibid*., pg. 50.
[116] Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), pg. 3.
[117] T. Gregory Garvey, *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pg. xxi.

opportunity for Emerson to become a cultural hero of the age.

With the destruction of the single-family as an economic unity, the disintegration of the apprentice-system, an influx of immigrants, the shift to a Jacksonian "boom and bust" economy, and an urban population explosion – mostly of uneducated young men – a powerful wedge was driven between the generations. The older generation lamented the loss of the traditional values of the family and the problem of educating and socializing the youth became paramount. It is no accident that Emerson's generation of writers – perhaps more than any previous generation in American – spoke directly to America's youth.[118]

On the surface, Emerson was staunchly aligned against the conservative values that Graham represented. Emerson found his own ministry even in Boston's liberal Unitarian Church too restrictive for his conscience. Emerson's 1839 "Divinity School Address" to the graduating class of Harvard Divinity School scandalized the establishment church. Many of Emerson's contemporaries denounced him as an "atheist" – and, in short order, Andrew Norton, of Harvard, delivered a rebuttal to Emerson's speech for the Cambridge Theological School entitled, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity." In that speech, Norton writes of Emerson's teachings:

> The latest form of infidelity [Transcendentalism] is distinguished by assuming the Christian name, while it strikes directly at the root of faith in Christianity, and indirectly of all religion.[119]

Norton aims at the issue at the heart of Emerson's early teaching: that the subject possesses access to a divine power, "nature," that makes the miracles of Christ seem inconsequential. Emerson doesn't so much dwell on a skeptical view of Christ's

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[118] Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 40-45.

[119] Andrew Norton, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity" (speech, Delivered at the Request of the "Association of the Alumni of the Cambridge Theological School," on the 19th of July, 1839., Cambridge, Massachusetts), section 11A.

miracles as render them irrelevant:

> And thus by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only. To aim to convert a man by miracles, is a profanation of the soul. A true conversion, a true Christ, is now, as always, to be made, by the reception of beautiful sentiments . . . The time is coming when all men will see, that the gift of God to the soul is not a vaunting, overpowering, excluding sanctity, but a sweet, *natural* goodness, a goodness like thine and mine, and that so invites thine and mine to be and to grow.[120]
> (italics added)

Four times in Norton's lecture, Emerson's teachings are denounced as "perverting" the gospel. Yet as admittedly unorthodox as Emerson's views were, the difference, for Emerson, is that the individual needs to make those same conservative principles "his or her own" – by making "nature" his or her own. This is why, paradoxically, Emerson could persuasively argue against the threatening influence of external models such as the traditional Unitarian church while affirming the principle of "sweet, natural goodness" which evokes core middle class Christian values.

According to Bercovitch, the authority of Emersonian "self-reliance" was, ultimately, "circumscribed" by what "America stood for": "an 'economic system' – as well as a moral, religious, and political way of life – that had 'all of nature behind it.'"[121] Emerson, according to Bercovitch, converts middle class "rites of assent"[122] into a statement that gives the individual a seemingly radical authority. The limits of this individualism, though, were speedily qualified. In "Self-Reliance," for example, Emerson asserts a curiously comfortable middle class vision of radical individualism.[123]

Bercovitch is also skeptical of the claim that Emerson's individualism

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[120] Emerson, pg. 82.
[121] Bercovitch, 184.
[122] Ibid., xviii.
[123] "Emerson's radical individualism (1836-1841) invests the self with the boundlessness of free enterprise capitalism in an apparently open, empty, and endlessly malleable New World." Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Office of the Scarlet Letter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pg. 148.

constitutes a politically radical stance:

> Far from pressing the conflict between the individual and society, Emerson obviated all conflict whatever by defining inward revolt and social revolution in identical terms . . . His vision of the good society invited the individual to deny every secular distinction between himself and others and so to make individuation an endless process of incorporation. His call to self-transcendence closed all options to middle-class norms.[124]

Smith-Rosenberg concurs, and further argues that the "individualism" exemplified by Emerson and the return to "old values," represented by Graham, are "quintessential statements of the male Jacksonian mind."[125] They represent opposite views, but they are forged by the same climate. Emerson's democratized vision of the American poet and intellectual both harnessed the public ferment created by the groups advocating social reform and also attempted to unify them all under a vision of the self-reliant American individual.

Russ Castronovo argues that whereas figures like Graham were intimately concerned with the diseased social body, Emerson's vision of the self-reliant American individual is intimately connected to a "privatized body":

> What matters most is that the body standing alone furnishes an anti-institutional register promising not only that the social critics can resist institutions, but also that the social critic need not think about institutions at all.[126]

Yet, the self-reliant body that Emerson describes is also the "body politic." As we will discover, Emerson's confident assertions about the "health" of this body and its appeal to an authority from "nature" concealed a preoccupation with disease – with specific hints of the disease of sexual perversion – that would, in a more explicit form, obsess Graham.

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[124] Bercovitch, pg. 184.
[125] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America," *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (1978): pp. 213-214.
[126] Russ Castronovo, "Enslaving Passions, White Male Sexuality and the Evasions of Race," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Literature*, by Tracy Fessenden, Nicholas F. Radel, and Magdalena J. Zaborowska (New York: Routledge, 2001), pg. 153.

It should not be surprising, then, that a theme that is generally equated with the sexual purity movements of the antebellum period should crop up in Emerson's great "declaration of American intellectual independence." In "The American Scholar," the exemplar of the failed poet is too effeminate and introspective to meet the demands of the new American poetry:

> Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness, —
>
> "Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."[127]

Later in "The American Scholar," Emerson alludes to Goethe's famous observations about Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*:

> Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flower-pot, there to hunger and pine . . .[128]

In Emerson's image – derived from Goethe – Hamlet's own nature is a delicate "flower-pot," incapable of supporting a heroic and masculine "oak" tree destiny. In Goethe, the flower-pot shatters, but in Emerson, the oak becomes sickly. It "hunger"[s] and "pine"[s]. Emerson is, here, attempting to displace the effeminate, dissipated Hamlet – perhaps deathly ill with tuberculosis (as his first wife and two brothers would become) with an image of health and wholeness.

That image of an effeminate Hamlet "Sicklied o'er" with the disease of "Introversion" was one that lingered with Emerson. While elsewhere Emerson associates this image of the poet with the Calvinistic preoccupation with original sin and predestination, what ghosts these particular lines is an evocation of Hamlet as an effeminate sexual deviant – perhaps turned in on himself with solipsistic self-

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[127] Emerson, pg. 68.
[128] Ibid., pg. 61.

regard. At the time, tuberculosis was regarded as one of the symptoms of excessive masturbation.

Emerson was much impressed by the scene with the ghost in *Hamlet* – and he makes numerous references to it:

> I remember, I went once to see the Hamlet of a famed performer, the pride of the English stage; and all I heard, and all I now remember, of the tragedian, was that in which the tragedian had no part; simply, Hamlet's question to the ghost, -
>
> 'What may this mean,
> That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
> Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon?
> (I. iv. 51-53)[129]
>
> In "Compensation," Emerson aligns the scene with the ghost in *Hamlet* quite explicitly with his ethical system:
>
> All infractions of love and equity in our social relations are speedily punished. They are punished by fear . . .
>
> Fear is an instructor of great sagacity, and the herald of all revolutions. One thing he teaches, that there is *rottenness* where he appears. He is a carrion crow, and though you see not well what he hovers for, there is death somewhere . . . Fear for ages has boded and *mowed and gibbered* over government and property. That obscene bird is not there for nothing.[130]

The "rottenness" evokes "something rotten in the state of Denmark" (I. iv. 90): Hamlet's world as threatened by disease. The other echo here is from Horatio's speech which just precedes the entrance of the ghost: "The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead / Did *squeak and gibber* in the Roman streets" (I. i. 115-116).

Emerson briefly envisions the "obscene bird" as a "carrion crow" that presides over a society ruined by a principle of private acquisition turned into bottomless, amoral greed. Here, Emerson establishes a kind of social law that is directly opposed to his own concept of the "self-reliant" individual. For Emerson's own principle of the self-reliant individual is based upon a notion of a natural power

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[129] Ibid. pg. 719.
[130] Emerson, pg. 294-295.

"without limits" annexed to the individual, a power intimately connected to boundless capitalist acquisition. Emerson's description of "rottenness" haunts the very individualism that he advocates. Sexual reformers explicitly linked such "rottenness" to a particular disease of sexual excess: masturbation.

As I mentioned above, Emerson's first wife and two of his brothers, Edward and Charles, died of tuberculosis. Emerson also had two brothers, Edward and Robert, committed to the McLean Asylum and, as Reiss observes, he sometimes wondered whether the family's "constitutional malady" might affect him as well.[131]

In Emerson's journal entries concerning Charles we find a disarming and inadvertent echo of Hamlet:

> Yesterday I read many of C. C. E.'s letters to E. H. I find them noble but sad. Their effect is painful. I withdrew myself from the influence. So much contrition, so much questioning, so little hope, so much sorrow, *harrowed me.* I could not stay to see my noble brother tortured even by himself. No good or useful air goes out of such scriptures, but cramp & incapacity only.[132]

It is a single phrase, but it is typical of Emerson to echo Shakespeare in times of distress. The phrase "harrows me" recalls the words of the Ghost in *Hamlet*: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would *harrow* up thy soul, freeze thy young blood" (I. v. 15-16).

What "harrows" Emerson about his brother's letters is their self-torture: "So much contrition, so much questioning, so little hope, so much sorrow." Ironically, what Emerson objects to is precisely the kind of hand-wringing and gnashing of teeth that would exercise Sylvester Graham – which he refers to as "cramp and incapacity." However, rather than emphasizing the infiltration of the healthy body by disease – as the sexual reformers would - Emerson does the opposite. He displaces disease with a vow to affirm *only* health: "I shall never believe that any

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[131] Reiss, *Theaters of Madness,* pg. 6.
[132] Emerson, *Journals*, pg. 506.

book is so good to read as that which sets the reader into a working mood, makes him feel his strength, & inspires hilarity." The contrast between "hilarity" and "harrow" is an extremely unusual lapse in tone for Emerson – and is psychologically revealing. It hints that Emerson possesses a vulnerable awareness that his confident assertion of healthy is merely a rhetorical spell to avoid the far deeper anxiety that he too will succumb to the family disease.

Emerson's prescription is the "self-reliant" individual – whose body is a sanctuary for imbibing unmediated "nature." For, as he writes:

> But never can any advantage be taken of nature by a trick. The spirit of the world, the great calm presence of the creator, comes not forth to the sorceries of opium or of wine. The sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body . . . If thou fill thy brain with Boston *and* New York, with fashion and covetousness, and wilt stimulate thy jaded senses with wine and French coffee, thou shalt find no radiance of wisdom in the lonely waste of the pinewoods.[133]

Or, Emerson adds:

> So the poet's habit of living should be set on a key so low and plain, that the common influences should delight him. His cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water.[134]

Although Emerson is espousing a far more liberal agenda, his regime of temperance is far from alien to Graham's – which, recommended a vegetarian diet to counteract the insurrection of perverse impulses within the body. Rather than preaching a sermon on chastity, Emerson's very notion of the self-reliant individual depended on a strength from a "nature" unperverted by sexual and alcoholic excess. So, while Emerson's language seems utterly untroubled by the dark preoccupations of a figure like Graham, his repeated appeal to "nature" and "health" mean that the specter of perverse sexuality is "everywhere and nowhere" in Emerson.

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[133] Emerson, pp. 460-461.
[134] Emerson, pg. 461.

WHITMAN: CALIBAN'S CURSE

OVERVIEW

I first trace the populist and threatening Shakespeare Walt Whitman discovered, as a young man and a journalist, in Manhattan's subversive Bowery Theater milieu. This is most characterized by Whitman's favourite Shakespearean actor, Junius Brutus Booth, whose dangerous and experimental acting was a formative influence on the life of his son, John Wilkes, also a strong Shakespearean actor, and may have contributed to the theatrical-style assassination of Abraham Lincoln. As a poet, though, Whitman regarded Shakespeare as a rival for the heart and soul of America. He dismissed him as the purveyor of elite aristocratic values that America had, supposedly, come on earth to "destroy."

Nonetheless, it is the radical and experimental Shakespeare that may have influenced Whitman's poetic persona in *Leaves of Grass* and it may also have influenced the reception of Whitman, among contemporary reviewers, as the Caliban to Emerson's Prospero. I analyse a neglected notebook passage in which Whitman himself experiments with the persona of Caliban, as the leader of an African slave insurrection.

I further theorize that Whitman continues Emerson's project to sanitize the unhealthy imagination, but extends this project to the "prurient" sexuality he finds in Shakespeare. I connect Whitman's liberationist position against Shakespearean perversity with the later American tradition of sexual identity politics. Far from

being the American Caliban, Whitman attempted even more thoroughly to vanquish Caliban from American poetry: but that attempt came to haunt him when, later in the century, the very identity politics he helped to engineer was used to label him a homosexual.

"I ACT AS THE TONGUE OF YOU": WHITMAN'S BOWERY SHAKESPEARE

In order to understand the way that perverse Shakespearean energies operate in Whitman's poetry, it will first be necessary to explore Whitman's genuinely radical poetic program, which was deeply influenced by the populist theater culture of New York City, specifically the Bowery Theater in the borough of Manhattan, best known for its spirited and, sometimes, anarchic Shakespearean performances of Junius Brutus Booth, father of the notorious assassin of Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth.[135]

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[135] This section is indebted to Ewan Fernie's discussion of Junius Booth, John Wilkes Booth, and the dangers and possibilities of Shakespearean freedom. Ewan Fernie, "Freetown! Shakespeare and Social Flourishing" (lecture, Inaugural Lecture, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, Birmingham, January 26, 2014). I follow closely the narrative arc established by David Reynolds, especially pp. 154-66, in the chapter, "American Performances: Theater, Oratory, Music." David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

For an authoritative book length study of the Astor Place Riot, see Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Random House, 2007). For the rivalry between Forrest and Macready see especially Chapter 9, "Of Men and Sheep," pp. 165-184. For a detailed analysis of the class tensions, corruption, gangs, yellow journalism and political factions in New York that fuelled the riots, see chapter 10, "A Night at the Opera, and Another in Hell," pp. 185-208. For Whitman's reminiscences of the Bowery Theater, its actors and its culture, see "The Old Bowery" in: Walt Whitman, *November Boughs* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1888), pp. 87-92. For a contemporary account of the Astor Place Riot, see "Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot at the New-York Astor Place Opera House," by Anonymous in James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now* (New York: Library of America, 2014), pp. 62-104.

This brief departure into American theater culture will help us to understand not only Whitman's unique debt to Shakespeare, but also the reason why Whitman's highbrow New England contemporaries were so quick to label him, after the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, as the "Caliban" to Emerson's "Prospero." I will reveal that Whitman himself embraced the role of Caliban, whom he imagined as an African slave revolting against his white overlords. While the role of Caliban assigned to Whitman by his contemporaries gets at part of the truth, it is my contention that it is also profoundly misleading. For the virulent power of the perverse acts in ways that inhere within the very progressive sexual politics that Whitman pioneered.

As I have already observed, Michael Bristol, writing in the tradition of Lawrence Levine, finds a sharp division between the fluid, experimental, populist Jacksonian theatrical culture and the post-Civil War period, in which an authoritative, textually stable Shakespeare, supported by imposing institutions such as the Folger Shakespeare Library and the burgeoning academic publishing industry, consolidated Shakespeare and American identity. Bristol also argues, as I do, that there is a profound continuity between early American Shakespeare critics like Emerson and Jones Very and the national agenda that would become formally institutionalized.[136] With the partial blindness of hindsight, it is easy to make the error of confusing the nationalistic aspirations voiced by Whitman's contemporaries in their Shakespeare criticism with the culture itself. Lawrence Levine's close analysis of theatrical culture in the Jacksonian period disabuses us of this potentially misleading assumption. The New York Shakespearean theater culture that Whitman encountered when he came of age was, at times, rowdy, dangerously

[136] See especially, chapter 5, "Shakespeare In the American Cultural Imagination," pp. 123-143, in Michael D. Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1990).

experimental, and populist. It was the spirit of this theater culture that made Whitman's blend of populism and high culture second nature. [137]

To get a flavor for this, consider the "Bowery b'hoys," who were among the working class men who idolized Whitman. Many of these men were butchers who spent their spare time running fire-engines; yet they also lived and breathed the high culture of Manhattan Shakespearean theater and claimed it as their own. [138] Whitman gives a pungent anecdote of one of these b'hoys:

> Whilst he puffs the smoke of a remarkably bad segar directly underneath your nostrils, he will discourse most learnedly about the classical performances in the Chatham Theatre, and swear by some heathen god or goddess that "[James Hudson] Kirby was one of 'em, and no mistake."[139]

This was the class of people that Melville would also exalt in Captain Ahab, when he wrote: "Ahab's been in colleges, as well as 'mong the cannibals."[140]

Not only was the theater milieu mixed, the theater itself featured high spirited populist entertainment that had a kinship with Shakespeare's own theater: religious proselytizers, newly enlivened by the Second Awakening, preached with theatrical intensity; minstrels performed in black face; the "screamer," an affable villain from frontier folklore, popularized by the widely read *Crockett's Almanac* (1835-1856), performed before raucous audiences unafraid of berating villains or booing poor actors off the stage. [141] Whitman vividly describes the theater audience, "no

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[137] Levine's distinction between the Shakespearean theater culture in the Jacksonian and the post Civil War America is an important one, but it begins to break down when it is applied too religiously. America's literary culture had enshrined Shakespeare in its "high culture" well before Emerson published *Nature* (1836).
[138] David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pg. 103.
[139] Quoted in: Reynolds, pg. 104.
[140] Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg. 78.
[141] For a representative example of Crockett's Almanac, see, *CROCKETT'S ALMANAC, Scenes in River Life, Feats on the Lakes, Manners in the Back Woods, Adventures in Texas, Etc.* (Philadelphia: Turner & Fisher, 1846).

dainty kid-glove business, but electric force and muscle from perhaps 2000 full-sinew'd men."[142]

In this atmosphere, two schools of British acting competed for American audiences. The Teapot school of acting, epitomized by Charles Kemble faced off against the blustery and impassioned Cooke-Kean school of acting.

As nationalistic and anti-British sentiment rose in 1847, the conflict between these two schools turned into the conflagration of the Astor Place Riot. Edwin Forrest rose to prominence as an actor with the turbulent, impassioned style that audiences identified as distinctly American. William Macready, a British actor touring the United States, who subscribed to the more decorous school of acting, emphasizing subtlety, became regarded by American audiences as the rival of Forrest, and the animosity spread to the two men.[143] Whitman weighed into the debate raging over the two actors: "After Booth was Forrest – a masterly man." By contrast, Whitman had little good to say of Macready, "I could never enter into the enthusiasm over him – never. He never seemed to address himself to me."[144]

Macready had already, on several occasions, been pelted with eggs and booed off the stage; but on May 7, 1849, Macready and Forrest appeared in rival performances of *Macbeth*, Macready at the elite Astor Place Opera House and Forrest at the more populist Broadway Theater. A citizen militia was mobilized to protect Macready from the rowdy mobs that gathered in front of the Astor Place Opera House that night, amidst shouts of "Burn the damned den of aristocracy!"[145] The militia fired warning shots into the air, and, in desperation, shot into the crowd. Twenty-two people were killed in the melee. Whitman inscribed a record of his

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[142] Whitman, *November Boughs*, pg. 90.
[143] For a contemporary account of the rivalry between Forrest and Macready, see also Shapiro, pp. 65-69.
[144] Quoted in Reynolds, pg. 163-4.
[145] *Ibid*. pg. 165.

whereabouts and occupation during the incident, along with the date – in a way reminiscent of accounts of the Kennedy assassination or the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers.

A particularly extreme adherent of the Cooke-Kean school of acting, exemplified by Forrest, was Junius Booth. Above all Shakespearean actors, it was Booth whom Whitman admired most. He not only incorporated the tempestuous style, but he directly challenged the division between art and life. He made a famous appearance at a Cincinnati church dressed as Cardinal Richelieu; in sword fights, he frequently caused real wounds; on one occasion, as Richard III, he pursued a terrified Richmond into the local tavern and had to be forcibly disarmed. Whitman gushed about Booth: "When he was in a passion, face neck, hands, would be suffused, his eye would be frightful – his whole mien enough to scare audience, actors, often the actors *were* afraid of him" … "The words, fire, energy, *abandon*, found in him unprecedented meanings."[146]

This might have been a purely artistic appreciation, but the tenuous division between life and theater was shattered when John Wilkes Booth, Junius Brutus's son, himself a powerful Shakespearean actor, murdered Abraham Lincoln, during a theater performance, with the phrase, "*Sic semper tyrannis*!"[147] The phrase is traditionally ascribed to Marcus Junius Brutus upon the assassination of Julius Caesar. Although Shakespeare does not use the phrase, the dramatic flourish is thoroughly in line with the tradition of American Shakespeare acting of the Cooke-Kean school. Indeed, in a letter published by the National Intelligencer, justifying his actions, Booth quoted Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

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[146] *Ibid*. pp. 159-60.
[147] *Ibid.* pg. 160.

> When Caesar had conquered the enemies of Rome and the power that was his menaced the liberties of the people, Brutus arose and slew him. The stroke of his dagger was guided by his love for Rome. It was the spirit and ambition of Caesar that Brutus struck at.
>
> "O then that we could come by Caesar's spirit,
> And not dismember Caesar! But alas!
> Caesar must bleed for it!"
>
> I answer with Brutus.
> He who loves his country better than gold or life.
> JOHN W. BOOTH[148]

Such a disturbing crossing of the threshold between life and reality was fertile ground for Whitman's persona in "Song Of Myself." It must be said, though, that while Whitman lavished praise on the acting of Junius Booth, he had very little good say about his son's acting: he was "as much like his father as the wax bust of Henry Clay," to the "genuine orator."[149]

Perhaps because Shakespeare was simply too threatening as a precursor, Whitman's Shakespearean echoes are scarce, with the notable exception of the poem, "Hours Continuing Long," which Nils Clausson has argued, persuasively, echoes Shakespeare's Sonnet 29.[150] [151] As such, Whitman continues in the American Protestant tradition, articulated by Jones Very in a more generous spirit. Whitman doesn't question Shakespeare's genius; indeed, he ranks him with Chaucer and Homer. But he argues in "A Thought on Shakespeare" (1886) that Shakespeare "exhales that principle of caste which we Americans have come on earth to destroy."[152] Whitman goes on to conclude that Shakespeare's comedies "have the

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[148] John Wilkes Booth, quoted in Shapiro, pg. 197.
[149] Walt Whitman, "THE BOWERY," *Leader*, May 3, 1862.
[150] While I do not subscribe wholeheartedly to Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence, Whitman spent so much of his career promoting himself as *the* national poet of America destined, as we shall see, to displace Shakespeare (and the feudal England Shakespeare represents to Whitman) that I feel the evocation of Bloom is warranted.
[151] Nils Clausson, ""Hours Continuing Long" as Whitman's Rewriting of Shakespeare's Sonnet 29," *Whitman Quarterly Review* 26 (Winter 2009): pp. 131-42.
[152] Walt Whitman, *November Boughs*, pg. 56.

unmistakable hue of plays, portraits, made for the divertissement only of the elite of the castle, and from its point of view. The comedies are altogether nonacceptable to America and Democracy."

Whitman's lack of generosity towards Shakespeare extended to his subscription, in later life, to the bizarre theory propounded by Delia Bacon, that Shakespeare was not the true author of the plays, but that Francis Bacon wrote them. He even wrote a poem, published in the late collection, *Good-bye My Fancy*, entitled, "Shakspere-Bacon's Cipher." In propagating Delia Bacon's theory, Whitman, at one stroke, dispensed with a rival and advanced his own Protestant theory that American democracy – most exemplified, of course, in his own poetry - would fulfill the unrealized promise in Shakespeare's plays. According to Whitman, Shakespeare could only be one of the "wolfish Earls so plenteous in the plays themselves." He writes:

> Will it not indeed be strange if the author of "Othello" and "Hamlet" is destin'd to live in America, in a generation or two, less as the cunning draughtsman of the passions, and more as putting on record the first full expose – and by far the most vivid one, immeasurably ahead of doctrinaires and economists – of the political theory and result, or the reason-why and necessity of them which America has come on earth to abnegate and replace.[153]

Such a view, as we will discover, extended to what Whitman regarded as Shakespeare's "prurient" sexual politics. Whitman asserted, in his late essay against censorship, "Memorandum at a Venture," that he could replace such a politics with a healthier one. In my view, Whitman's disavowal of Shakespearean perversity (and, indeed, the perversity of his own earlier work) is over-determined by the structuring power of the perverse jeremiad.

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[153] *Ibid*. pg. 53.

AS IF THE BEASTS SPOKE

In the censored poem, "A Woman Waits for Me," Whitman would articulate the radical identity politics that he would adhere to throughout his writing career: "Sex contains all, bodies, souls, / Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations . . ." (3-9)[154]

Whitman was extending Wordsworthian "Nature" to the breaking point. In doing so, he was quite conscious that he was inaugurating a new theory of poetry incorporating sexual expression:

> From another point of view "Leaves of Grass" is avowedly the song of Sex, and Amativeness, and even Animality – though meanings that do not usually go with these words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted;[155]

Here, Whitman regards "Amativeness" and "Animality" as the "espousing principle" of his poetry. It is so central to his poetic project that "the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted."

Whitman could also appeal to nature implicitly to "naturalize" his descriptions of homoerotic sex: "The souse upon me of my lover the sea" (*Spontaneous Me*, 34); he could depict the masturbatory fantasies of a solitary, unmarried woman watching twenty eight young men bathing ("Which of the young men does she like the best? /Ah, the homeliest of them is beautiful to her" ["Song of Myself," 204-205]); he could describe a woman's genitals as "the exquisite flexible doors" (SOM, 1292); he could delight in his own genitals as natural objects: "love-

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[154] Whitman, Walt, Michael Moon, Sculley Bradley, and Harold William Blodgett. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings: Authoritative Texts, Other Poetry and Prose, Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2002, pp. 87-88.
[155] Whitman, Walt, pg. 809.

root" (SOM 22); "Root of wash'd sweet-flag" (SOS, 534); "hubb'd sting of myself" (*Spontaneous Me*, 24) "calamus-root" ("These I Singing in Spring," 20); or he could turn genitals themselves into a poem, "wherever are men like me, are our lusty, lurking masculine poems" (SOM, 10).

For Whitman's contemporaries, the dichotomy between body and soul could easily conjure the division between Prospero's "dainty spirit, Ariel" and Caliban in *The Tempest*. Coleridge writes:

> Ariel has in everything the airy tint which gives the name; and it is worthy of remark that Miranda is never directly brought into comparison with Ariel, lest the natural and human of the one and the supernatural of the other should tend to neutralise each other; Caliban, on the other hand, is all *earth*, all condensed and *gross* in feelings and images; he has the dawnings of understanding without reason or the moral sense, and in him, as in some brute animals, this advance to the intellectual faculties, without the moral sense, is marked by the appearance of vice.[156]

In *from Pent-Up Aching Rivers*, Whitman evokes his "true song of the soul" . . . as "Renascent with grossest Nature or among animals" (15). An anonymous reviewer published in *The New Eclectic* published in 1868, summarizing the views of Mr Robert Buchanan writes:

> The "poem" here referred to is the one which contains the key to Walt Whitman's philosophy and poetic theory. It is in it that he describes himself and his qualifications for the office of poet of the future, grounding his claim upon the fact of his being "hankering, *gross*, mystical, nude, one of the roughs, a kosmos, disorderly, fleshy, sensual, no more modest than immodest"; and proposing to produce poetry of corresponding qualities, a promise which we must say he most conscientiously fulfils.

He then adds:

> Then Mr. Robert Buchanan took him up in the *Broadway* magazine, and, saying nearly all that has ever been said against Walt Whitman—that he is no poet and no artist, that he is gross, monotonous, loud, obscure, prone to coarse animalism and to talking rank nonsense— [Anonymous].[157]

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[156] Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare*.
[157] "[Review of *Poems by Walt Whitman*]." *The New Eclectic* (1868): 371-5. "The Walt Whitman Archive," accessed March 23, 2014, http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/poems/anc.00194.html.

This is typical of Whitman's reviewers who picked up immediately on his "philosophy and poetic theory" which they correctly associated with "animalism." Whitman was called by reviewers a "monster," a "goatish satyr," a "Centaur . . . half-man, half beast."[158] This response, at times, clearly evoked Whitman as the earthy, animalistic antithesis to Emerson. One reviewer called Whitman pointedly "Emerson muscularized."[159]

Emerson, in his letter to Thomas Carlyle, described the man who referred to him, for a time, as "master" – as a "nondescript *monster* which yet has terrible eyes and *buffalo* strength." Henry Thoreau, who, according to Emerson "loved Walt,"[160] described some "disagreeable" passages in *Leaves of Grass* this way:

> *It is as if the beasts spoke.* I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants.[161]
> (italics added)

And Carlyle responded succinctly to the copy of *Leaves of Grass* Emerson gave him to read: "It was as though the town bull had learned to hold a pen."[162] The contemporary reviewer, John Hollingshead, summarized the troubled relationship between the Emerson and Whitman:

> EACH literary man of any distinguished mark or position has raised at least one monster, who seizes his style, his principles, his peculiar modes of thought, and carries them headlong downwards into the great gulf of absurdity. This Frankenstein,—this attendant spirit,—is faithful, but unruly.

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[158] [Metcalfe, William Musham]. "Walt Whitman." *The Scottish Review* (September 1883): 281-300. Walt Whitman Archive; [Anonymous]. "Walt Whitman's' Leaves of Grass." *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* 53 (7 January 1882): 1. Whitman Archive; [Anonymous]. "Leaves of Grass." *The New York Daily Times* (13 November 1856): 2. Whitman Archive.
[159] Hollingshead, John. "A Wild Poet of the Woods." *The Irish Literary Gazette and Register* (February 1861): 126-7.
[160] Emerson's Journals, pg. 790.
[161] Whitman, pg. 801.
[162] J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998), pg. 105.

> It multiplies every action, whim, or fancy that it copies by three or four; it leaps higher, dives lower, speaks louder, and goes farther than its master;[163]

This insinuation of a spiritual alliance between the "monster" and his "master" certainly disconcerted Emerson. The words from the review were also prescient – in that Whitman proved as "unruly" as Caliban.

In his own early notebook drafts for the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in a poem that was rewritten with the title "Now Lucifer Was Not Dead," and eventually became "The Sleepers," Whitman could identify himself quite directly with another version of an American Caliban: the African American slave seeking revenge. Here Whitman evokes, tellingly, the scene in *The Tempest* after Miranda denounces Caliban for responding to her teaching him language (when he "wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish" [I. ii. 356-357]) by attempting to rape her:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language! (Tem. I. ii. 363-365)

Whitman writes, from the point of view of the African American slave:

> O topple down like Curse!
> topple more heavy than
> death!
> I am lurid with rage!
>
> I invoke Revenge to assist
> me—
>
> Let fate pursue them
> I do not know any horror
> that is dreadful enough
> for them—
> What is the worst whip
> you have
> May the genitals that
> begat them rot
> May the womb that begat [sic][164]

[163] Hollingshead.

Here, Whitman not only evokes Caliban, but he does so with the instinctive recognition that Prospero has no 'natural' right to rule over Caliban. Thus, Whitman uses the very Shakespeare play that was most associated with Emerson's assertion of the democratic authority of the individual – and, by implication, the state – and turns it on its head to indict that authority at its foundation. Yet even in this early fragment in a private notebook, Whitman refuses to follow Shakespeare's radicalism where it would naturally lead him. Whitman's Caliban resembles Shakespeare's in that he is filled with the desire for "revenge" and understands that he must not merely overthrow Prospero in the form of his white overlords, but he must "rot" the "genitals that / begat them." Yet he makes no suggestion of Caliban's plan to marry Miranda and "people[] else / This isle with Calibans" (I. ii. 350-351). Whitman's narrator would merely murder his overlords, but he would still implicitly preserve racial segregation. He does not hint at the rape of a white woman or miscegenation, which would have been a far more disturbing concept in antebellum America. In the very process, then, of assuming Caliban's voice, Whitman bleaches out his most profoundly perverse potential.

Still, Whitman's ambition to identify with the outcast and excluded in American society cannot be denied. If the scandalous nature of his poetry was responsible for gaining him readers, it also cost him prestige – most conspicuously the friendship of Emerson that he so coveted. Although Emerson wrote Whitman an important letter of recommendation, he excluded him from his late poetry anthology, *Parnassus* – and even in Emerson's private journals, he startlingly recorded only a few phrases about Whitman. Typical of these sparse references is

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164 "The Walt Whitman Archive," Notes and Examples for "The Making, and Unmaking of Walt Whitman's 'The Sleepers'," Ken Price and Brett Barney, accessed March 23, 2014, http://www.whitmanarchive.org/resources/sleepers/sleepers.html.

the embarrassed humour of this recorded observation by a friend – which, notably doesn't even mention Whitman's name: "Whipple said of the author of 'Leaves of Grass,' that he had every leaf but the fig leaf."[165] It appears that, like Prospero, it was only with great reluctance that he acknowledged "this thing of darkness" (V. i. 275).

VOICES INDECENT, BY ME TRANSFIGURED

As I have argued, though, it is not so easy to polarize Emerson and Whitman in the way that his reviewers and contemporaries clearly wanted to. For while Whitman's means were radical, his goal was – in many ways – just as conservative as Emerson's. Whitman's radical departure from the Romantic conception of "nature" was indebted to a separate, phrenological materialist tradition – most exemplified by the phrenologist and publisher of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Orson Fowler. Laqueur calls phrenology "the nineteenth century equivalent of modern biological determinism."[166] Yet, in America, the phrenolological tradition was advocated by people whom Horowitz argues were from an "evangelical milieu" . . . "trying to make an accommodation with science and its understanding of human reproduction."[167] As with the "sexual purity" movement, Fowler's goal was to promote the health of the American youth.

Ironically, it was Fowler's scientific book about sex, *Sexual Science; Including Manhood, Womanhood, and Their Mutual Interrelations*, that led him to his split with his

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[165] Ralph Waldo Emerson and Lawrence Alan Rosenwald, *Selected Journals 1841-1877* (New York: Library of America, 2010), pg. 663.
[166] Thomas Walter. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pg. 208.
[167] Helen Lefkowitz. Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Knopf, 2002), pg. 115.

publishing partner, Samuel Wells. A year later, Wells also cracked down on Whitman – thus ending their publishing agreement. Although Fowler offended conservative morality, his aim was far from being the release of raw libido. As Reynolds observes:

> The nastiness was in the eye of the beholder, for both Orson Fowler and Whitman had a deep-seated belief in the sacredness and purity of sex when rightly treated. Both stood opposed to the desacralization of sex in popular culture, and both hoped to reinstate sex as fully natural, the absolute center of existence.[168]

Whitman, like Fowler, wanted to anchor existence in sexuality, but he wanted to do so in a way that was "fully natural." In other words, Whitman wanted to assert that what he repeatedly called a "healthy," "chaste," and – as he would later describe it in "Memorandum at a Venture," "unperverted" sexuality was a fit subject for poetry. As critics as varied as Reynolds, Brasas, and Killingsworth, observe, complicating matters is the fact that the later Whitman deliberately attempted to systematize his early views about sexuality in such a way that they evaded the radical implications of the early exuberant celebratory mode of his work from 1855 through to 1865. As Killingsworth writes:

> The *heterogeneity* of the imaginative text is a leading characteristic of Whitman's poetry of the body between the years 1855 and 1865. It appears in 1856 as *a de-structuring* force that is an affront not only to conventional values and language but to Whitman's own attempt to coopt those values and that language.[169]

Yet it is my contention that – though in the earlier books Whitman, to use his own words from a letter to Symonds, let the "spirit impulse (female) rage its utmost wildest damnedest,"[170] his conservatism was always present. In one sense, in his public persona (outside of his private first drafts) he wanted Caliban's poetic

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[168] David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pg. 210.
[169] M. Jimmie. Killingsworth, *Whitman's Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pg. 60.
[170] Quoted in Killingsworth, pg. 172.

sensibility; but he wanted to exclude Caliban's dissident sexuality - exemplified by Caliban's potential cross-species rape of Miranda. Moreover, Whitman's larger poetic project suggests a covert identification with the very colonizing features of language that Miranda betrays in her contemptuous demand that Caliban should have been grateful to her for teaching him the language of his oppressors.

As we have seen, Fowler was an unabashed sexual liberationist, but of a very qualified sort. He advocated what, for the time, was a radical view of the purity, health, and wholesomeness of sexuality – almost identical to that of Whitman. Like Whitman, Fowler asserts that sex is "what steam power is to machinery – the prime instrumentality of its motions and productions," the very "chit-function of all males and females."[171] Fowler endorsed ideas that were, then, very radical: a materialist and scientific view of the body; the value of personal choice in marriage not just for men, but for women; the importance of libido and sexual pleasure for women and men; the proto-Freudian notion that emotional problems spring from lack of sexual satisfaction. Whereas Whitman could affirm, "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean," or "Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, perfect and clean the womb cohering" ("The Sleepers," section 8, 152), Fowler could wax lyrical about the testicles, calling them "God's only messengers of all life" and therefore "angelic" (pg. 710), and "sperm" could be characterized as miniature Hamlets, "drop[ping] this mortal coil" and mount[ing] on the pinions of immortality" . . . "Great God, what wonders hast Thou wrought by means of this infinitesimal entity!"

As radical as all of this admittedly was for the time, Fowler also, though, viewed this celebration of sexuality staunchly within the context of a traditional

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[171] O. S. Fowler, *Creative and Sexual Science,* (Philadelphia, Pa. ; Chicago, Ill. ; St. Louis, Mo.: National Publishing, 1875), pg. 712.

marriage - "this conjugal inspiration and talent" – and he had the stated goal of rooting out "perverted" sexuality as the primary cause of "vice" and corruption of the youth:

> All hail, then, this love sentiment, this conjugal inspiration and talent . . . Its *perversion* alone is despicable, and so is that of all our other faculties . . . Amativeness, when and because perverted, becomes one of the vilest of the human vices; whereas, when properly exercised, none of the human powers or virtues are more honorable or praiseworthy, or to be cultivated.[172]

Like Whitman, Fowler's ideas about the importance of "sexuality" for physical and emotional 'health' were asserted with an evangelical fervor that was not so much a form of permissiveness or tolerance - but an attempt to root out perversion by violent assertion of its opposite.

As I have claimed, the particular concern of sexual reformers with the sexual health of the nation's young people in antebellum America was stimulated by the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening, and intensified by rapid economic development, a population explosion, the economic instability of Jacksonian "boom and bust" capitalism, and a demographic shift from rural to urban centers. There was yet a more stark and immediate reason for Fowler and Whitman's obsession with sexual health. Manhattan was a city plagued by disease including "yellow fever, measles, tuberculosis, and, beginning in the late forties, cholera."[173] Between 1840 and 1855, the annual death-rate climbed from one in every forty New Yorkers to one in twenty-seven. As Reynolds observes:

> In 1847, Whitman noted in the *Eagle* that only half of the 450,000 children born annually in American lived to be twenty-one and that in large cities like New York and Boston the death rate was especially high. "As much as the present time is vaunted over the past", [Whitman wrote], "in no age of the world have so many influences been at work averse to health and to a noble physical development, as are working in this age!"[174]

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[172] Fowler, pp. 81-82.
[173] Reynolds, pg. 238.
[174] Ibid.

More than merely physical disease, though, Americans in the mid 19th century, according to contemporary accounts, including that of Alexander Tocqueville, experienced an emotional and spiritual malaise. Tocqueville writes of this, echoing Emerson's words about a Hamlet diseased by "Introspection":

> The strange melancholy often haunting inhabitants of democracies in the midst of abundance, and of that disgust with life sometimes gripping them in calm and easy circumstances.[175]

Whitman observed in 1854:

> Our country seems to be threatened with a sort of ossification of spirit . . . For I do not believe the people of these days are happy. The public countenance lacks its bloom of love and its freshness of faith – For want of these, it is cadaverous as a corpse.[176]

As Reynolds observes, in the 1830's the reform movements proposed a variety of "'natural' forms of healing," such as the "water cure" and there was a new emphasis on health and physical fitness: "Regulation of diet, exercise, ventilation, temperance, and other personal habits were thought to ensure mental and physical health."[177] Whatever the proximal cause, both Whitman and Fowler possessed a religious sense that not a dissident, but a pure and "unperverted" sexuality would improve the health of the nation.

Admittedly, mid 19th century sexual reformers' grim obsession with masturbation seems light-years from Whitman's early exuberant celebration of sexuality – which includes masturbation in this passage from "Song of Myself":

> I hear the trained soprano . . . . she convulses me like the climax of my love-grip;
> The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,
> It wrenches unnamable ardors from my breast,
> It throbs me to gulps of the farthest down horror,
> It sails me;[178]

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[175] Ibid., pg. 331.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid., pg. 332.
[178] See, for comparison, revised 1891 edition, section 26, 603-605.

(1855, p. 684, 601-604)

Yet, it is notable that this passage was edited in the later 1891 edition of *Leaves of Grass* to exclude the explicitly masturbatory "love-grip" – and the "unnamable ardors." In a liberationist vein, Whitman could fiercely and explicitly denounce sexual "reformers" – referring disdainfully to fear of the "scrofula" caused by tuberculosis, supposed to be caused by sexual excess:

> What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
> Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent,
> My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,
> I moisten the roots of all that has grown.
>
> Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy?
> Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be work'd over and rectified?
> (SOM, section 23, 463-469)

In other passages in "Song of Myself," Whitman could refer to the "treacherous tip of me" – that succumbs to a "red marauder" - and he evokes contemporary accounts of masturbatory insanity:

> I am given up by traitors,
> I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and
> Nobody else am the greatest traitor,
> I went myself first to the headland,
> My own hands carried me there.
> (SOMS, section 28, 637-638)

As the insane asylum superintendent, Samuel Woodward, would attest, Whitman has only his "own hands" to blame! In *Spontaneous Me*, Whitman could write again in this melodramatic vein:

> The young man that wakes deep at night, the hot hand seeking to repress what would master him,
> The mystic amorous night, the strange half-welcome pangs, visions, sweats,
> The pulse pounding through palms and trembling encircling fingers, the young man all color'd, red, ashamed, angry;
> (SM, 32-34)

Even in the early poem "The Sleepers," Whitman could exhibit the same image of the "sick gray-face[d] onanists" (S, 7) evoked both by psychiatrists and sexual reformers like Graham.

Ultimately, Whitman employed ideas from evolutionary biology for the purpose of asserting the old American teleology. As Harold Aspiz explains, Whitman did this by incorporating a version of the Lamarckian idea of "soft inheritance," which argued that traits acquired during the lifetime of an organism could be passed on to offspring.[179] Whitman vulgarized Lamarck's theory to suggest that healthy sexual behavior would result in robust children, thus implying that the sexual pervert was an obstacle to America's optimistic future. In his paean to robust American youth, "Song of the Open Road," Whitman excluded the sexually "diseas'd" from the journey towards America's optimistic future:

> Come not here if you have already *spent* the best of yourself!
> Only those may come who come in sweet and determin'd bodies,
> No diseas'd person, no rum-drinker or venereal taint is permitted here.[180]
> (SOR, section 10, 135-137)

Recall that this same poet who, in "A Woman Waits for Me," "shall demand perfect men and women out of my love-*spendings*" – uses the imagery of "spending" to evoke the healthy progeny that Whitman felt required "sweet and determin'd bodies." This voice couldn't be more different from that of "Song of Myself" in which Whitman cries:

> Through me many long dumb voices,
> Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
> Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs . . .
> (SOM, section 24, 508-510)

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[179] Harold Aspiz, *Walt Whitman and the Body Beautiful* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 183-209.

[180] See pg. 12, Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors.* "Spend" in the nineteenth century meant to reach orgasm. It was the shortened form of the more refined term "expenditure."

How do we resolve the apparent disjunction? Quoting Eve Sedgwick, Killingsworth contends that Whitman "lived and wrote" in an "anxious, sharply dichotomized landscape." Referring to Whitman's journalism, Killingsworth argues:

> I heard a very different voice. It spoke of reserve and prudence, and it warned of the folly and danger that awaited sexual experimenters. Addressed to the young and the old, it seemed the very essence of a dominating and chauvinistic middle age.[181]

These two voices, as Killingsworth argues, run alongside one another throughout Whitman's poetry as well as his prose. The answer, though, might not only be within Whitman's complex identifications as a poet, but also within the reform movements themselves. Whitman's voice addresses the "excluded," the "dwarfs," the "diseas'd and despairing," but his real aim is to heal them. As Reynolds observes:

> Both physical and psychological ills are challenged by the powerful "I" of "Song of Myself," who is equipped with the full range of life-affirming, health-giving restoratives from mid-nineteenth century therapeutic thought.[182]

After all, Whitman claims his poems will "filter and fibre your blood." In other words, Whitman's poems make a move that is as old as the theological perverse itself (a move that is still very much alive through the Twelve Step programs and their innumerable offspring) which is to turn "perversion" into "conversion."[183] Whitman writes:

> Through me forbidden voices,
> Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
> Voices indecent, by me *clarified and transfigur'd*.
> (italics added, SOM, section 24, 516-521)

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[181] Killingsworth, pg. xv.
[182] Reynolds, pg. 332.
[183] Jake Flanagin, "The Surprising Failures of 12 Steps," The Atlantic, March 25, 2014, accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/the-surprising-failures-of-12-steps/284616/.

Notice the words, "by me clarified and transfigur'd." As a contemporary reviewer, Robert Buchanan observes, evoking the Proteus trope from Shakespearean criticism:

> In a few vivid touches we have striking pictures; the writer shifts his identity like Proteus, but breathes the same deep undertone in every shape. He can transfer himself into any personality, however base. "I am the man—I suffered—I was there." He cares for no man's pride. He holds no man unclean.[184]

Buchanan's Whitman, like Shakespeare, possesses a kind of "Negative Capability." He can "transfer himself into any personality, however base." This ability to "transfer" does not taint the "I." On the contrary, it proves his Christ-like compassion: "He holds no man unclean." Unlike Shakespeare, though, Buchanan implies that Whitman has a deliberately moral purpose, one that could only be realized by what Emerson called the "poet-priest" of American democracy.

Whitman's complex "redeemer" sexual persona is captured in the censored poem, "To A Common Prostitute." In this poem, Whitman transfigures the role of a man soliciting sex from a prostitute into a Christ-like posture, evoking the Mary Magdalene tradition (Luke 7:36-50) – which holds Mary Magdalene to be a prostitute:

> I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature,
> Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
> Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to
> rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you.
>
> My girl, I appoint with you an appointment—and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me,
> Till then, I salute you with a significant look, that you do not forget me.
> And I charge you that you be patient and perfect till I come.

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[184] Buchanan, Robert. "Walt Whitman." *The Broadway* 1 (November 1867): 188-95. Whitman Archives. For a full account of the "Proteus" trope in Shakespeare criticism, see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 14-16. See also William Richardson, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters By W. Richardson.* (London: Printed for J. Murray, 1784), pg. 38 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (New York: Leavitt, Lord &, 1834), pg. 186.

Prostitution was, in New York of 1855, a 6.35 million dollar a year business – second only to tailoring. Here, Whitman explicitly "transfigure"[s] the very symbol of sexual "disease" and licentiousness that plagued the city of New York during 1820 to 1865, the assignation with a prostitute, into a figure for Christ's "appointment" with humanity.[185] Whitman consciously sublimated the "liberal and lusty" persona of his earlier poems in order to fashion this image of himself. Whitman has fashioned himself to become the new Christ-like American poet who would replace Shakespeare by not only writing immortal verse, but by healing the nation. The distinction between Whitman's project and that of the sexual reformers – who eventually succeeded in censoring his 1881 *Leaves of Grass* was one of means, but not of ends.

THE SHADOW OF EMERSON

In his late, embittered essay about Emerson, entitled "Emerson's Books, (The Shadows of Them)," Whitman casts his former "Master" as part of the aristocratic "select class" of the Shakespearean "Old World" inimical to the "plan" of America. This was the very type of writer that Emerson himself argued must be superseded by the American "poet-priest." Whitman writes:

> The plan of a select class, superfined, (demarcated from the rest,) the plan of Old World lands and literatures, is not so objectionable in itself, but because it chokes the true plan for us, and indeed is *death* to it.

Emerson is associated with the "death" that, along with the "plan of Old World," stands in the way of America fulfilling its destiny. Yet, Whitman also chides

[185] Reynolds, pg. 227.

Emerson for lacking Shakespeare's primal power. Ironically, Whitman's criticism of Emerson inadvertently echoes Emerson's own criticism of American verse in the essay that Whitman revered, "The Poet." As Emerson writes:

> . . . this genius is the landscape-garden of a modern house, adorned with fountains and statues, with well-bred men and women standing and sitting in the walks and terraces. We hear, through all the varied music, the ground-tone of conventional life. Our poets are men of talents who sing, and not the children of music. The argument is secondary, the finish of the verses is primary.[186]

In "The American Scholar," we recall, Emerson evoked the Hamlet-like poet, plagued by "Introspection," "sickl'ied o'er with the pale cast of thought," who plants an "oak tree" in a "flower-pot" . . . "there to hunger and pine." Emerson and Whitman largely agreed that the disease of the "Old World" stood in the way of the future. In his late essay, Whitman aligns the man he earlier regarded as his "Master" (or, as he recounts bitterly, he "address'd him in print as 'Master,' and for a month or so thought of him as such") with all that Emerson had originally rejected of the Old World, including Shakespeare.

To liberate American individuality was to displace disease onto the Shakespearean Old World and to affirm what Whitman calls "normal and unperverted" sexuality fit for a democracy. In this sense, then Whitman's "perverse" is *not* located so much in his homosexuality – which he consistently denied after the rise of sexology in the 1870's - but, paradoxically, in his sexual evangelism: his confident assertions of healthy, mature masculine sexuality – and his consequent fear of its perversion by disease and degeneration.

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[186] Emerson, pg. 450.

THE NEW AMERICAN PERVERT

In 1881, Whitman was the subject of a large public controversy over the censoring by the Boston district attorney, Oliver Stevens, of his new edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It was the first edition of the book published by a respectable publisher, James R. Osgood. It was a handsome volume – and, as Whitman instructed, "markedly plain & simple even to Quakerness - . . . no sensationalism or luxury – a well made book for honest wear & use & carrying with you."[187] He had published a successful and heavily expurgated copy of his poetry in England through William Michael Rosetti, Pre-Raphaelite and son of the famous Dante Gabriel Rossetti*;* he had edited many of the racier passages from his earlier editions; he also included an extensive book of "inscriptions" filled with patriotic bluster and "religious mist"[188] – and intended, in part, to bury the more sexually explicit poems; he renamed the expansive early poem, "Whitman," to the more respectable, "Song of Myself;" and he relegated the original defiant, cocky, and sensual 1855 portrait of himself to the middle of the book.[189]

The newly respectable Whitman received, on the whole, good reviews for the book. Eight of the first nine reviews of the new 1881 edition were mostly positive. [190] Still, through the zealous activism of figures like Anthony Comstock, who in 1871 established the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, the new *Leaves of Grass* confronted antiobscenity laws that doomed it from the start. Whitman was asked to censor what he called his "sexuality poems." At first, he attempted to revise the offending poems: "Woman Waits," "Body Electric," and "Spontaneous

[187] Reynolds, pg. 534.
[188] Ibid. pg. 536.
[189] Ibid. pg. 535.
[190] Ibid. pg. 538.

Me." When his publisher, Osgood, indicated that more revision would be required, Whitman refused: "The list whole & entire is rejected by me, & will not be thought of under any circumstances."[191]

Whitman immediately wrote an essay, "A Memorandum at a Venture,"[192] published in *The North American Review*, in defence of the 1881 volume of *Leaves of Grass*. In "Memorandum," Whitman formulated his most coherent theory about the expression of sexuality in poetry. Admittedly, the later Whitman who penned "Memorandum" was markedly different from the man who celebrated himself in 1855, but the essay is not, in my view, at all inconsistent with the more "heterogeneous" editions from 1855-1865.

Whitman argues that there are two contemporary approaches towards sexuality that are deeply problematic. One of those views is the view of the prudish – like Comstock – which, in his view, "has led to states of ignorance, repressal." For Whitman, this view, far from leading to the elimination of sexuality or the purification of society, simply "cover[s] over disease and depletion." The absence of a frank discussion of sexuality has the "scent" of "something sneaking, furtive, mephitic" that "pervade[s] all modern literature, conversation, and manners."

The second view of sexuality is the polite literary tolerance of it – but only within exclusive "masculine circles." This is exemplified by the tradition that has been inherited in America from the Old World: "especially in England" . . . "from the oldest times down" – and it is in "Shakspere almost anywhere." This is far "less dangerous than the conceal'd one" – but, only as a "disease which comes to the surface" and is thus easier to treat. It also descends from an exclusive, aristocratic tradition that, in Whitman's view, is alien to the aspirations of a democratic people.

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[191] Quoted in: Reynolds, pg. 541.
[192] Whitman, Walt, and Floyd Stovall. *Prose Works 1892*. New York: New York University Press, 1963.

Whitman proposes a third view, which is that "America" is "to be the place" that "must work out a plan and standard on this subject" . . . "for thoughtfulest men and women, and thoughtfulest literature." Of this third view, Whitman writes:

> . . . the sexual passion in itself, *while normal and unperverted*, is inherently legitimate, creditable, not necessarily an improper theme for poet, as confessedly not for scientist—that, with reference to the whole construction, organism, and intentions of "Leaves of Grass," anything short of confronting that theme, and making myself clear upon it, as the enclosing basis of everything . . . [sic, italics added]

Whitman, here, establishes for himself a poetic project that is explicitly and ostentatiously sexual, but that also removes from sex everything that makes it – and one might add his own verse – sexy: namely the "abnormal" and the "perverted." Whitman's evocation of the "scientist" here is consistent with claims he made in defence of his " sexuality poems" throughout his career. In another late prose work, Whitman adds:

> Literature is always calling in the doctor for consultation and confession, and always giving evasions and swathing suppressions in place of that "heroic nudity" on which only a genuine diagnosis can be built.[193]

Whitman regards his poetry as having the same new claim for frank and open physiological examination of "heroic nudity" that the American "doctor" was beginning to claim. He even regards his poetry as a method for the "diagnosis" of disease. In 19th century America, female patients received notoriously poor care from the predominantly male doctors who, because of the prudery of the time, were unable to examine them without clothes.[194] Whitman imagines poetry as advancing like "science" and medicine with the aim of improving the health of the population.

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[193] Whitman, pg. 809.

[194] ". . . in America where most women would have preferred to die than have a physician - a man - examine their bodies, it was a "delicacy" nearly impossible to surmount, and as a consequence a great many Americans did die, and young men in medical training in America seldom had a chance to study the female anatomy, other than in books" in David G. McCullough, *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), pg. 115.

Whitman goes on to suggest that the prior views of sex are not only "prurient," but misogynistic and exclusionary; they exhibit a subtle contempt towards women:

> To the movement for the eligibility and entrance of women amid new spheres of business, politics, and the suffrage, the current prurient, conventional treatment of sex is the main formidable obstacle. The rising tide of "woman's rights," swelling and every year advancing farther and farther, recoils from it with dismay. There will in my opinion be no general progress in such eligibility till a sensible, philosophic, democratic method is substituted.

His alternative is to develop a notion of generous and robust sexual expression ("the demesne of poetry and sanity") that is also – for the time – a radical vision of equality between the sexes. For, Whitman is not just arguing that sexuality is a proper theme for a poet, but that, in order for women to attain the proper rights and responsibilities of full citizenship in a democracy, they *must* not be excluded from frank discussions of sexuality. As Killingsworth observes:

> Political power is dependent upon sexual identity; sexual experience unlocks the mystery of the physical, the knowledge of which is necessary if one is to assume leadership in the realm of human action;[195]

The old chauvinistic tradition, embodied by Shakespeare, is an old-boys network that is an obstacle to women's opportunity and a utopian future of sexual equality.

As essential as were the advances in women's rights, Whitman does not 'liberate' sexuality here. He displaces the burden of unsocialized sexuality onto the old order – exemplified, in large part, by Shakespeare. Perverse sexuality is precisely what 'cannot' be linked to social movements such as that of women's suffrage. By associating "normal and unperverted" sexual expression to the women's rights movement, Whitman creates a new, more virulent perverse – one that becomes, as we have seen, an anti-social negation of the "True America" – an attack on the

[195] Killingsworth, pp. 67-68.

future of the species itself. As Bercovitch writes, regarding the American project more broadly:

> Here, in short, the *national* prospect encompassed teleology, nostalgia, and universalist principle. *This* way of life (prophesy and experience combined) was "futurity" itself. It was the work of ideology in all cultures to co-opt utopia – to extol its particular norms as universal ideals and then to incorporate these ideals as perfection incarnate *sub specie aeternitatis* (as in monarchy the norms of the Good Ruler coalesced as a reflection of the heavenly kingdom) – and in this case the utopia was the True America.[196]

Whitman's essay sets itself the impossible project – that writing can do away with the distinction between sexuality that is "prurient" and "secret" and sexuality that is "healthy" and socially valuable. This is surely a more onerous project even than that set by Emerson – who writes of "*self*-reliance" without setting himself the impossible task of converting perverse sexuality into healthy sexuality. Yet Whitman's project is very much informed by Emerson's project – and by Shakespearean sexual anxieties that are everywhere present in Emerson's work.

WHITMAN AND SEXUAL LIBERATION

Ironically, it is also the vicious male chauvinism that Whitman so rightly denounces that was the fertile terrain of his early homoerotic verse. For the kind of polarized society that frowned upon women reading the unedited classics such as Shakespeare and Rabelais, was one in which men possessed an idealized, homoerotic intimacy that would make Whitman's "Calamus" poems not only possible, but unnoticed by the era's defenders of public morality. It was Whitman's very stance *for* frankness in the public expression of "sexuality" that caused the death of his own nostalgic 1855-1865 world of manly "camaraderie." By the 1880's, when Whitman wrote

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[196] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978, 2012), pg. xx.

"Memorandum," he inhabited a much changed world – in which the very evaluation of sexuality in the medical and scientific terms that he repeatedly advocated - was beginning to solidify into the psychiatric classification of the "perverse sexual orientation" of "homosexuality."

Whitman's response was deliberately to convert his earlier notion of "camaraderie" into a form of Neo Platonic mysticism, and the effect was to bleach his later poetry of the sexual excesses that had invigorated his earlier work from 1855-1865. It may have been not so much Whitman's own lack of truthfulness, but his confusion at the new emerging medical category of "homosexuality" – a category his own insistence on the open expression of sexuality, in part, fostered – that led to Whitman's disavowal of the homoerotic meaning of his "Calamus" poems. When Symonds asked him directly, in 1890:

> [In your conception of Comradeship] do you contemplate the possible intrusion of those semi-sexual emotions and actions which no doubt occur between men? I do not ask whether you approve of them, or regard them as a necessary part of the relation. But I should much like to know whether you are prepared to leave them to the inclination and the conscience of the individuals concerned?[197]

Whitman's response was bewildered:

> Ab't the question on Calamus pieces &c: they quite daze me. L of G. is only rightly to be construed by and within its own atmosphere and essential character – all of its pages & pieces so coming strictly under that – that the calamus part has even allow'd the possibility of such a construction as mentioned is terrible – I am fain to hope the pages themselves are not to be even mention'd for such gratuitous and quite at the same time undream'd and unreck'd possibility of morbid inferences – wh' are disavowed by me and seem damnable.[198]

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[197] Horace Traubel and Gary Schmidgall, *Intimate with Walt: Selections from Whitman's Conversations with Horace Traubel, 1888-1892* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), pg. xiii.

[198] Traubel, pg. xiv.

Careful attention to Whitman's language in this passage is instructive: "daze," "undream'd," and unreck'd." Whitman's response – and Whitman's subsequent qualification of it, has often been interpreted as "disingenuous":[199]

> Symonds is right, no doubt, to ask the questions: I am just as much right if I do not answer them. I often say to myself about *Calamus* – perhaps it means more or less than what I thought myself – means different: perhaps I don't know what it all means – perhaps never did know.[200]

Though Whitman undoubtedly attempted to conceal his sexual attraction to men – going so far as to create a numerical system to disguise the names of men in his journals – these passages don't strike me as disingenuous so much as mystified. Whitman lived within an era in which there was a dramatic shift in the meaning of "perverse" – a shift that his poetry was very much involved in. The fact that the genuinely liberating features of sexual discourse could have a dark underbelly – that liberation itself, in part, advanced the notion of "morbid" sexual pathology – could never have occurred to him.

It is my contention that the deepest perversity in Whitman lies, therefore, not in his homoerotic poetry – which is rather anodyne – but, in his deeply held belief that his frank poetic treatment of "healthy sexuality" would, like Graham's vegetarian diet, supply a cure for the perverse sexual excess that gave rise to prostitution and pornographic literature in his era. In fact, what happened is that frank sexual expression – of the very clinical kind that Whitman had so much faith in – liberated discourse to create medical categories that would re-evaluate his own poetry of "health" as the epitome of the disease and death he so feared. As Foucault observes, this also opened the way for "counter-discourses" already evident in

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[199] Eve Kosofsky. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pg. 204.
[200] Traubel, pg. 85.

Symonds' cautious letter to Whitman. Whitman was deaf to these, though – as he never fully adapted to the era that was superseding his own.[201]

[201] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 122-127. Foucault's argument that the so-called sexual "revolution" that occurred between the world wars in the 20th century was "nothing less—and its importance is undeniable–than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality" (pg. 127) is characteristic of his argument throughout *The History of Sexuality* that sovereign power metamorphosed during the industrial revolution into modern disciplinary power. In my view Foucault's account is also applicable to the transformation of sexuality that Whitman lived through. See also Foucault's pt. 2 "The Repressive Hypothesis" in the same volume.

THE IMAGINATION DISEASED: HAWTHORNE, INCEST, AND THE RETURN OF THE SHAKESPEAREAN REPRESSED

OVERVIEW

I first demonstrate the extensive and infrequently explored influence of Shakespeare upon Nathaniel Hawthorne, which reveals a Gothic pattern of association that, in Hawthorne's mature work, evokes Jacksonian sexual pathology and Augustinian non-being.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne descends fully into the terrors of Augustinian non-being, attempting to discover a moral and humane vision of America's future by overcoming the pathological perversity and ontological terror of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. This attempt is foiled by the incestuous undercurrent in the relationship between Dimmesdale and Pearl, conjured by imagery from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hawthorne then duplicitously attempts to displace Dimmesdale's perverse sexuality onto Pearl, producing a redemption narrative in which America's future depends upon the supposed conversion of the perverse child into a symbol of antebellum womanhood. Dimmesdale's confession of iniquity to the multitude, far from humanizing Pearl and redeeming American history, in fact, manipulates Pearl through guilt into renouncing her anarchic spirit and becoming precisely the kind of conformist that Dimmesdale is, at heart.

THE STRATFORD BEDLAMITE

> Thence I was ushered up stairs to the room in which Shakespeare is supposed to have been born: though, if you peep too curiously into the matter, you may find the shadow of an ugly doubt on this, as well as most other points of his mysterious life.[202]

It was 1857 when Hawthorne made the pilgrimage to Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon. This was the same trip that Thomas Jefferson and John Adams took in 1786. At the time, he lived in the nearby town of Leamington Spa. He had been United States consul for the port of Liverpool for five years, and had moved, temporarily, to the countryside before his departure to Italy in January of 1858.

While at the birthplace, he peered up the immense chimney, wondering if "Shakespeare may have seen the blue sky by day and the stars glimmering down at him by night" through its "immense passageway."[203] On the whole, though, he found the house "whitewashed and very clean, but woefully shabby and dingy, coarsely built, and such as the most poetical imagination would find it difficult to idealize." He felt it incumbent upon him to confess:

> I should consider it unfair to quit Shakespeare's house without the frank acknowledgment that I was conscious of not the slightest emotion while viewing it, nor any quickening of the imagination.[204]

Despite his disappointment, it is notable that he was self-consciously aware that he was expected to have such a "quickening of the imagination."[205]

The descriptions of such a journey by American literary figures were so "innumerable" that Hawthorne could only justify his to his audience by using it as

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[202] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901), pg. 159.
[203] Hawthorne, *Our Old Home*, pg. 158.
[204] *Ibid*, pp. 162-3.

part of the framework for a Gothic narrative. The story he told was of his encounter with one of the most eccentric American residents in Stratford-upon-Avon's long history, Delia Bacon. The specific subject of Hawthorne's story is Delia's visit to Trinity Church, where Shakespeare is buried, to seek confirmation for her theory, subsequently published in her book, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* (1857), that Francis Bacon was the chief author of Shakespeare's plays.[206]

Hawthorne had met Delia on July 29, 1856. Subsequently, she sent Hawthorne a manuscript containing the ideas upon which her book would be based, argued through a close reading of *King Lear, Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. Hawthorne's wife Sophia thought the work brilliant.[207] Hawthorne thought that Delia was "mad" but highly intelligent, and he reluctantly provided the financial support for the publication of her book. He wrote:

> The woman is mad . . . but the book is a good one; and as she threw herself on me, I will stand by her in spite of her nonsense . . . How funny, that I should come in front of the stage-curtain, escorting this Bedlamite![208]

He got far more than even he had could have foreseen, for Delia turned out to be completely intractable to his editorial decisions. Hawthorne felt honor-bound to write a preface for the book — which he put off for months — and to finish overseeing the book's publication; but the book proved a disaster.

In her book, Delia argues that Shakespeare's plays were proto-republican polemics produced by a "freemasonry" of courtiers in Elizabeth's and James's courts, founded by Sir Walter Raleigh and including Edmund Spenser and – in France – Montaigne (as well as many others, though it is not always clear to whom

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[206] I use Delia Bacon's first name throughout this section so as not to confuse her with Francis Bacon.
[207] Nina Baym, "Delia Bacon: Hawthorne's Last Heroine," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1994).
[208] Quote in: Edwin Haviland. Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), pg. 422.

she is referring).[209] From the top, the plays would convey the new philosophy of "MORALITY" and "POLICY" in cipher to those courtiers across Europe within the secret society; from the bottom, the plays would teach the "Doctrine of Human Nature and Human Life" to the uneducated. The plays were not intended, as Delia quoted Francis Bacon, to "innovate *greatly* but *quietly*, and by degrees scarce to be perceived.'" [210] They would operate not in Shakespeare's time, but across the centuries ("as letters to the future"), gradually working to reconcile human beings to a Nature divinely revealed to that select School of courtiers.[211] In Delia's view, Francis Bacon was the "new interpreter of Nature"… a "priest"…"whose work" bore "the seal of" a divine "testimony" that was written "in the large handwriting of"…"Providence Divine."[212]

This view of Shakespeare, as a prophet of a newly revealed gospel, was actually not, as we have seen, very far short of Emerson's own claims for the Bard. Where Emerson claimed implicitly that Shakespeare exemplified an occult relationship between the self and nature, Delia was interested in the mechanism by which nature was interpreted to human beings. She felt that Francis Bacon had revealed this mechanism in the *Novum Organon* and that it was then given sensuous embodiment by the plays attributed to Shakespeare. In this way, Delia justified using *The Advancement of Learning* as a gloss to read *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, and *Julius Caesar*.

Though full of rich insights, the book is clearly in draft form. If one separates out Delia's unsubstantiated claims about the secret society founded by Walter

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[209] Delia Bacon, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1857), pg. lxxii.
[210] Bacon, pp. 96, 187. See Francis Bacon, "Of Innovation" in *The Essays of Francis Bacon Vol. 1* (London: J. Walter Printing-House-Square, 1787), pg. 128.
[211] Bacon, *Philosophy*, pg. 147.
[212] Bacon, pg. 124.

Raleigh and Francis Bacon's supposed authorship of the plays, the book's idea, to analyze Shakespeare's plays in light of Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, is highly original and it gives rise to insightful and innovative readings. It also shows a wonderful mastery of the texts of the plays and a deft ability to place quotes. What it lacks is a strong narrative with clearly identified historical figures, a persuasive description of their deeds, and anchoring supporting details. Delia's perception, though, of internal division within Elizabethan and Jacobean political culture, her sensitivity to Shakespeare's riddling language and her intuition that an underground utopian, proto-republican sympathy exists in the plays, is not only insightful, but, as Nina Baym argues, it prefigures New Historicism.[213] Indeed, though far from being a "perverse" reading of Shakespeare, Delia's book foreshadows my own work, with its attention to a covert subtext deciphered by close readers of the plays.

The critics, as Hawthorne foresaw, lambasted the book and, for reasons that are probably unrelated, Delia was committed to an insane asylum.[214] Hawthorne's depiction of Delia in *Our Old Home* – perhaps out of an attempt to elicit sympathy for her – as a nineteenth century Gothic "madwoman in the attic," visiting Trinity Church late at night with a lantern, hoping to find evidence of the true identity of the plays' author there, pleading with the local church officials to exhume the body

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[213] Nina Baym, "Delia Bacon, History's Odd Woman Out," *The New England Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 1996): pg. 246. For a hint of the uncanny prescience of Delia's critical approach (as opposed to her misguided historical methodology), see, for example, Kiernan Ryan's recent argument, "It's my contention that this profound commitment to the *universal human potential* to live otherwise is the secret of the plays' proven ability to transcend their time. This is what drives their radical dissatisfaction with Shakespeare's world, divorcing their vision from the assumptions and attitudes that held sway in early modern England, and opening them up to the future and the prospect of the world transfigured. That prospect – the tidal pull of futurity that inflects their language and form at every turn – is what propels Shakespeare's plays beyond the horizon of his age to speak with more authority and power than ever to ours." Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Universality: Here's Fine Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pg. 9.

[214] See James Shapiro's vivid recounting of this story. James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), pp.110-124.

from Shakespeare's grave, and communing with local ghosts – sealed her reputation in the eyes of the public. It would take well over a century for Delia's status to be reevaluated, first in the richly informative and well-researched 1957 biography by Vivian Hopkins entitled *Prodigal Puritan A Life of Delia Bacon;* more recently in the works (cited here) by Nina Baym and Karl Shapiro.

Delia's book may not have transformed Hawthorne's view of Shakespeare, but his experience of meeting her moved him to create one of his most memorable insights into the Bard:

> Shakespeare has surface beneath surface, to an immeasurable depth, adapted to the plummet-line of every reader; his work presents many phases of truth, each with scope large enough to fill a contemplative mind. Whatever you see in him you will surely discover, provided you seek truth. There is no exhausting the various interpretations of his symbols; and a thousand years hence, a world of new readers will possess a whole library of new books, as we ourselves do, in these volumes already written.[215]

Not surprisingly, given how personally invested he was in his sketch of Delia, Hawthorne's insight could just have easily been made about his own novel, *The Scarlet Letter*.[216] In the context of Hawthorne's fictionalized account of Delia's mad pursuit for a cipher to explain the mystery of Shakespeare's plays, it also evokes the plays as a dangerous and unsettling labyrinth in which madness potentially awaits. This is an intimation of a Gothic Shakespeare that Hawthorne struggled most intensely to exorcise in *The Scarlet Letter*.

GOTHIC SHAKESPEARE

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[215] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), pp. 175-6.

[216] Nina Baym, in fact, argues that Hawthorne's sketch of Bacon is shaped by the two character types that dominated his fiction: "the individual whose obsession determines the shape of the inner and outer life, and the antinomian heroine who defies social conventions." Baym, "Hawthorne's Last Heroine", pg. 5.

The Gothic genre is itself inextricably linked to the influence of Shakespeare. The preface to the second edition of the novel that inaugurated the Gothic genre, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), uses the authority of Shakespeare, the "great master of nature," in order to establish credibility for the invention of the new genre.[217] After Walpole, allusions to Shakespeare and the evocation of his authority became a traditional feature of the Gothic genre.[218] As John Drakakis writes:

> Shakespeare's investments in the resources of the supernatural, his predilection for spectres, graveyards, the paraphernalia of death, moving statues, magical transformations and the emphasis upon the 'non-rational' as a category of human experience all render his plays open to the descriptive term 'Gothic'.[219]

Underlying the emphasis on the "non-rational" is the experience of "the uncanny," a subject treated by Sigmund Freud in his seminal essay with that title. For Freud, the uncanny is deeply implicated in the return of structures of infantile perception surmounted by the adult; this takes the form of the revivification of the infant's belief in "animism" and the "omnipotence of thoughts" as well as the eruption of complexes, such as the Castration Complex and the Oedipus Complex, that structure the infant's perception.[220] If Freud is correct, then it is no accident that

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[217] Horace Walpole and W. S. Lewis, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pg. 10.

[218] See also Christy Desmet and Anne Williams, *Shakespearean Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); for Gothic Shakespeare's influence on French postmodernism, see Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 29-75.

Arguably, Derrida's Gothic reading of *Hamlet* in *Spectres of Marx*, especially his extended analysis of Hamlet's phrase, "the time is out of joint" (I. v. 188) in chapter 1, with its close attention to the term "perverse," is relevant to my study. The perverse jeremiad, however, is an enclosed system that reels between utopia and dystopia, which is different from hauntology's sense of the past's many open potential possibilities. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 22-24.

[219] John Drakakis and Dale Townshend, *Gothic Shakespeares* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pg. 24.

[220] Sigmund Freud, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

writers of early Gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe, in her posthumously published essay "On The Supernatural In Poetry" (1826), relied upon figures like the Ghost in *Hamlet* to justify the use of the supernatural in the new genre; for figures like the Ghost in *Hamlet* not only horrify but they are a key to psychological depth. [221]

As I will argue, Hawthorne's fiction, and indeed the American fiction of the 19th century, is so steeped in Gothic tropes that his allusions to *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* must be seen partly within that tradition. More, the Gothic genre is preoccupied with taboo and transgression; this clearly over-determines the way that the Shakespearean perverse is deployed by Hawthorne (and later Melville). [222] Hawthorne's delicate psychological use of Shakespearean allusion, however, exceeds the Gothic tradition that he inherits. It will be important, therefore, to foreground Hawthorne's relationship to the Gothic genre in order to discover his unique contribution to it.

THE PERVERSE IN GOTHIC

Hawthorne may have, from his childhood, associated Shakespeare with the Gothic genre. Hawthorne's sister recalled that young Nathaniel frequently recited, "My lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass" (I. ii. 38) from *Richard III*. As Brenda Wineapple observes, this might be a casual recollection if it were not for the fact that somber processions of coffins were a grisly commonplace in Salem. Wineapple also

[221] "Oh, I should never be weary of dwelling on the perfection of Shakespeare, in his management of every scene connected with that most solemn and mysterious being, which takes such entire possession of the imagination, that we hardly seem conscious we are beings of this world while we contemplate 'the extravagant and erring spirit.'" Ann Radcliffe, "On The Supernatural In Poetry," ed. David Sandner, in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), pg. 46.
[222] David Punter, *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pg. 3.

suggests that Hawthorne may have felt a personal affinity with the play, as his lame uncle Richard, Richard Manning III, became the family patriarch after Hawthorne's grandfather died, but only after a power struggle with rival contenders for the throne, which led to his departure from Salem, to Maine. Wineapple writes:

> Shakespeare's Richard III: malformed, robbed by nature, a villain to be sure; and crippled Uncle Richard: *paterfamilias absconditus*, a kind of hero and, for having abandoned his nephew, a kind of villain too.[223]

Hawthorne's later description of Zenobia recounting the chilling story of the "Veiled Lady" in *The Blithedale Romance*, describes her as "fond of readings from Shakespeare, and often with a depth of tragic power, or breadth of comic effect, that made one feel it an intolerable wrong to the world, that she did not go upon stage." [224] These dramatic readings may have been inspired by Hawthorne's own readings of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton to his wife "beneath the astral lamp" in the evening.[225]

As we will explore later, Hawthorne's nickname in College was Oberon, King of the Fairies, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For Hawthorne, this name conjured not only the magic of romance, but also Oberon's sobriquet, "king of shadows" (III. ii. 347). In his early Gothic novel, *Fanshawe*, published anonymously in 1828 and, Hawthorne thought, lost to history, Hawthorne was anxious to claim his affiliation with Shakespeare, giving three of his ten chapters Shakespearean epigraphs. This habit of using Shakespearean epigraphs follows a pattern familiar to Gothic fiction, exemplified by such novels as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

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[223] Brenda Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pg. 26.
[224] Nathaniel Hawthorne and Millicent Bell, *Collected Novels* (New York: Library of America, 1983), pg. 725.
[225] Wineapple, pg. 162.

Hawthorne was never again so keen to claim lineage from Shakespeare, though hints remain such as the allusion in the title of his first book of short stories, *Twice Told Tales*, to the lines from *King John*: "Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale, / Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man" (III. iv. 108-9). He would also never again write explicitly in the Gothic genre, except in isolated short stories. Though all of Hawthorne's novels contain Gothic themes, such as the dark forest and the supposed witch, Mistress Hibbins, in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the gloomy mansion in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) which preserves the inheritance of "Maule's curse" and *The Marble Faun's* (1860) setting amidst the crumbling ruins of Rome, Hawthorne deliberately set his work apart from that genre, preferring, in his famous preface to *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), to call his work "romance" and himself a "romancer," placing himself in the tradition of the "Faery Land" of Spenser.[226]

In a larger sense, though, the Gothic genre is inescapable for American authors, especially in Hawthorne's period, because it is already implied within the structure of the American jeremiad. As David Punter argues, the Manichean dichotomies of the traditional English Gothic novel with its oppositions between the supposed Protestant enlightenment and Catholic superstition, a republican political culture and monuments to a crumbling aristocracy, Roman civic order and medieval barbarity, were reproduced in the "Puritan consciousness itself" with its "Gothic imagination of good and evil, and perilous human experience." This, in Punter's view, is the basis for the later themes that constitute the American variant

[226] "In the old countries, with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs." Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852), pg. IV.

on the genre: "the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism."[227]

These themes inform American literature at its very beginning. They are central, for example, to what many scholars regard as the pioneering work of American fiction, Charles Brockden Brown's Gothic novel, *Wieland* (1798). In Brown's novel, the structure of the American jeremiad, with its anxiety about the potential collapse of the new American republic, is adapted to the apparatus of the Gothic genre. As Punter argues, the utopia in *Wieland* has implicit parallels with the United States:

> . . . it is rationalist, based on Enlightenment principles, and significantly without recourse to external authority . . . The dreadful collapse of this happy and independent society could suggest a pessimism about the future of self-government.[228]

Brown apparently even went so far as to mail a copy of his novel to Thomas Jefferson, presumably with the intention of providing a warning to him about threats to the American project.[229] This theme, which links the Gothic genre to threats of dystopia extends into the fiction of Hawthorne's contemporary, Edgar Allen Poe, whose theory of a "perverse" destructive impulse unaccounted for by rationalistic Enlightenment principles is elaborated in such stories as "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), "The Black Cat" (1843), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), and "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845). In "The Imp of the Perverse," Poe's murderer-narrator writes:

> Examine these and similar actions as we will, we shall find them resulting solely from the spirit of the *Perverse*. We perpetrate them merely because we feel that we should *not*. Beyond or behind this, there is no intelligible principle. And we might, indeed, deem this perverseness a direct instigation of the Arch-Fiend, were it not occasionally known to operate in furtherance of good.[230]

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[227] Punter, *A New Companion*, pg. 163. See also Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. xix-xx.
[228] Ibid. pg. 166.
[229] Ibid. pg. 166.
[230] Edgar Allan Poe and Dawn B. Sova, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2007), pg. 283.

Here, Poe transposes a traditional view of the Pauline wayward will into criminal psychology. The rather crude irony of the story is, of course, that the narrator feels betrayed not by his, he imagines, eminently rational scheme "wrought with thorough deliberation" to commit a murder to receive an inheritance, but by his need to confess it.[231] As we will discover, Hawthorne is not content to remain with a conception of the "perverse" as psychologized moral theology, but his starting point is the same as Poe's. It is no surprise then that, as Richard Kopley persuasively and thoroughly argues, Hawthorne may have adapted Poe's allusions to *Macbeth* in "The Tell-Tale Heart" to *The Scarlet Letter*.[232] As we will discover in the section that follows, Poe's tendency to link psychology and moral theology was a common one. Hawthorne drew not only from the Gothic tradition, but from the developing language of psychology, empowered by the inception and rapid expansion of America's asylum movement, with its explicit taxonomy of sexual diseases.

A FEAST OF LUSCIOUS FALSHOODS

> By some witchcraft or other – for I really cannot assign any reasonable why and wherefore – I have been *carried apart* from *the main current of life,* and find it impossible to get back again. (Hawthorne, letter to Longfellow)[233]

If Emerson could occupy the optimistic the role of Prospero – as the personification of the Shakespearean imagination, Nathaniel Hawthorne was far more likely to

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[231] Poe, pg. 283.

[232] In Kopley's reading, Chillingworth assumes the combined role of the murderer / narrator in Poe's short story and Macbeth / Lady Macbeth. It is more difficult to trace *Hamlet's* ghost in *The Scarlet Letter*, but the grim, tormenting presence of Chillingworth can be read as a haunting patriarchal authority commanding Dimmesdale to undo the ill effects of his own sexual transgression.

[233] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1966), pg. 227.

approach the Shakespearean imagination with reserve and skepticism. He did not bring with him the transcendentalist assumption of the subject's centrality in relation to the phenomenal world. Rather, he maintained psychological and moral principles that were aligned with the 18th century tradition of Locke, Johnson, and Burke.

Theologically, contrary to the transcendentalists, Hawthorne inherited what Melville famously called "that Calvinist sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free."[234]

Melville felt that Hawthorne's sense of "Innate Depravity" was the real source of his Shakespearean profundity:

> this blackness . . . the infinite obscure of his background, – that background, against which Shakespeare plays his grandest conceits, the things that have made for Shakespeare his loftiest, but most circumscribed renown, as the profoundest of thinkers.[235]

Melville is, of course, right. The Calvinist doctrine of Innate Depravity is at the core of Hawthorne's work – and it is not merely mediated through the Augustinian tradition that Hawthorne inherited through his Puritan ancestors. It is also derived from his peculiar reading of Shakespeare.[236] At the same time, what Melville doesn't observe is that the pathologized imagination that Hawthorne inherits is one that derives from a distinctly antebellum psychiatric understanding – which, in turn, is animated by Shakespearean representations of sexual perversity. It is my view that Hawthorne attempts to inoculate not only his work, but American history, and by implication its destiny, from the Shakespearean perverse, but that the perverse

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[234] "Hawthorne And His Mosses," in: Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg. 521.
[235] Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg. 522.
[236] Hawthorne himself identified his precursors in the Protestant poetic tradition: Spenser, Bunyan, and Milton. See, for example, pg. 200, Matthiessen. Matthiessen also sees Hawthorne in the Augustinian tradition of the psychomachia – best exemplified in the Renaissance by Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and in medieval poetry by *The Romance of the Rose.* pp. 247-247, Matthiessen.

returns as a tragic force to undermine this project.

In Hawthorne, the relationship between the imagination and the body is foregrounded – as is its potential as the cause of a nervous disease of sexual perversion. This disease has many different aspects – but, the dominant one is what he calls the "unpardonable sin" which develops from a cultivation of the intellect in the absence of "sympathy" (see OED 3B, the "capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others").[237] Hawthorne describes it in the short story, "Ethan Brand" (originally known as "The Unpardonable Sin," 1850):

> He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of *holy sympathy*, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was no a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study. (italics added)[238]

The phrase "holy sympathy," in this passage, contrasts strongly with the "cold observer" who is able to treat "mankind" as "the subject of his experiment," merely "puppets." The importance of the word "sympathy" in Hawthorne's work has been well understood to be evoked in the tradition of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* – in which "sympathy" is defined as the "source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others" and plays a primary role in human morality. Hawthorne, therefore – as was common among antebellum American psychiatrists – regarded "sympathy" as a social and ethical capacity that kept in check the extravagant and potentially solipsistic imagination.[239]

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[237] "sympathy, n.". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. ,http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196271?rskey=t3U7oU&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 13, 2014).

[238] Nathaniel Hawthorne and James McIntosh, *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1987), pg. 265.

[239] Lester H. Hunt, "The Scarlet Letter: Hawthorne's Theory of Moral Sentiments," *Philosophy and Literature* 8, no. 1, pp. 76-78; Edmund Burke, "A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" (Open Library), October 7, 2008, pp.

The psychiatric industry, in antebellum America, was the institutionalized form of the wider social reforms that were undertaken in all parts of society. As we have discussed these reform movements were animated from below by public anxiety over radical social change that was taking place in the society of the time. At the same time, the concepts that animated the reform movement were adapted from above by psychiatry. There was, therefore, a symbiotic relationship between the burgeoning psychiatric industry, the construction of asylums, and the social reform movements that were part of the cultural landscape that Hawthorne participated in. Hawthorne was deeply skeptical of these reform movements and the institutions that might grow from them – as is clear from a cursory view of the thinly veiled egotism in Hollingsworth's quest to reform criminals in *The Blithedale Romance*.

As Benjamin Reiss observes, however, Hawthorne imbibed not only the psychiatric theory upon which treatment of the insane was predicated, but the view of the asylum itself as a source of rehabilitation:

> [A]lthough Nathaniel Hawthorne sometimes portrayed asylums as spaces of punishment rather than cure, he casually accepted the asylum movement's central therapeutic premises in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables.* Cloistered in that famous domain, the elderly Hepzibah Pyncheon "had grown to be a kind of lunatic, by imprisoning herself so long in that one place, with no other company than a single series of ideas." Her brother Clifford is even further gone, and is at one point threatened with being sent to a public asylum. But their young cousin Phoebe, whose arrival on the scene eventually sanitizes the house from the apparently contagious threat of insanity, has perfectly internalized the moral treatment regimen.[240]

It is not clear whether Hawthorne ever read The American Journal of Insanity (hereafter referred to as "The Journal"), but what is clear is that he shared the

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72-75, accessed April 13, 2014, <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL20594267M/A_Philosophical_Enquiry_Into_the_Origin_of_Our_Ideas_of_the_Sublime_and_Beautiful.>

[240] Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p 5. Reiss provides the only detailed study of the American Asylum and Shakespeare. Especially important to this thesis is his chapter, pp. 79-103, "Bardolatry in Bedlam, Shakespeare and Early Psychiatry."

predominant ideas of the age about the intimate connection between the imagination and mental pathology. The Journal, produced by asylum superintendents starting in 1844, was written to promote and defend dozens of publicly funded asylums that appeared in the Northeastern United States, starting in the early 1830's continuing until the Civil War.[241] Notably, the inaugural journal issue, for July 1844, highlights this by celebrating the opening of the New York State Lunatic Asylum at Utica.[242] This is also where the issues of The Journal relevant to the period of this study, from 1844-1851 (the latter is the date of the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*), were published. These issues were as dedicated to the pathology of the imagination as they were to establishing Shakespeare as the authoritative observer of that pathology.

While various points of view on the imagination are represented – some psychiatrists finding it entirely pathological while others associating it with the highest human ideals - the link between imagination and diseases of the mind is reiterated again and again. One of Hawthorne's favorite authors, Samuel Johnson, is quoted at length by an anonymous contributor in the second article entitled, "Illustrations of Insanity," of the inaugural edition about the psychological dangers of the "imagination":

> There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason, who can *regulate* his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command . . . All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any deprivation of the mental faculties . . . In time, some particular train of ideas fixes the attention; all other intellectual gratifications are rejected; the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favorite conception, and *feasts on the luscious falsehood*, whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the *reign of*

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[241] Reiss, *Theaters*, pg. 4. The title of The American Journal of Insanity was altered in 1921 to The American Journal of Psychiatry.

[242] Anonymous. *The American Journal of Insanity* 1 (1844): 1-9. Web. <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=YPwGAAAAcAAJ&q=reign+of+fancy#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

> *fancy* is confirmed . . then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish. (italics added)[243]

Johnson here, quoted by The Journal, combines the 18th century emphasis on the dangers of the excesses of the imagination with the Augustinian concept that such indulgence produces a "reign of fancy" which entails "feast"[ing] on "luscious falsehood." Although 19th century American psychiatrists regarded their enterprise as a humanitarian attempt to separate insanity from religion, the Augustinian metaphysics of privative evil is never far from their accounts of insanity. Johnson also subtly genders his account of insanity as a lapse in manly government of "reason" over "fancy." [244] The gendered account of insanity was accepted uncritically by Jacksonian psychiatrists. The man who succumbs to the "reign of fancy" had lost his capacity for what Americans of the antebellum period would call "self-reliance."

Of course, the view of the asylum superintendents about the imagination was ambivalent. An important part of the treatment was the healthy exercise of the imagination. The asylum relied upon The Journal to showcase poetry, letters, and personal testimonial about stage performances from the inmates as evidence of their recovery. As Reiss observes:

> To the extent that patients could produce creditable poetry, learn to work efficiently, comport themselves respectably, and advertise that skill in published literary works or stage performances, they justified massive public and private expenditures in this early form of social engineering.[245]

These, though, were examples of the socialized and domesticated imagination. As we discovered with Emerson and Whitman, if the imagination could be diseased, it was also the primary means by which a patient was cured.

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[243] The Journal Insanity Volume 1 (1844): pp. 16-17.
[244] The Journal of Insanity (1844); See, especially, *Definition of Insanity – Nature of the Disease*, pp. 98-99.
[245] Reiss, pg. 5.

In the opening article for the issue of January 1845, entitled, "The Poetry of Insanity," the imagination is both exalted as "the fire of Prometheus" and also clearly pathologized:

> Imagination essential to the perfection of either of the fine arts, is the predominant element in true poetry . . . Wonderfully exemplified as is the power of Imagination, in the annals of poetry, it is no less so in the records of Insanity. In the latter, as in the former, it invests the beings of its own creation with power, loads them with riches, lavishes upon them the most eminent honor, and gives them all the titles of nobility, royalty, and the Deity.[246]

The activity of the imagination in the insane person operates based upon the same premise that it does in the gifted poet. To bestow "riches," "eminent honor[s]," and "titles of nobility" on these beings is to trade homely reality for insubstantial wealth and titles. To do so leaves the patient not merely impoverished, but with nothing. The danger of excessive imagination is the threat that sympathies that would otherwise be put to social use might be diverted into a world that is unbounded and solipsistic.

Although, as Reiss observes, American asylums were "citadels of the anti-masturbation movement," they did not directly implicate the Shakespearean imagination in contemporary fears about sexual excess.[247] Shakespeare was much more likely to treated as a cool-headed observer of the insane, a precursor of contemporary psychiatrists themselves. As The Journal observes in an 1844 article entitled, "Illustrations of Insanity – Shakespeare":

> The more we read Shakespeare, the more we are astonished; not so much at his wonderful imagination, but at the immensity and correctness of his knowledge.[248]

Here, the taint of the dangerous potential of the "wonderful imagination" is

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[246] The Journal (1844), pg. 208.
[247] Reiss, pg. 56.
[248] The Journal, (1844), pg. 27.

carefully distanced from Shakespeare, the clinical authority on the insane.[249] The common association between artistic endeavors, sensuality, and madness as well as the potential pathology of the reading of books, though, is made clear in The Journal. Another notable Journal article, entitled, "Art, Passion, and Madness," that could easily be imagined as the basis of a Hawthorne short-story, combines the suspicions of the imagination with fears about the seductive nature of art. It recounts the story of a woman who became "passionately enamoured" of a statue:

> Her whole frame seemed to be electrified, as if a transformation had taken place within her; and it has since appeared that, indeed, a transformation had taken place, and that her youthful breast had imbibed a powerful, alas! fatal passion. [250]

It is sexual reformers, like Sylvester Graham, who are more explicit about the direct connection between imaginative excess and sexual desire that Hawthorne would voice through the language of Shakespeare:

> Hence, therefore, SEXUAL DESIRE, cherished by the mind and *dwelt on by the imagination*, not only increase the excitability and peculiar sensibility of the genital organs themselves, but always throws an influence, equal to the intensity of the affection, over the whole nervous domain.[251]
> (italics added)

Graham is voicing here a belief that had been pervasive for more than a hundred years, but he articulates it with a zealous fervor even more intense than the asylum superintendents. There is no hint in Graham, of course, of a connection between Shakespeare and the diseased imagination – except a generalized suspicion of the imagination. Shakespeare was far too revered for such suggestions. Shakespeare, though, in both the asylum publications and in the wider culture, lurks around the

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[249] Reiss, pp. 84-87.
[250] "American Journal of Insanity, Volume 9 (Google EBook)," Google Books, pp. 363-365, accessed November 07, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books/about/American_journal_of_insanity.html?id=YfwGAAAAcAAJ>.
[251] Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity: Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians* (Boston: Light & Stearns, Crocker & Brewster, 1837), pg. 50.

edges of these discussions of the illicit imagination.

One place for a strange liaison between sexual perversion, economic anxiety, and Shakespeare occurred in the discussion which followed the Bank Panic of 1837 (which, in turn, led to a recession lasting through the 40's). As Laqueur observes, this is because the new economy, reliant on bank-notes, speculation, and debt, shared with masturbation a "false epistemology."[252] Andrew Jackson, in his farewell speech, regarded the "paper-system" as "robbing honest labour of its earnings." As David Anthony observes, the new system was regarded as inimical to a system rooted in "labor and reality;" it formed a "laborless model of selfhood that [was] not only insubstantial, but also, perhaps, inevitably, self-consuming."[253]

Not surprisingly, these anxieties about the potentially perverse internal economy of the imagination and the national economy could fuse in Shakespearean imagery. For example, an anti-Jacksonian lithograph entitled "New Edition of Macbeth. Bank-Oh's! Ghost," in which commerce itself is represented as a ghostly return of the repressed, was published during the year of the 1837 Bank Panic by Edward Williams Clay. Although Andrew Jackson has "slay[ed] the U. S. Bank," it "continues to haunt him and his horrified successor, Martin Van Buren [who is depicted, comically and perversely in drag, as Lady Macbeth], in the spectral form of inflation, speculation, and debt."[254] Thus, the pathology of the imagination is extended to the national economy – and this is explicitly dramatized through Shakespearean imagery.

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[252] Thomas Walter. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), pg. 294.
[253] D. Anthony, "Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic," *American Literature* 76, no. 4 (2004): pg. 723.
[254] Anthony, pp. 725-726.

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Hawthorne himself laments, in "The Custom House" introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, that the production of his own imagination is like the merely "the impalpable beauty of a soap-bubble." He lacks the creative power to manage what he calls the "wiser effort" which would have been "to diffuse thought and imagination through the opaque substance of to-day." To do this would be to achieve a literary economy as balanced as his internal economy. Rather than the "torpid creatures of my own fancy," he would "find the letters turned to gold upon the page." He concludes, with a lament: "[a] better book than I shall ever write was there; leaf after leaf presenting itself to me." As we have discovered, such a book as the acme of Jacksonian mental health was precisely what Whitman attempted to write when he published *Leaves of Grass*.

255 Bernard Reilly, *American Political Prints, 1766-1876: A Catalog of the Collections in the Library of Congress* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1991), entry 1837-7.

A BLIGHTED BODY AND A RUINED SOUL

Given Hawthorne's temperament and background, he was much more likely than Emerson to explicitly foreground these anxieties about imagination. As I have observed, he had none of the transcendentalist's faith in the subject's annexation of the powers of nature. Rather, he viewed the imagination with a Johnsonian suspicion and an antebellum anxiety about its potential for pathological excess.

This climate may explain why Hawthorne's evocations of Prospero are so different from Emerson's depiction of himself as the Shakespearean sage of Concord. Hawthorne's works are filled with the fearful prospect of the imagination's amoral and perverse excesses. For example, he frequently depicts scientists with quasi-magical powers who resemble Spenser's sorcerer, Archimago, more than Shakespeare's Prospero: Aylmer, in "The Birth-Mark" and Rappuccini in "Rappucini's Daughter" are corrupted by their art into dangerous experiments that murder those most beloved to them. Professor Westervelt, in *The Blithedale Romance* uses mesmerism to control Priscilla, who is at the mercy of his scheme to market her to superstitious audiences as a clairvoyant act called "The Veiled Lady."

An unnamed painter in "The Prophetic Pictures" is an "extravagant" (pg. 467) Prospero whose paintings "had caught from the duskiness of the future – at least, so he fancied – a fearful secret, and had obscurely revealed it in his portraits" (pg. 458). His "imagination" has been so "lavished on the study" of his two subjects, Walter and Elinor, "that he regards them as creations of his own, like the thousands with which he had peopled the realms of Picture."

While Shakespeare's Prospero thunders:

> graves at my command
> Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent art
> (V. i. 48-50)

Hawthorne's unnamed artist exults:

> 'Oh glorious Art!' thus mused the enthusiastic painter, as he trod the street. 'Thou art the image of the Creator's own. The innumerable forms, that *wander in nothingness*, start into being at thy beck. The dead live again. Thou recallest them to their old scenes, and givest their gray shadows the lustre of a better life, at once earthly and immortal . . .'
>
> 'Oh, potent Art! As thou bringest the faintly revealed Past to stand in that narrow strip of sunlight, which we call Now, canst thou summon the shrouded Future to meet her there? Have I not achieved my aim? Am I not thy Prophet?'[256]

Whereas Prospero's "insubstantial pageant" is universalized – "we are such stuff as dreams are made on" (VI. i. 157) – Hawthorne's "Prophet" is clearly dabbling in an unhallowed art. He does not merely bring back the dead, but he "summon[s] the shrouded Future." The "innumerable forms" that he conjures onto his canvas are from a spiritual abyss where they "wander in nothingness." They "give their grayest shadows the lustre of a better life," but their essence is the void of a diseased imagination.

Hawthorne explicitly diagnoses his Prophet with a "melancholy fervor":

> Thus, with a proud, yet *melancholy fervor*, did he almost cry aloud, as he passed through the toilsome street, among people that knew not of his reveries, nor could understand nor care for them. It is not good for man to cherish a solitary ambition. Unless there be those around him, by whose example he may *regulate himself*, his thoughts, desires, and hopes will become extravagant, and he the semblance, perhaps the reality, of a *madman*.[257]

The painter fails to maintain Johnson's "regulat"[ed] economy of the self based upon sympathy with the "example" of "those around him." Rather, he enters a

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[256] Nathaniel Hawthorne and James McIntosh, *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1987), pg. 467.
[257] Hawthorne, pg. 467.

state that is boundless and "extravagant": he has become a "madman."

Like Emerson's benign Prospero, Hawthorne's malevolent Prospero could spill over into his personal reflections on the hazards of the writer's imagination. In the story, "The Devil in Manuscript," (1834) Hawthorne's narrator, Oberon – his Shakespearean nick-name among his closest College friends – exclaims bitterly:

> "Would you have me a damned author? You cannot conceive what an effect the composition of these tales has had on me . . . I am surrounding myself with shadows, which bewilder me, by aping the realities of life. They have *drawn me aside* from beaten path of the world, and led me into a strange sort of solitude, - a solitude in the midst of men, - where nobody wishes for what I do, nor thinks nor feels as I do . . . Oh, I have a horror of what was created in my own brain.'[258]
> (italics added)

This is a passage, again, that unites the psychiatric discourse about the perverse excesses of the unhealthy imagination with the Augustinian imagery of privative evil. Oberon is "drawn" . . . "aside from the beaten path of the world" into a "horror." He is immersed in an insubstantial world of "shadows" that "bewilder" by "aping the realities of life." Whereas Emerson's Prospero annexes Shakespeare to the self in order to enlarge its powers, Hawthorne dramatizes the usurpation of the self by the unreal and potentially pathological excesses of the imagination. Emerson attempts to authorize America's literature with the Shakespearean imprimatur; Hawthorne dramatizes the imagination diseased by the very solipsism that was always implicit within Emersonian self-reliance.

For if, as Emerson observes in "The American Scholar," nature can be regarded as "this shadow of the soul, or *other me*," it is also in danger of becoming a narcissistic mirror for boundless egotism. As Leland S. Person observes concisely: "[s]elf reliance and self-making can become self-pollution."[259] As Person further

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[258] Hawthorne, pg. 334.
[259] Leland S. Person, *The Cambridge Introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 53.

argues, Hawthorne explores quite explicitly the pathological and masturbatory potential of self-reliance in stories like "Monsieur Du Miroir," with its explicit equation of Emersonian self-reliance with the abyss of self-love:

> Thus do mortals deify, as it were, a mere shadow of themselves, a spectre of human reason, and ask of that to unveil the mysteries which Divine Intelligence has revealed so far as needful to our guidance and hid the rest.[260]

This could very easily be Andrew Norton denouncing Emerson's "Divinity School Address" as the "latest form of infidelity" – except that Hawthorne more typically evokes Shakespeare against Shakespeare: the tragic authority of Macbeth mixed with the Augustinian ontology of privative evil against Prospero's sovereign power over nature.

In "Wakefield," Hawthorne creates a figure of the perverse imagination far surpassing the anonymous narrator of "Monsieur Du Miroir." Though Wakefield possesses a strange thematic parallel to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which we will see threads its way through *The Scarlet Letter*, the story does not contain any certain echoes of Shakespeare. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's Macbeth frames Wakefield's bizarre act with the same view of the perverse will as at once "involuntary and intentional" that we will discover in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Wakefield is a perfectly ordinary husband with a wife and a child, who earns a "foremost place among the doers of eccentric deeds." He does this by an act of supreme solipsism: departing from his wife and children under the pretence of a business trip, and moving into an apartment just adjacent the family home in London, where he anonymously observes his family for twenty years. In a more hopeful story, like "Sights from a Steeple," Hawthorne could conclude that the viewpoint of a "spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman,

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[260] Hawthorne, *Tales,* pg. 405.

witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts . . . and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself" would be "the most desirable mode of existence."[261] Wakefield is an all together more abject figure. Seemingly light-years from Macbeth's "vaunting ambition," (I. vii. 27) Wakefield is motivated by a "morbid vanity" to "perplex" his wife with what he believes, at first, will merely be "a whole week's absence." Wakefield's intention is to see how his family, especially his wife, "will be affected by his removal." He also shares with Hawthorne the writer's desire to achieve a vantage point external to his own life.

Unlike Macbeth, the great exemplar of the depraved criminal imagination, Wakefield attacks hearth and home through an act of pure solipsism – unredeemed by even the dignity of a criminal. At the moment that Wakefield departs from his house with the pretence of a business trip, he is described in this way:

> At that instant his fate was *turning on the pivot*. Little dreaming of the doom to which his first *backward step* devotes him, he hurries away, breathless with agitation hitherto unfelt, and hardly dares turn his head at the distant corner.[262]
> (italics added)

The imagery surrounding Wakefield's decision, the "turning on the pivot, the "backward step," later "stepping aside," clearly evokes the tradition of the "perverse" – though Wakefield represents a significant innovation. Whereas the exemplar of the 19th century imagination, Macbeth, commits a political crime with a profoundly social impact, the assassination of Duncan, Wakefield's "moral change" operates *within* himself.

For Macbeth, the moral change caused by the murder is summed up in these lines: "to know my deed 'twere best not know myself." (Mac. II. ii. 73) Self and deed are irreconcilable. To know his former "self," he must conceal the "deed" from

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[261] Ibid., pg. 43.
[262] Hawthorne's *Tales*. All citations for "Wakefield" are in this volume.

himself; if he is to know his "deed," he must erase his former self. For Wakefield, this change is eerily similar:

> The singularity of his situation must have so *moulded him to itself*, that, considered in regard to his fellow-creatures and the business of life, he could not be said to possess his right mind. [263]
> (italics added)

An alien self evoked by "the singularity of his situation" is so cunningly "fit" ("to assume a certain form or shape", OED, 6,7), like a garment, to the original self, that Wakefield no longer notices its presence.[264] There might also be a secondary sense in which the false self is "moulded," so shaped (OED 3) to resemble the original that Wakefield can no longer distinguish between the two. In *Macbeth*, Banquo evokes a similar disjunction between "strange garments" and "mould" a noun meaning the shape and form of the body, which may be faintly hinted by Hawthorne:

> New honours come upon him
> Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
> But with the aid of use.
> (I. iii. 144.2-146.1)

Hawthorne captures the suffocating, Macbeth-like alien self with the intimacy of a habit that has become second nature. Like his unnamed narrator's relationship with Monsieur du Mirroir, Wakefield is trapped within a familiar abyss.

Like Macbeth's murder – with its violation of hospitality to a guest – Wakefield commits an act, albeit passive, of violence against the "hearth" and it condemns him to a terrible spiritual exile: "he was, we may figuratively say, always beside his wife and at his hearth, yet must never feel the warmth of the one nor the affection of the other." As Macbeth cries:

> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

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[263] Hawthorne, pg. 296.
[264] "mould | mold, v.1". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/122813?rskey=vGC6hc&result=7 (accessed April 13, 2014).

> I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
> Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath
> Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.
> (V. ii. 24-7)

While Wakefield's "transformation" borrows the sense of alienation evoked by Macbeth's "depraved" imagination, it is also quite distinct. It is a form of the asocial possibilities of the private self that would have been inconceivable to Shakespeare. For what is so haunting is Wakefield's very mundaneness – the ordinariness of his "morbid vanity." He doesn't possess an active, but a "sluggish temperament." Yet Wakefield's solipsistic act seems to produce a void within the "sphere of creatures and circumstances" in which he is the "central object" that secures his "doom" and transforms him into a kind of subhuman creature:

> He is meagre; his low and narrow forehead is deeply wrinkled; his eyes, small and lustreless, sometimes wander apprehensively about him, but oftener seem to look inward. He bends his head, and moves with an indescribable obliquity of gait, as if unwilling to display his full front to the world.

For Macbeth to become doomed to a horrific isolation of spirit, he must murder a king. Wakefield simply moves across the street. The contrast couldn't be more profound, yet Wakefield is also a figure of the pathological imagination. Wakefield's "low and narrow forehead" and "eyes, small and lustreless," his "obliquity of gait," suggest almost a clinical description of idiocy and degradation supposed, at the time, to be caused by excessive masturbation. As Graham observes in his *Lectures on Chastity*:

> [T]he wretched transgressor [masturbator] sinks into a miserable fatuity, and finally becomes a confirmed and degraded idiot, whose deeply sunken and vacant glossy eye, and livid, shrivelled countenance . . . emanciated, and dwarfish, and crooked body, and almost hairless head . . . denote a premature old age a blighted body and a ruined soul ![265]

Hawthorne's depiction of Wakefield as "bend[ing] his head" with an

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[265] Sylvester Graham and James Coates, *Graham's Lectures on Chastity: Specially Intended for All Serious Consideration of Young Men and Parents* (Glasgow: S.n., 1837), pg. 25.

"apprehensiveness about him" . . . "as if unwilling to display his full front to the world" is also echoed in the anti-masturbation literature. The "masturbator," we are told, is "timid, afraid of his own shadow, uncertain" . . . his "walk" is not "erect or dignified," but in a "diminutive, cringing, sycophantic, inferior, mean, debased manner."[266]

Hawthorne's hint of Macbeth as an abject portrait of the artist transfigured by degenerative masturbatory illness – is startling. Wakefield as Macbeth becomes so emptied of tragic stature that he becomes a symbol of the abjection of the urban antebellum self with its combination of mundaneness and the dreadful terrors of the perverse sexual imagination.[267]

THE CRYSTAL OF DELICATE SENSUALITY

The Scarlet Letter is Hawthorne's most sophisticated treatment of the perverse Shakespearean imagination. The Shakespeare play that dominates the novel's landscape is *Macbeth*, but *Hamlet* also has powerful reverberations, as we will see. These allusions are mediated through Hawthorne's vision of the pathologized imagination.

This is explicitly worked up in the culminating scene of Dimmesdale's

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[266] R. T. Trall (1856) *Home-Treatment for Sexual Abuses. A Practical Treatise,* quoted in: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America," *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (1978): pg. 226.

[267] See the concept of influence as "kenosis," . . . "humbling or emptying out." Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence; a Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pg. 16.

Election Sermon as a vision in which the story of the perverse imagination also becomes a national myth. As we saw in Whitman, the perverse is precisely what threatens America's "high and glorious destiny." Not surprisingly, it is Hawthorne's explicit treatment of the moral dilemmas associated with the perverse imagination in *The Scarlet Letter* that first caused the guardians of public virtue to become alarmed. In an astonishingly perceptive review, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, for *The Church Review*, accuses Hawthorne of sympathizing with the very diseased and licentious imagination that he purported to explore psychologically:

> The language of our author, like patent blacking, "would not soil the whitest linen," and yet the composition itself, would suffice, if well laid on, to Ethiopize the snowiest conscience that ever sat like a swan upon that mirror of heaven, a Christian maiden's imagination."[268]

He further charges:

> and damsels who shrink at reading of the Decalogue, would probably luxuriate in bathing their imagination in the crystal of its delicate sensuality.[269]

Hawthorne's prose appears like "crystal" water, but it conceals a "delicate sensuality" that supposedly corrupts like the "Ethiop." Coxe's racist rhetoric aside, his criticism may well have been deeply embarrassing for Hawthorne. For Coxe detects precisely what, as we have discovered, Hawthorne himself felt was the morally suspect and potentially pathological character of his own imagination. *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's most serious and sustained treatment of this subject.

For Hawthorne foregrounds the pathological nature of Dimmesdale's imagination in clinical terms:

> Wherever there is a heart and an intellect, the diseases of the physical frame are tinged with the peculiarities of these. In Arthur Dimmesdale, thought and imagination were so active, and sensibility so intense, that the *bodily infirmity* would be likely to have its groundwork there.
>
> (italics added, pg. 83)

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[268] From *Church Review* 3, no. 4 (January 1851) in Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter*, pg. 259.
[269] Ibid. pg. 259.

In Dimmesdale, "bodily infirmity" has its very "groundwork" in "intense" "thought and imagination." Chillingworth, the professional doctor, also opines that Dimmesdale, "of all men whom I have known, [is] he whose body is the closest conjoined, and imbued, and identified, so to speak, with the spirit whereof it is the instrument" (pg. 91). As we have seen, this is perfectly consistent with the psychiatric attitude of Hawthorne's day.[270] In a typical opinion by William Sweetser in *Mental Hygiene*, a self-help book intended for a popular audience, published in the same year as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the sensitive and studious "sensibility" exemplified here by Dimmesdale is pathologized.[271] Sweetser's *Mental Hygiene* is particularly useful not only because of the date of its publication, but because the book shared some of Hawthorne's didactic purpose: it is intended to bridge the gap between psychiatry ("mental hygiene") and the wider public – with a dose of moral instruction thrown in. As such, it is written in a literary style. Like the asylum superintendents, Sweetser's book is peppered with allusions to Shakespeare and his chapter on the "Moral and Physical Disorder" of "The Imagination"[272] is specifically indebted to Shakespeare. While there is no evidence that Hawthorne read Sweetser, they both share the same fusion of moral philosophy for the common reader, psychiatric reasoning, and Shakespeare allusion.

In his chapter on the "Moral and Physical Disorder" of "The Imagination," Sweetser affirms a dynamic that we have seen before. The diseased imagination

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[270] "To be nervous in the nineteenth century was therefore more than a passing description of individual personality; rather, nervousness characterized the basic psychological assumption of the century. Because the nervous system united the body together, from the brain all the way to the toes, the cultural impact of the nerves proved both physical and metaphysical." Justine S. Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pg. 2.
[271] William Sweetser, *Mental Hygiene, Or, An Examination of the Intellect and Passions: Designed to Illustrate Their Influence on Health and the Duration of Life* (New-York: Langley, 1843).
[272] Ibid., pp. 362-377.

thwarts the "intention of nature" by "revers"[ing] "the order of things." [273] Sweetser goes farther, though – as Hawthorne would. For he specifically connects this to the "long habits of solitary reflection" characteristic of Dimmesdale. Sweetser quotes the sexual outlaw, Byron's Manfred, to describe the dangerously asocial lack of "sympathy" that goes hand in hand with the perverse imagination:

> Though I wore the form,
> I had no *sympathy* with breathing flesh.
> My joy was in the wilderness – to breathe
> The difficulty air of the iced mountain's top . . .[274]
> (italics added)

Just prior to suggesting the generally pathological character of the Byronic hero, Sweetser presents Exhibit A of the "unhealthy character of the imagination": a vivid portrait of the early life of Rousseau, made notorious in the history of the pathology of masturbation for his account of "the dangerous supplement" in his *Confessions* (1782).[275] Rousseau, for Sweetser, is an example of the "morbid excess of sensibility" and its "unhappy nervous infirmities." (pg. 364) Though Sweetser, of course, could never have known about Hawthorne's novel, Rousseau and Dimmesdale are clearly deviants of a very distinct psychiatric type.

Hawthorne, in his description of Dimmesdale, also observes his dubious habit of sitting in his solitary "close and stifled study" reading books:

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[273] "I had learned to use that dangerous substitution ["supplément"] which defrauds nature and saves young men of my temperament from many disorders, but at the expense of their health, their strength, and sometimes their life itself. This vice, so congenial to shame and timidity is, in addition, very attractive to those of a lively imagination, for it places at their disposal, as it were, the whole of the other sex, and makes a lovely woman that tempts them serve their desires without needing to obtain her consent. Seduced by this baneful advantage, I set about destroying the good constitution with which nature had provided me." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Angela Scholar, and Patrick Coleman, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pg. 106. See also "Once he knows this dangerous supplement, he is lost. From then on he will always have an enervated body and heart. He will suffer until his death the sad effects of this habit, the most fatal to which a man can be subjected." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pg. 334.

[274] Quoted in Sweetser, pg. 365.

[275] Laqueur, pp. 42-44.

> . . . where his life was wasting itself away, amid lamp-light, or obstructed day-beams, and the musty fragrance, be it sensual or moral, that exhales from books.
>
> (pg. 83)

With characteristic ambiguity, Hawthorne insinuates, without stating certainly, that the "musty fragrance" that "exhales" from those books might be "sensual" and, therefore, a contributing factor in Dimmesdale's "bodily infirmity." Of course, Hawthorne also leaves unclear the precise nature of Dimmesdale's reading – though he certainly would not have possessed novels. The same suspicion of "sensual" gratification, however, is at work in Sweetser's more unambiguous remarks on Rousseau's passion "in his youth" for "read[ing]" "novels":

> In sensitive and secluded individuals, this sort of reading, when carried to excess, has sometimes so wrought upon and disturbed the fancy as to bring on actual insanity . . . [it] incites in the mind a precocious activity and premature desires, with the imagination of excellences never to be realized; [276]

Sweetser's victims of pathological reading, "sensitive and secluded" . . . "individuals" prone to a "disturbed fancy," are quite similar to the "morbidly self-contemplative" Dimmesdale. Sweetser even goes on to inveigh against the very tradition of "romance" that Hawthorne self-consciously writes in, evoking precisely the moral reservations and anxieties we discovered Hawthorne had about his own novel. He associates them, among other things, with "Erotic melancholy" and "monomania."[277]

As is typical of the literature by psychiatrists and asylum superintendents in America at this time, Sweetser goes on not to pathologize Shakespeare himself, but to appeal to him as an authority on the diseased imagination: "Shakespeare," Sweetser affirms, as if Shakespeare were a psychiatrist and not a dramatic artist,

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[276] Sweetser, pg. 366.
[277] Ibid.

"classes all lovers with lunatics." He then quotes Theseus's oft-cited passage from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet" of "imagination all compact." (MND. V. i. 7-8) Like the psychiatrists, Hawthorne, as we have seen, can regard Shakespeare as a source of moral authority, but more persistently, the plays themselves evoke dangerous, amoral sexual desires and anxieties.

FORBIDDEN SYMPATHIES

If Dimmesdale possesses an "active" . . . "imagination," Hester Prynne possesses a "rich, voluptuous," "abundant," "Oriental" imagination, with a "taste for the gorgeously beautiful." She uses this in the "exquisite productions of her needle" which fetch high prices among the townsfolk who otherwise scorn her for the ignominy of her disgraceful letter (pg. 58). This imagination, Hawthorne hints, is also diseased by "the red ignominy" which perverts her gift into a "morbid ingenuity" intent upon turning her daughter's dress into "the scarlet letter in another form" (pg. 69).

Like Wakefield's betrayal of hearth and home, Hester's letter, the visible symbol of her sexual transgression, turns her into a living "ghost" and exiles her from the sympathy of human kind:

> She stood apart from mortal interests, yet close beside them, like a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside, and can no longer make itself seen or felt; no more smile with the household joy, nor mourn with the kindred sorrow; or, should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnance.
>
> (pg. 59)

Contrary to Adam Smith's optimistic view of the moral correction that the withdrawal of sympathy affords, exile makes Hester vulnerable to a world of "forbidden sympathy." It leads her inexorably towards an amoral, deviant "sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts":

> Sometimes, the red infamy upon her breast would give a sympathetic throb, as she passed near a venerable minister or magistrate, the model of piety and justice, to whom that age of antique reverence looked up, as to a mortal man in fellowship with angels. "What evil thing is at hand?" would Hester say to herself.
>
> (pg. 60)

Like the protagonist from Hawthorne's great short-story, "Young Goodman Brown," who is led by the devil into the forest, there to discover the pillars of his community, "the minister," "good old Deacon Gookin," and even "Goody Cloyse," . . . "the old woman who taught [him his] catechism," gathered for a black mass, Hester's "sympathetic knowledge" gives her access to a community, each of whose members is only more intensely isolated for their recognition of one another.[278] Without the positive sympathy cultivated, Hawthorne suggests, by social middle-class domestic life, Hester's diseased imagination feeds upon dangerous ideas and, like the ironically mentioned "Sainted Anne Hutchinson," whom Hawthorne describes in a separate essay as "a woman of extraordinary talent and strong imagination" . . . who "showed symptoms of irregular and daring thought" and expressed "strange and dangerous opinions," Hester is plunged into a perverse "labyrinth of mind":[279]

> Thus, Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without clew in the dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside an insurmountable precipice; now startling back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghastly scenery around her, and a home and comfort nowhere.
>
> (pg. 108)

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[278] Hawthorne, *Tales*, pg. 286.
[279] "Mrs. Hutchinson" in Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pg. 168.

The "wild and ghastly scenery" of Hester's imagination recalls the Byronic hero, Manfred, who "had no sympathy with breathing flesh," but whose "joy was in the wilderness." For Hawthorne, this Gothic internal landscape, in which "home and comfort" is "nowhere," gives rise to an unnaturally subversive consciousness:

> In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door.
>
> (pp. 107-108)

While Lady Macbeth pleads perversely to "you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts" to "unsex me here;" (I. v. 38-39) and, we recall, Coleridge referred to the witches themselves as the "fearfully anomalous of physical nature" . . . "without sex or kin,"[280] Hester involuntarily loses what Hawthorne regards as her womanhood to "forbidden sympathies" that arise from the scarlet letter's "revelations": "some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman" (pg. 107).

Dimmesdale too, possesses forbidden sympathies – most notably with the "weird old gentlewoman," (pg. 154) Mistress Hibbins, the sister of Governor Bellingham, who, like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* seems to possess a bewildering but familiar and intimate connection with him. His encounter with her, as we find, "did but show [his] sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals and the world of perverted spirits" (pg. 142). Like Hester, though, it is precisely through his forbidden sympathies that Dimmesdale's pathological imagination produces such eloquence that he becomes famous throughout New England:

> But this very burden it was, that gave him *sympathies* so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind; so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain into itself, and sent its own throb of pain through a thousand other hearts, in gushes of sad, persuasive eloquence.

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[280] Coleridge, *Lectures.*

(pg. 94, italics added)

Of course, the most perverse forbidden sympathy of all is exhibited by Roger Chillingworth – who uses his illicit sympathy with Hester's sexual transgression as a sort of extra-sensory-perception in order to find and torment Dimmesdale for seven years:

> "There is a *sympathy* that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine!"
> (p. 54, italics added)

As Frederick Crews has observed, Chillingworth possesses Iago-like traits: "physical deformity," "personal inferiority and impotence," deviant "sexuality," and "perverted craving for knowledge." Moreover, Chillingworth's unnatural "sympathy" for Dimmesdale possesses some of the homoerotic undertones of the diabolical marriage between Iago and Othello, consummated by Othello's murder of Desdemona.[281]

Underpinning this demonic "reign of fancy" with its amoral "forbidden sympathy," that provides preternatural stimulus, but never gives "comfort," is an Augustinian metaphysics of privative evil. For Hester's secret dissident politics, Dimmesdale's hypocritical denial of his act of adultery with Hester, and Chillingworth's investigation into the "the interior" of Dimmesdale's "heart," gives rise to a universe that is founded upon nothingness. As the narrator explains, sounding both like a theologian and also like a 19th century psychiatrist: "It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance." (pg. 97) He goes on to affirm even more unequivocally:

> To the untrue man, the whole universe is false, – it is impalpable, – it shrinks

[281] Fredrick C. Crews, "The Ruined Wall," ed. Rita K. Gollin, in *The Scarlet Letter: Complete Text With Introduction, Historical Contexts, Critical Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), pg. 317.

> to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist.
> (pg. 97)

Dimmesdale, whose name recalls a Dim Dale, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, has himself become "a shadow" . . . has "ceased to exist." He is Hawthorne's most chilling figure for what Freud would call the Death Drive. As Chillingworth observes of Hester – in a remark applicable to Dimmesdale too: they "are here wandering together in this gloomy maze of evil," (p. 113) and there seems no escape. As such, the hope of the novel depends upon the socialization of Pearl, the "elf child," who is born of Hester and Dimmesdale's sin. As Hester observes, "she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution for my sin" (p. 76).

Unlike Hester, whose womanhood has become corrupted by her "forbidden sympathies" with demonic powers, Pearl has the capacity to become "softened and subdued, and made capable of a woman's gentle happiness" (p. 165). What hangs in the balance is either the victory of the demonic world of *Macbeth* or the triumphant world of Protestant New England with its optimistic destiny.

Yet this grand overarching narrative is, of course, belied by the ambiguity of the novel's discourse on sympathy. For it is Hester's very curse to know the "the hidden sin in other hearts" that reveals the complacency and hypocrisy of the supposedly pious townsfolk who shun her. Like Reverend Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil," it is Hester's very forbidden sympathy which makes her indispensible to those suffering from a private grief that they cannot share with others, and called for by the sick and the dying: for those in anguish, "the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom" (p. 106). More, Hawthorne's very emphasis on a woman finding her true place at the center of the New England

hearth and home, to develop her "sympathies," undermines the narrative's claim for eternal verity. It also historicizes the tale as a drama in which a specific kind of view of middle class domesticity is destined to triumph. All of this powerfully undercuts the simple Augustinian dichotomy that Hawthorne, along with 19th century psychiatrists propounded – which equated asocial imagination with "non-being" (privative evil) and social emotion with "Being."[282]

Moreover, Hawthorne qualifies Hester's "sin" of adultery (the word is, of course, famously never used in the novel) by making it clear that: 1) Chillingworth is elderly and deformed by a hunch-back, and Hester is very young, when they are married; 2) Hester is forced into the marriage against her will; 3) Hester is honest with Dimmesdale, telling him from the start that she never loved him; 4) there had been no word from Chillingworth for two years as Hester waited for him to follow her on the journey from England to Massachusetts, and it was presumed that Hester's husband, during the time of her affair, "may be at the bottom of the sea" (p. 46); 5) the punishment of wearing the letter is bestowed by a grim and draconian Puritan law.

This foregrounds the question as to whether the letter itself – with the attendant isolation, asocial sympathy, and perverse imagination, is not merely a social construct. With this in mind, I find Michael Pringle's Foucauldian reading, "The Scarlet Lever: Hester's Civil Disobedience," very persuasive; I also am mindful that the "lever" of power exerted to punish Hester does not merely have

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[282] "Hester's strange demonic musings produce no trace on her saintly person; Dimmesdale suffers from an inner malaise which is never fully externalized; Chillingworth, demonstrating the obverse of this process, becomes externally the very type of caricature of revenge, yet his motivation may be pure. The darkest, most disturbing, insight in the book, both for the reader and for the text, is that there may be 'no' law of connection between outer and inner worlds." Norman Bryson, "Hawthorne's Illegible Letter," ed. Harold Bloom, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pg. 93.

one handle. Moreover, texts are never reducible to a single authorial narrative – especially not one as polyvalent as *The Scarlet Letter*. However, it is clear to me that, despite its complexity, *The Scarlet Letter* does possess, as Sacvan Bercovitch argues in *The Office of the Scarlet Letter*, a unifying narrative, what Bercovitch calls "the devious pattern of national history,"[283] and that is especially pertinent to the discourse of the Shakespearean perverse. As I will argue, though, Shakespearean perversity is not so easily dispelled – and the character upon whom the novel's narrative of redemption most hinges, Pearl, acts as an "infant pestilence," carrying dissident Shakespearean themes that Hawthorne seeks to repress.

The predominant way that moral conflict is framed in *The Scarlet Letter* is through the Pauline wayward will – which would become so important in Augustine. The passage of particular importance is (KJ) Romans 7:19:

> For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.[284]

In Paul's account the "sin that dwelleth in me" constitutes another alternate will – one that seeks to undermine the sovereign will. It is this will that possesses, in Hawthorne's account, the "forbidden sympathies" that trap the wayward soul deeper and deeper into its "labyrinth." The ultimate litmus test of this occurs at the novel's pivotal moment in the forest when Dimmesdale and Hester move from merely suffering the consequences of their transgression towards embracing it – with Hester's famous blasphemous declaration: "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other! Hast thou forgotten it?" (p. 126). This manifestation of a sin, not impetuous, but freely chosen by consent to the sinful

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[283] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Office of the Scarlet Letter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pg. 45.
[284] Bruce Manning. Metzger, *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

"will," hauntingly echoes "Wakefield." We recall that in "Wakefield" it is "the magic of a single night" that "wrought" a "transformation": "The minister's own will, and Hester's will, and the fate that grew between them, had *wrought this transformation*" (p. 138, italics added).

This threshold moment, like Macbeth's murder of Duncan and Wakefield's betrayal of hearth and home, causes an upheaval within Dimmesdale that strongly mirrors that in *Macbeth*:

> Before Mr. Dimmesdale reached home, his inner man gave him other evidences of a revolution in the sphere of thought and feeling. In truth, nothing short *of a total change of dynasty and moral code, in that interior kingdom*, was adequate to account for the impulses now communicated to the unfortunate and startled minister. At every step he was incited to do some strange, wild, wicked thing or other, with a sense that it would be at once *involuntary and intentional*; in spite of himself, yet growing out of a profounder self than that which opposed the impulse. For instance, he met one of his own deacons.
>
> (italics added, pp. 138-139)

The verbal echo is from Brutus in *Julius Caesar* when he is contemplating the conspiracy to murder Caesar:

> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection.
> (II. i. 67-70)

The "state of man, / Like to a little kingdom" suffering "an insurrection" is very similar to Hawthorne's "interior kingdom" in which a "total change of dynasty and moral code" takes place. *Julius Caesar* is a play that, like *The Scarlet Letter,* is deeply concerned with the wayward will bewildered by "error" into choosing "things that are not." In *Julius Caesar*, of course, it is the treasonous murder of Caesar that Messala laments:

> O hateful Error, Melancholy's child,
> Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
> *The Things that are not*? O error, soon conceived,
> Thou never com'st unto a happy birth,

> But kill'st the mother that engendered thee.
> (italics added, V. iii. 66-71)

Shakespeare picks up the same theme in *Macbeth* and uses it to convey the Pauline wayward will that so transfixed Hawthorne in a way that was much more psychologically penetrating. There is no simple declaration, for example, of the terrible consequences of the wayward will. Instead, when Macbeth meets Banquo, who compliments him for being an ideal host to Duncan, and brings a "diamond" from the king as a token of his "measureless content," he stumbles in his speech, inadvertently betraying his murderous intentions:

> Being unprepared
> Our will became the *servant of defect*
> Which else should free have wrought.
> (italics added, II. i. 17.2-19.1)

Macbeth wants to apologize for his hasty preparations on behalf of Duncan, but what he inadvertently reveals is that his "will" has become "the servant of defect." He is in thrall to the error of the wayward will. Had he chosen, like Banquo, when he himself had indirectly tempted his friend with complicity in the murder of Duncan, to "lose none" ("honour") "in seeking to augment it," (II. i. 25-28) Macbeth would also have kept his "bosom franchised and allegiance clear."

Curiously, the Pauline wayward will is also, in Shakespeare, coupled with precisely the logic of bottomless solipsism that we find in Hawthorne and the psychiatric literature about masturbation of the time. Sweetser, as we have discovered, evokes Rousseau's childhood which the philosopher recounted in his autobiographical *Confessions*. Though Sweetser doesn't mention it directly, his reference to "the unhealthy character of" Rousseau's "imagination," his compulsive novel reading, his "morbid excess of sensibility," and his "unhappy nervous infirmities," evokes the symptoms of what Rousseau called "the dangerous

supplement." What makes "the dangerous supplement" so terrible is not merely its false epistemology, but the logic whereby an imaginary romantic object "supplements" a real one.[285]

Such a supplement is, as Banquo understands, a form of "augment"[tation] that causes a spiral of "los"[ing] even as it seeks to gain. As the narrator of Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* observes:

> And this ambitious foul infirmity
> In having much torments us with *defect*
> The thing we have, and all for want of wit
> Make something nothing by augmenting it.
> (italics added, 150-154)

The "defect" of perpetual "augment"[tation] is that it becomes a kind of preternatural machine that converts "something" into "nothing." It is this "nothing" that is converted by the antebellum democratic subject, into a metaphor for the boundless amoral horrors of the pathological masturbatory imagination.

Though Dimmesdale's transgression is clearly adultery, he possesses much in common with the subjectivity of the pathological Jacksonian masturbator. The oath which has consecrated Dimmesdale's "sympathy and fellowship" with "perverted spirits," is a revelation of this amoral imagination and the illicit sympathy that has developed throughout the novel.

To return to *Macbeth*, observe, for example, the way that Hawthorne's description of Dimmesdale's "interior kingdom" with its "change of dynasty," echoes Macbeth's soliloquy upon the "supernatural soliciting" of the witches, with its combination of active and passive verbs:

> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs

[285] Kant argues that the masturbator, "himself creates its [desire's] object. For in this way the imagination brings forth an appetite contrary to nature's purpose." Quoted in Laqueur, pg. 214.

> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical
> Shakes so my single state of man
> That function is smothered in surmise,
> And nothing is but what is not.
> (I. iii. 133-140)

Whereas Macbeth cries out in genuine surprise at his erring will, "Why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair," Dimmesdale cries, "What is it that haunts and tempts me thus?" (p. 140). Later, upon meeting the witch, Mistress Hibbins, Dimmesdale is tempted to destroy the faith of an elderly widow with a "poisonous infusion" of "a brief, pithy," . . . "unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul;" he is tempted to sew a "germ of evil" in the bosom of a "maiden newly won" to the faith;" and he has the irrepressible urge to share "heaven-defying oaths" with "dissolute sailors" (pp. 139-140). After he successfully navigates these freakish impulses, Dimmesdale encounters the witch, Mistress Hibbins, who possesses a familiar and disturbing intimacy with him. He asks himself, in wonder, "have I then sold myself," . . . "to the fiend whom, if men say true, this yellow-starched and velveted old hag has chosen for her prince and master?" (pp. 141). As admittedly tame as Dimmesdale's temptations seem in comparison with Macbeth's, his alien will acts precisely like Macbeth's: "growing out of a profounder self than that which opposed the impulse" (pg. 139). As the theologians and psychiatrists of the 19th century argued, Macbeth's commitment to the perverse imagination is based upon a false epistemology. He has traded "what is not" for what "is." More, Dimmesdale's "change of dynasty and moral code" is "at once involuntary and intentional."

Contrary to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, though - notwithstanding Dimmesdale's death on the scaffold – *The Scarlet Letter* is not intended to be a tragedy. Hawthorne,

I would argue, self-consciously attempts to correct Macbeth's spiral into nothingness by revealing the positive triumph of the Christian will over the wayward and defective one. Notice, for example, that Dimmesdale, in his speech on the scaffold not only attempts to fit his suffering from tragedy into a conversion narrative, but his last words are a relinquishment of his own will to God's: "Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be his name! *His will be done!* Farewell!" (p. 162).

It is Dimmesdale's final "His will be done! Farewell!" that is, in my view, despite the undoubted egotism that Agnes McNeill Donohue believes damns him, for Hawthorne, the seal of his salvation.[286] As we will see later, this triumph is profoundly qualified by the Shakespearean perverse. Hester too, in her choice to return, "of her own free will," to the location of her suffering and her punishment, and to "resume[] the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale," strongly suggests the ultimate redemption of her sin.

It is my view, though, that *Macbeth*'s powerful negativity not only haunts the language of sexual pathology in *The Scarlet Letter*, but that it presented for Hawthorne – in the context of the sexual panic of his time – an uncanny image of the unredeemed perverse imagination. This posed a direct threat to the vision of a redeemed New England that so preoccupied Hawthorne. *The Scarlet Letter* was Hawthorne's attempt to dispel this dystopian nightmare.

WITCHCRAFT IN THE BEAST

[286] "To presume knowledge of election is what Calvin called the 'immense abyss'." Agnes McNeill. Donohue, *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), pg. 60.

In order, though, to get a sense of the scope and depth of the Shakespearean association with Hawthorne's national vision, we will have to take a brief detour to his early story, "The Maypole of Merry Mount," in which a confrontation between America's national destiny and Shakespeare's perverse Old England is explicitly staged.

In "May-Pole" (as it shall be referred to henceforward) Hawthorne dramatizes a conflict between an early group of American colonists, whose "chief" symbol is the "Maypole" celebrations of "merry old England", and a group of Puritans led by the iron-fisted "zealot" Endicott. Just as in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's narrator here states quite explicitly that: "[t]he future complexion of New England was involved in this important quarrel":

> Should the grizzly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime, and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm forever. But should the banner staff of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest, and late posterity do homage to the Maypole.[287]
>
> (p. 366)

Despite Hawthorne's carefully balanced ironic treatment, reminiscent of *The Scarlet Letter*, offsetting the humorless cruelty of "these grim Puritans" with the feckless "light spirits" of the Merry Mount colony, who had "sworn allegiance to the May Pole," Hawthorne structures the tale as an allegory of lost innocence, through the pastoral wedding of the Lord and Lady of the May Pole, ruined by the sad and inexorable revelations of maturity, represented by the unprovoked Puritan attack upon the colony in the midst of their revelry:

> There they stood, in the first hour of wedlock, while the idle pleasures, of which their companions were the emblems, had given place to the sternest cares of life, personified by the dark Puritans.
>
> (p. 369)

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[287] Hawthorne, *Tales*.

The narrator's uncanny irony seems to offset the position of the Puritans and the Merry Mount colonists against one another, while refusing himself to take sides. However, such a structure, as Sacvan Bercovitch observes, in fact closes off the narrative, leading the reader to view the Puritan usurpation of Merry Mount as inevitable. More, the Merry Mount colonists are explicitly associated with Shakespeare's pastoral England, best evoked in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – which is alluded to throughout. The Merry Mount colony, the narrator informs us, was a place where "Erring Thought and perverted Wisdom were made to put on masques and play the fool":

> They gathered followers from all that giddy tribe whose whole life is like the festal days of soberer men. In their train were minstrels, not unknown in London streets: *wandering players,* whose theatres had been the halls of noblemen; mummers, rope-dancers, and mountebanks, who would long be missed at wakes, church ales, and fairs; in a word, mirth makers of every sort, such as abounded in that age, but now began to be discountenanced by the rapid growth of Puritanism.
>
> (p. 364)

In Hawthorne's story, Merry Mount specifically singles out "wandering players, whose theaters had been the halls of noblemen" along with the "mummers, rope-dancers, and mountebanks." Earlier, we hear that the revelers possess a "dreamlike smile" amidst a "world of toil and care."

Although Hawthorne cites the "curious history of the early settlement of Mount Wollaston, or Merry Mount" as the origin of his story, he also makes reference to Joseph Strutt's *Book of English Sports and Pastimes* (p. 360). [288] Strutt's account of the Maypole celebration features a famous and extended quote from Philip Stubbes' damning critique of the annual May Day celebrations in the *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583). Stubbes' diatribe, is, of course, also a diatribe against the theaters –

including what would be, just a few years later, Shakespeare's – and it is now traditionally evoked to give a broader context for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is difficult not to see Stubbes' vivid denunciation as providing the true inspiration for Hawthorne's story. Here is the account Hawthorne would have read:

> . . . Oxen drawe home this May-pole (this stinking Idol rather) which is covered all ouer with flowres, and herbs bound round about with strings from the top to the bottome, and sometime painted with variable colours, with two or three hundred men following it with great devotion. And thus being dressed up with handkerchiefs and flags hovering on the top, they strew the ground rounde about, binde green boughes about it, set up summer bowers and arbors hard by it. And then fall they to dancing about it like as the heathen people did at the dedication of the Idols. I have heard it crediblie reported, by men of great credite, and reputation, that of fourtie, threescore, of an hundred maids going to the wood, there have scarcely a third part of them returned home againe 'as they went'. [289] [290][sic, originally "undefiled"]

Stubbes' characterization of the Mayday celebrations possesses precisely the combination of vivid, pastoral description combined with outraged moral indignation that characterizes Hawthorne's story. The narrator calls the masked revelers, who are dressed like "beasts," . . . "Gothic monsters":

> These were Gothic monsters, though perhaps of Grecian ancestry. On the shoulders of a comely youth uprose the head and branching antlers of a stag; a second, human in all other points, had the grim visage of a wolf; a third, still with the trunk and limbs of a mortal man, showed the beard and horns of a venerable he-goat. There was the likeness of a bear erect, brute in all but his hind legs, which were adorned with pink silk stockings. And here again, almost as wondrous, stood a real bear of the dark forest, lending each of his fore paws to the grasp of a human hand, and as ready for the dance as any in that circle.
>
> (pg. 361)

Hawthorne's explicit literary associations are not with Shakespeare, but with Milton's *Comus*. Though Milton's *Comus* includes a seductive necromancer accompanied by a "wild rout of Monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts,"

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[289] Quoted in: Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: Methuen &, 1801), pp. 276-277.

[290] See original text for comparison: Stubbes, Phillip, Gervase Babington, Thomas Naogeorg, Barnabe Googe, and Frederick James Furnivall. *Phillip Stubbes's Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakspere's Youth, A.D. 1583* .. London: Pub. for the New Shakspere Society, by N. Trübner &, 1877, pp. 148-149.

who tempt Lady with the sins of flesh – while she resists with virtuous reason. Milton's *Comus*, though, does not quite fit the wild May-Day festival mood that the Puritans in Hawthorne's story so object to.[291] Hawthorne's "monsters," with human limbs and the heads of animals, distinctly recall the metamorphosis of Bottom, who possesses the legs of a human and the head of an ass, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, there is a tone here, not of romantic comedy, but of satire and menace – which evokes tragic metamorphoses in Shakespeare, such as Othello's "exchange me for a goat" (V. v. 136), or "A horned man's a monster and a beast" (IV. i. 162). On the one hand, Shakespeare is distanced, associated with a pastoral "Old England" that is too naïve to survive the somber adulthood of the American republic; on the other hand, Shakespeare's tragic transformations are an intimate and haunting threat. Though Hawthorne describes his Puritans as "zealots," it is Shakespeare's Old England that is associated with the "dream" of youthful illusions – that must be dispelled. This is captured in the moment the Puritans infiltrate to destroy the Maypole celebration:

> Their darksome figures [of the Puritans] were intermixed with the wild shapes of their foes, and made the scene a picture of the moment, when waking *thoughts start up amid the scattered fantasies of a dream.*
>
> (p. 367, italics added)

The Puritans who bestow "a small matter of stripes apiece" along with "further penalties such as branding and cropping the ears" (p. 368) upon the erring revelers suggest a grim reality far less threatening than the intensities suggested by "perverted wisdom" (pg. 364) and Shakespearean metamorphosis. Further, there is a strange parallel between the way that Hawthorne's Endicott "assault[s] the hallowed Maypole" and the way that he assaults the flag of England in the later

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[291] John Milton et al., *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), lines 92-93.

story, "Endicott and the Red Cross," (the story in which we first glimpse the "young woman whose doom it was to wear the letter A on her breast,"):

> "Officer, lower your banner!" said he.
> The officer obeyed; and, brandishing his sword, Endicott thrust it through the cloth, and, with his left hand, rent the Red Cross completely out of the banner. He then waved the tattered ensign above his head.
>
> (pg. 548)

Endicott, in "Maypole" is even more violent:

> "And this dancing bear," resumed the officer. "Must he share the stripes of his fellows?"
> "Shoot him through the head!" said the energetic Puritan. "I suspect witchcraft in the beast."
>
> (pp. 368-369)

For Hawthorne, it seems that the banishment of Old England – the England that he associated with the pastoral genre and the threatening permissiveness of Shakespeare's world - was a germinal act of violence: it meant the creation of the republic. For it is Shakespeare's England that is associated with that which must be repressed and distanced in order for America to be born – or, more broadly, for civilization itself to occur - but that desire is all the more omnipresent for being repressed.

A PROPHESY OF DECAY

If, in "May-Pole," Hawthorne produced a legend that predicates America's maturity upon its vanquishing of the Shakespearean perverse, he did so on a much grander scale in *The Scarlet Letter*. This is the purpose for Dimmesdale's climactic Election Sermon and it is the reason why it is so important for the novel to exorcise the Shakespearean perverse. For, to put it bluntly, if Dimmesdale is a sexual pervert and if his offspring, Pearl, cannot be socialized, than the whole of New England's

destiny is potentially heir, as we recall from *Julius Caesar*, to an "unhappy birth," a demonic progeny that "kill'st the mother that engendered thee." In *The Scarlet Letter*, recall, for example, that Dimmesdale "beheld," on the night of Governor Winthrop's death – which will provide the occasion for the election Election sermon for the new governor – "the appearance of an immense letter, – A, – marked out in lines of dull red light" (the same "crimson" color reserved for an omen of "Pestilence"). Though the narrator ironically marks Dimmesdale's "egotism," the "portent" is also seen, the sexton observes, by the townspeople, who interpret it to mean "Angel." The two potential futures for New England, angelic or demonic, hang in the balance.

Here, we recall the anxieties voiced by Emerson and the sexual reformers. Recall, also Whitman's unfortunate lines from *By Blue Ontario's Shore*:

> I lead the present with friendly hand toward the future.
> Bravas to states whose semitic impulses send wholesome children to the next age!

For it is not merely a metaphysical contagion, but a pathological one that Hawthorne fears. Sweetser, for example, subscribed to another common belief of the era, that mental illness could be transmitted to "Unborn Offspring" (xiv, Moral Hygiene). Hawthorne himself subscribed to this belief. Years after publishing *The Scarlet Letter,* when Hawthorne lived in England and visited an orphanage, he was horrified by the spectacle of a dying infant:

> The governor whispered me, apart, that, like nearly all the rest of them, it was the child of *unhealthy parents*. Ah, yes! There was the mischief. This spectral infant, a hideous mockery of the visible link which Love creates between man and woman, was born of disease and sin. Diseased Sin was its father, and Sinful Disease its mother, and their offspring lay in the woman's arms like a nursing Pestilence, which, could it live and grow up, would make the world a more accursed abode than ever heretofore;[292]

[292] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901), pp. 515-516.

Remember that not only does the "crimson" light Dimmesdale sees in the sky recall "Pestilence," but Pearl herself is referred to as an "infant pestilence," a "scarlet fever":

> She resembled, in her fierce pursuit of them, an infant pestilence, – the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged angel of judgment, – whose mission was to punish the sins *of the rising generation*.
>
> (p. 69)

The mind and body were, in the antebellum period, so inextricably connected, that it is not preposterous to assume that sexual disease acquired through the parents could be cured by their moral transformation. Nor is it improbable that Dimmesdale's sexual transgression could, through "sympathy," pass on to the future generations of New England. Hawthorne merely extends Whitman's vulgarized Lamarckian view of inheritance into more subtle territory. For Dimmesdale's Election Sermon is informed by a "spirit of prophesy," while his own physical and mental illness proclaims a more dubious "melancholy prophesy of decay":

> His subject, it appeared, had been the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind, with a special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness. And, as he drew towards the close, a *spirit as of prophecy* had come upon him, constraining him to its purpose as mightily as the old prophets of Israel were constrained; only with this difference, that, whereas the Jewish seers had denounced judgments and ruin on their country, it was his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord.
>
> (p. 157)

Dimmesdale's "prophesy" is with specific reference "to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness," and he is "foretell[ing] a high and glorious destiny" for its people. Yet, Dimmesdale's sermon is written in "haste and ecstasy," (pg. 143) inspired by the unholy "consecration" of his sin with Hester – which also confirms his "sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals and perverse spirits," even as it inflames his prurient imagination and intensifies his "bodily infirmity." Dimmesdale is in awe that "Heaven should see fit to transmit the grand and solemn

music of its oracles through so foul an organ-pipe as he" (pg. 143) – and yet the very phrase "foul an organ-pipe," with its comical phallic connotation, suggests that the speech he plans, whatever its immediate effect, might not only desecrate, but contaminate his listeners with the venereal disease he suffers. If his own sermon could be so inspired by forbidden desire, then it is also possible that a moral and sexual "Pestilence," could be inflamed by means of his "prophesy of decay."

This may well be the reason that Hawthorne neglects to include the speech itself. We are left, though, with Hawthorne's ironic commentary on the state of bliss that he leaves his audience with:

> This idea of his transitory stay on earth gave the last emphasis to the effect which the preacher had produced; it was as if an angel, in his passage to the skies, had shaken his bright wings over the people for an instant,--at once a shadow and a splendor,--and had *shed down a shower of golden truths upon them.*
> (pg. 157)

More than merely contamination, Hawthorne hints that Dimmesdale has defiled by urination ("shed down a shower of golden truths") those who have entrusted him to lead them to the New Jerusalem.

THE RANK LUXURIANCE OF A GUILTY PASSION

The contamination and defilement of New England's destiny is conveyed through powerful imagery that suggests a transmission of Dimmesdale's imaginative disease and bodily infirmity to Pearl. Although Pearl's antisocial imagination is engendered by her parents' sexual transgression, Hawthorne's description of her is ambivalent. Though the Puritans regard Pearl as a "demon offspring," (pg. 164) she is called a "witch-baby" (pg. 156) by an uncouth sailor; and, we recall that Hester's "morbid ingenuity," unfortunately, turns Pearl's dress into "the emblem of her guilt and

torture," . . . "the scarlet letter only capable of being loved." Pearl is associated with potentially Shakespearean spirits of the forest: she is a "nymph-child," and an "infant dryad" (pg. 132). Governor Bellingham asks her quite directly: "art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies, whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in merry old England?" (pg. 74) Pearl is also associated, as Shakespeare himself was traditionally, with nature. Governor Bellingham, attempting to find out if Pearl has been instructed in the Westminster Catechism, asks Pearl who made her, she announces that she was "plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door" (pg. 76). As such, Pearl has associations with the pastoral Old England that Hawthorne evokes in "May-Pole."

Just as in "May-Pole," Hawthorne treats the romantic view of Shakespearean nature with irony, so does he in *The Scarlet Letter*. For the forest is the domain of the Black Man who makes a "contract" with wayward Puritans there at midnight, where they "sign" their name in "blood" (pg. 140); it is associated with the supposedly morally suspect wild Indians; it is where Chillingworth gathers his herbs that can "quicken[] to an evil purpose" with "poisonous shrubs," "converting" . . . "every wholesome growth . . . into something deleterious and malignant" (pg. 114). While the associations with Mistress Hibbins and the Black Man evoke connotations of *Macbeth*, the forest also conjures connotations of disease from *Hamlet*. For the question is not merely whether Pearl will succumb, like her parents, to the agency of demonic powers, but to their moral and psychological disease. Besides being described as an "infant pestilence," Pearl is described not as "possessing the disease of sadness," as "almost all children, in these latter days, inherit scrofula, from the troubles of their ancestors," but her very "unfailing vivacity of spirit" might itself "too [be] a disease" . . . "the reflex of the wild energy" (pg. 119): the deviant sexual

affair that resulted in Pearl's birth.

Pearl becomes, on the one hand, the "pearl of great price" (pg. 61), (KJ *Matthew* 13:45-46*),* from Matthew's Gospel, suggesting that she has the power to absolve her parents' sins and open up the kingdom of heaven for them; at the same time, though, she becomes the symbol not just of her parents' iniquity, but of their raw, deviant sexual desire. As such, adult sexual imagery recalling the guilty passion that resulted in her birth is obsessively displaced upon her. So, for example, the symbol of "the pearl" also recalls Desdemona, an adult Shakespearean heroine whose function as a redeemer goes tragically wrong – when Othello, like the "base Indian" who "threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (V. ii. 343-344) – murders her. Dimmesdale and Hester can, at times, recall a jealous Othello – for Pearl, like Desdemona, is suspected of concealing hidden demonic wickedness. This speaks not only to the antebellum notion that sexual disease could be transmitted to offspring, but to more intimate anxieties about the destruction of gender roles that sexual deviance supposedly brought about.

Even more importantly, if Dimmesdale and Hester's sexual disease, as we have seen, threatens their gender, Pearl's disease threatens to blur the distinction between childhood and adulthood. The potential for sexual disease makes her disturbingly precocious, overturning the power relation between adult and child. This is why she becomes such a powerful symbol of the destabilizing power of sexual illness in antebellum America. It also suggests the possibility that the Shakespearean perverse may have gotten the upper hand of Hawthorne after all. Even if it is Hawthorne's wish that Dimmesdale and Hester be redeemed and Pearl socialized into comfortable domesticity, this happy ending may be thwarted, after all, by the tragedy of Pearl's story.

Surrounding Pearl, we find a powerful cluster of imagery that recalls *Hamlet*:

> We have as yet hardly spoken of the infant; that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower, *out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion.*
>
> (pg. 61, italics added)

The narrator's description recalls immediately and disturbingly Hamlet's reference to Gertrude's "rank sweat of an enseamed bed" (III. vi 100-101). Hamlet here imagines Gertrude as a kind of adultress, betraying his dead father. One might go so far as to say that Hamlet's own revenge for his father is, somehow, engendered in this primal scene – the nauseating and unacceptable image of his mother, Gertrude, having sex with his father's brother, Claudius. There is yet another important use of the word "rank," though, in *Othello*, that is hinted above. It is Iago's in lines insinuating Desdemona's infidelity: "one may smell in such, a will most *rank*, foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural" (III. iii. 230-231). And certainly the word in Hawthorne is used to evoke the provocative and nauseating odor of the sexual act that went into creating the "immortal flower" Pearl.

The result of these juxtapositions is to create an anxious drama in which a perverse child is in need of being saved, first from herself and secondly from her parents – through their reform of their own sexual transgression. At the same time, Pearl is, paradoxically, the potential source of salvation. In one scenario, she is a kind of child, lured into a world of adult sin, but she is also, at the same time, quite horribly, the adult-child willfully reveling in sin. In another scenario, she is an adult-child who redeems her parent-children. All of these possibilities are at play here.

Pearl, for example, during the secret meeting between Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne, has one of her tantrums – and runs off into the woods. During her hiatus in the woods, the narrator makes this observation:

> A wolf, it is said, – but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable, – came up, and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand.
>
> (pg. 131)

Is Pearl, here, the child who can humanize the "savage" . . . "wolf" – or is she herself recognized by the wolf as its kindred?

This is developed further in the chapter, "The Leech and His Patient." Chillingworth, in disguise as Dimmesdale's friend and doctor, describes a trip to gather medicinal herbs to heal the sick man. Continuing the *Hamlet* imagery, Hawthorne describes the medicinal herbs, "converted" to "drugs of potency" by Chillingworth, as themselves "weeds":

> He therefore still kept up a familiar intercourse with him, daily receiving the old physician in his study; or visiting the laboratory, and, for recreation's sake, watching the processes by *which weeds were converted into drugs of potency.*
>
> (italics added, pg. 87)

We recall that Hamlet's rebuke to Gertrude is "do not "spread the *compost on the weeds* to make them ranker" (Ham. III. vi. 166). This paragraph oddly creates an image of Chillingworth as a Claudius using the very "rank" weeds of the "enseamed bed" to make the poison that he pours into King Hamlet (Dimmesdale's) ear:

> "where, my kind doctor, did you gather those herbs, with such a dark, flabby leaf?" "Even in the grave-yard, here at hand," answered the physician, continuing his employment. "They are new to me. I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, no other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime." "Perchance," said Mr. Dimmesdale, "he earnestly desired it, but could not." "And wherefore?" rejoined the physician. "Wherefore not; since all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make manifest an outspoken crime?"
>
> (pp. 87-88)

Dimmesdale is given a vision in which the very bodies of the dead are pierced by the crimes buried in their hearts – poison indeed. Yet, again, Dimmesdale and

Chillingworth are interrupted in the midst of their chilling dialog, not by Hester, but by Pearl:

> Before Roger Chillingworth could answer, they heard the clear, wild laughter of a young child's voice, proceeding from the adjacent burial-ground . . . Pearl looked as beautiful as the day, but was in one of those moods of *perverse merriment* which, whenever they occurred, seemed to remove her entirely out of the sphere of sympathy or human contact. She now skipped irreverently from one grave to another; until, coming to the broad, flat, armorial tombstone of a departed worthy, – perhaps of Isaac Johnson himself, – she began to dance upon it . . . Roger Chillingworth had by this time approached the window, and smiled grimly down. "There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, right or wrong, *mixed up with that child's composition*," remarked he, as much to himself as to his companion.
>
> (pg. 89, italics added)

When Pearl "irreverent"[ly] "skip[s] from one grave to another, she literally dances upon the graves of the deceased that Dimmesdale has imagined tormented like himself. When she "decorat"[es] "the maternal bosom" with "burrs," she is the divine agent of suffering, but she might also be an imp – whose transformation from redeemer to "savage" child of the "rank luxuriance of a guilty passion" makes her oddly "mixed up with" the wild "black weeds" that grow out of the hypothetical deceased man's heart.

She is the symbol not only of a kind of original perversity, but, she suggests, an odd reversal of roles between child and adult. For not only does Pearl attract a comparison to imagery from *Hamlet*, but also to Shakespeare's most famous adulteress, Cleopatra:

> Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of *infinite variety*; in this one child there were many children, comprehending the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp, in little, of an infant princess.
>
> (p. 62)

Of course, Hawthorne is recalling the description of Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety." (AC II. ii. 240-241) But if, in some sense, Pearl is, in Dimmesdale's imagination *already* grown up, Dimmesdale's true

horror may be that, by contrast, he himself is, childishly powerless. For, like King Lear, Dimmesdale may *need* to convert the wayward and "perverse" Pearl – to save himself from King Lear's predicament – which is, of course, that he has made his "daughters" his "mother." (Lear. I. iv. 4, 10)

It is finally through Dimmesdale's death on the scaffold - whose purpose is, as Sophia Hawthorne famously said, "to show that the Law cannot be broken"[293] – that Pearl is converted from the dangerous, but free, "infinite variety" – the "perverse merriment" - of her childhood to an adulthood whose "rich nature will be softened and subdued." And, so Pearl can be regarded as inheriting the curse of Dimmesdale's sterility – while Dimmesdale, the child-man, converts, in death, into the patriarchal father – the Law, the Moral Authority – who sadistically demands obedience. Or is it not the Law at all, but Arthur Dimmesdale whose final act of revenge is Othello-like to throw "a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe"?

The irony is that the very destiny that Hawthorne wishes for America is its truly tragic one: "conversion" as a means to rid the land of the contamination of the "perversion" of the middle class domestic values of hearth and home so threatened by Pearl's anarchic childhood, by Hester's subversive intellect, and by Dimmesdale's desire to raise a family outside of the jurisdiction of the grim New England law. However, it is also my view, as we have seen, that Hawthorne's employment of Shakespearean imagery is a double-edged sword that offers a subversive perverse critique of the very vision of America that he intends. We will discover a more deliberate and anarchic version of this critique in Emily Dickinson.

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[293] Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 539.

HEROIC CUNNING: MELVILLE'S DOOMED QUEST TO CONQUER THE WHITENESS OF *MACBETH*

OVERVIEW

Melville exhibits the most extensive, heroic, and self-riven struggle of all of the American authors in this study. Shakespeare was a lightning rod for the anarchic force of perverse sexuality that was already roiling in Melville's psyche. This chapter will delineate Melville's quest to exorcise the perverse, like Hawthorne, through Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest,* linking Melville's reading of these plays with what I regard, contrary to most critics, as his unlikely jeremiad against the solitary vice. I will then turn to *Billy Budd* and *Othello* to uncover what I regard to be the duplicity that both allowed Melville to finish his masterpiece, and that committed him to the redemptive narrative of the perverse jeremiad.

I leave Melville's most powerful chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," for last. In this chapter, Melville's structuring narrative breaks down, and he surrenders to the pure terrors of the perverse. It is my hypothesis that Melville's "whiteness" is, in part, animated by the dramatic energy of non-being that becomes, itself, a palpable presence in *Macbeth*, evoking audience complicity. I contend that Melville was not only influenced by Shakespeare, but reproduced, as a reading experience, something very close to the experience Shakespeare intended for the audience of *Macbeth*. I call the dramatic technique that Melville developed "perverse reading." This will lead us to Dickinson, who looks Shakespeare directly in the eye.

DARK CHARACTERS

While there are glimmerings of Shakespeare in Melville's earlier work, he didn't truly come to read Shakespeare until the age when he wrote *Moby Dick*. It was at this point that an avalanche occurred in Melville's mind:

> Dolt & ass that I am I have lived more than 29 years, & until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, aye, almost as Jesus. [294]

As Markels argues, "*Pierre* (1852) in places and *Moby-Dick* (1851) throughout are functionally produced by the ferment of Melville's mind in response to Shakespeare's plays."[295] Markels' notion is, of course, as old as Melville criticism itself. Charles Olson was the first to assert this, "Above all, in the ferment, Shakespeare the cause."[296] F. O. Matthiessen's account in *The American Renaissance* turned Shakespeare's influence upon Melville into a legend. According to Matthiessen, Melville was "hypnotized" by Shakespeare and "unconsciously impelled towards emulation."[297] How else could one account for the "bold, nervous, lofty"[298] language of Melville's characters aboard a whaling ship or the daring

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[294] Herman Melville, *The Letters of Herman Melville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pg. 77.
[295] "In the succession of his novels the Shakespearean echoes become far more frequent and various in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre,* the two books written next after the Duyckink letter and the *Mosses* review discussed in the preceding chapter, and this quantitative increase also reflects a qualitative difference. In *Mardi* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) the Shakespearean allusions and plot motifs amount to no more than a literary patina fitfully applied, but *Pierre* (1852) in places and *Moby-Dick* (1851) throughout are functionally produced by the ferment of Melville's mind in response to Shakespeare's plays." Markels, pg. 61.
[296] Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1947), pg. 39.
[297] Francis Otto. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman, [by] F. O. Matthiessen.* (London and Toronto: Oxford University Press (printed in the U.S.A.), 1968), pg. 424.
[298] Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg. 73.

creative departure in chapter 36, "The Quarter-Deck," in which the progress of a novel is suddenly transfigured, with these famous stage directions:

> (Enter Ahab: Then, all.)
>
> (pg. 303)

In addition to stage directions, Matthiessen notes that Melville's characters deliver soliloquies and speak in prose lines that often scan as blank verse:

> I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters
> Paler cheeks, where'er I sail. The envious
> Billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them;
> But first I pass.
>
> (pg. 142)

Melville even manages to reproduce Shakespeare's difficult syntax, with its functional shifts, such as his conversion of the noun "tornado" into an adjective in the marvelous phrase "*tornadoed* Atlantic of my being." As one would expect, *Moby-Dick* has proved to be a gold mine for critics who have searched for allusions to Shakespeare plays. The language in *Moby-Dick* echoes all of Shakespeare's major tragedies. As Julian Markels observes, "In his tragic stature, character, and progression, Ahab can remind us severally of Othello, Macbeth, and Lear." [299] Obscure scenes, such as Romeo's visit to the apothecary in the depiction of the bar in *The Spouter-Inn* (pg. 27), and iconic ones such as Hamlet's speech to the skull, with Ahab's soliloquy in the presence of the decapitated head of the whale, are re-envisioned on a grand scale.

Among Shakespeare scholars, it is Markels, in his book *Melville And the Politics of Identity, From King Lear to Moby-Dick*, who best demonstrates the dynamic between the Shakespeare of New England Protestantism and what he calls Melville's "demonic Shakespeare." This "demonic" Shakespeare, for Markels, is revealed in

[299] Markels, pg. 64.

Melville's letters to Evert Duyckinck and in his review of Hawthorne's book of short stories, entitled, "Hawthorne And His Mosses." For Melville, what "makes Shakespeare Shakespeare" is precisely that which is *not* caught by the domesticated image of the playwright as a national symbol:

> Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them. Tormented into desperation, Lear the frantic King tears off the mask, and speaks the sane madness of vital truth . . . For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth, – even though it be covertly, and by snatches.[300]

For Markels, the "sane madness of vital truth" lies in Lear's question: "is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" This question, Markels contends, plunges Melville into the heretical exploration of the Hobbsian universe of "magnified force and fraud"[301] through the voyage of the *Pequod*. The attempt to answer this question also forces him to confront the demonic underbelly of the emerging republic, with its threat of demagoguery, religious fanaticism, capitalist expansion, and robber barons. Markels' Melville, therefore, finds within Shakespeare the national symbol of American culture, a seething underbelly filled with questions about the underlying forces that were shaping the new nation.

It is my contention, though, that Markels' cogent study gives the face behind the mask that Melville wanted us to find. His study is as neatly philosophical and metaphysical as Melville tried to be. I find a perverse Shakespeare inhering within Melville's work, one that is linked to Augustinian non-being, but also explicitly sexual, intimately connected to America's reform movements, which were

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[300] "Hawthorne And His Mosses," in: Herman Melville et al., *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pg. 521.
[301] Markels, pg. 60.

themselves a product of economic and social anxieties, and the messianic project of America's Second Great Awakening.

For Melville not only intuits a shattering power within Shakespeare's plays that erupts through the mask of his tragic protagonists, like Lear, but he evokes this process in a language that suggests deviousness: "craftily," "cunning," "covertly," "by snatches." This disjunction between Shakespeare as a heroic, but embittered and estranged Jeremiah telling the truth "though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges" (pg. 54), and a more devious playwright whose perverse identifications need to be masked, is the one that I think Melville's marginalia supports. Mediating these is the playwright interested in the dramatic effect of striking through the mask of outward piety or innocence to reveal hidden and disturbing depths.

A TOUCH SHAKESPEAREAN

Despite the obvious scope and depth of Shakespeare's influence on *Moby-Dick*, it is curious that even Markels, who undertakes a complete reading of *Moby-Dick* through the lens of *King Lear*, neglects to take into account Melville's Shakespeare marginalia, his frequent scores, and the many passages he underlined in the plays. Markels' predecessor, F. O. Matthiessen, in *The American Renaissance*, did not offer a thoroughly Shakespearean reading, but he effectively used Melville's scores and underlined passages to provide perceptive insights into Melville's character during the composition of *Moby-Dick*.

Admittedly, I am taking a risk in giving Melville's copious underlines and

scores the weigh that I do, and suggesting that they reflect his own personal views. Many of his marks, after all, may simply be passages that evoked his curiosity or helped him to follow Shakespeare's themes. But Melville's personality as a reader, like William Blake's, is forceful and distinct. At times, in fact, his marks can seem as monomaniacal as Ahab's might be. There is also a distinction in emphasis in his underlined and scored passages. Some of the passages receive multiple scores and single phrases are underlined with a thick, heavy mark indicating the importance Melville attributes to it.

For example, here is a passage in which Melville's Jeremiah reading persona surfaces. He underlines with a thick pencil mark this phrase from the Fool in *King Lear*: "Truth's a dog that must to kennel" (I. IV. 110).[302] He also scores this passage from *Hamlet*:

> Forgive me this my virtue,
> For in the fatness of these pursy times,
> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg;
> Yea, curb and woo, for leave to do him good. (III. iv. 153-6)[303]

Melville frequently identifies with passages that expose hypocrisy. He places a thick pencil mark under "scurvy politician" in Lear's mad improvisation, which culminates in the politicized image, inspired by Gloucester's blindness, "Get thee glass eyes; / And like a scurvy politician, seem / To see the things thou dost not" (IV. vi. 172).

Melville is also concerned with moments when a sinister truth erupts from behind the mask of appearances. He is so preoccupied by this theme that, at times, he neglects passages that one would expect would be far more relevant to him. In

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[302] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. February 4, 2014. http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=31>. pg. 31.
[303] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. February 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=31>., pg. 339.

Pericles, for example, a play Melville could have pillaged for its remarkable ocean passages, he double scores this rather lacklustre line, contrasting the "visor" of "villainy" with its outward appearance of sycophancy: "No visor does become black villany (sic), / So well as soft and tender flattery" (*Per.* IV. iv. 44).[304] In *Hamlet*, Melville was keen to score the passage in Claudius's speech:

> In the corrupted currents of this world,
> Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
> And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law.
> (III. iii. 57)[305]

In *The Tempest*, Melville placed a score and an "x" next to the famous passage in which Miranda, for the first time, encounters human beings, and – unusually for Melville – he circles Prospero's ironic retort. The passage begins with Miranda exclaiming:

> MIRA
> O! wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
> That has such people in't!
>
> PRO
> 'Tis new to thee (V. i. 181-4)

In the margin, Melville writes, "Consider the character of the persons concerning whom Miranda says this – Then Prospero's quiet words in comment – how terrible! In 'Timon' itself there is nothing like it."[306] Again, Melville is acutely aware of that moment when surface appearance is belied by a more disturbing and intractable

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[304] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *Pericles*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. February 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=30>., pg. 491.
[305] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 2 February, 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=31>., pg. 331.
[306] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 2 February, 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=25>., pg. 72.

reality. He is especially aware of how these are structured as dramatic exchanges on stage.

Still another voice emerges from Melville's Shakespearean reading, one far more in alliance with Shakespeare's dark energies. Melville scores and places an "x" next to the passage in *King Lear*, just after Albany charges Edmund with treason. He singles out the passage:

> What in the world he is
> That names me a traitor, villain-like he lies.
> Call by thy trumpet; he that dares approach,
> On him, on you, (who not?) I will maintain
> My truth and honor firmly. (V. iii. 98-102.1)

In the margin, Melville writes somberly, "The infernal nature has a valor often denied to innocence." Upon the occasion of Gloucester's blinding by Cornwall, Melville thickly underlines "See it shall thou never" (III. vii. 66). In the margin, Melville writes, "Terrific!"[307] Melville double scores the passage when Regan and Cornwall usher in Gloucester for interrogation, and Regan exclaims, "Ingrateful fox!" (III. vii. 28). In the margin, Melville writes, "Here's a touch Shakespearean – Regan talks of ingratitude!"[308]

Unfortunately Melville left *Macbeth* without any scores or marginalia. This may be because he was already familiar with the play. In a single letter from 1843 Melville's sister Helen remembered seeing the tragedian Charles Macready in Boston:

> The witch scenes were admirably got up, and when, dancing about the 'cauldron of hell-broth,' one of the horrid creatures, puts in some terrible contribution; and enjoins it 'to make the gruel thick & slab,', I *could* not help thinking of poor Herman, who made it a favorite quotation, and talked

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[307] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 2 February, 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=31>., pg. 124.

[308] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 2 February, 4. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=31>., pg. 85.

> about the 'pilot's thumb, wrecked as homeward he did come,' eye of newt, toe of frog,&c."[309]

This brief window into Melville's childhood may yet be apposite. In *Macbeth*, which I believe to be one of *Moby-Dick*'s most important influences, child-like horror is central: for example, "my fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in it" (V. v. 11-12); or that curiously childlike image "the eye wink at the hand" (I. iv. 53); or the fantastic image from a child's hallucination, of a "moving grove" (V. v. 38.1). Intriguingly, Melville also completed the circle by accepting his sister Augusta's suggestion to name his first son Malcolm, perhaps not only symbolizing his high hopes that his child would *one day* have the destiny of a future king, but a covert attempt to ward off *Macbeth*'s curse.[310] Ishmael, recall, is also promised by God that he will "make him a great nation" (KJ Gen. 17:20).

Perhaps most suggestive of all, though, is that with all Melville's righteous ire about hypocrisy and superficiality, there is a hint that he responded with duplicity to Shakespeare's dangerous sexuality. Melville quadruple scored Shakespeare's famously homoerotic Sonnet 20, "A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted;" then, perhaps anxious about his own enthusiasm, he erased three of the four scores.[311]

In Melville's marginalia, I find a series of reading personas: wounded Jeremiah, railing against the world's hypocrisy, communing with Shakespeare, a fellow truth-teller; a reader fascinated when a sinister force erupts through apparently calm surfaces; a dissident who could himself identify with the dramatic genius of perhaps Shakespeare's darkest moment on stage, Gloucester's blinding; a

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[309] Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pg. 107.
[310] Parker, pp. 612-613.
[311] Melville, Herman. "Melville's Marginalia in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*." *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 2 February, 4, 2014. <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/tool.php?id=32>., pg. 26.

reader who could express sober admiration for the powerful negativity of an Edmund, even going so far as to prefer his "valor" over (presumably) Cordelia's "innocence."

It was precisely the conflict between these reading personas that we find in Melville's engagement with Shakespeare in *Moby-Dick*. It is my contention that the self-righteous Jeremiah persona led him to develop an elaborate structure in *Moby-Dick*, heroically to exorcise and disavow his own enthusiastically perverse identifications. Unfortunately, the perverse cannot be so exorcised. Its powerful, self-undermining energy is merely displaced onto another figure or group. *Moby-Dick*'s very ethical center is where this process of displacement is structured.

PISTOL AND BALL

If Ahab's monomaniacal pursuit of a white whale "round the Norway maelstrom, and round Perdition's flames" (pg. 139), is the most obvious form of Shakespearean perversion in *Moby-Dick*, it is Ishmael's smoldering passive-aggressive desire that is much more evasive and easy to overlook. It is Ishmael's deviant sexual subjectivity, as it is displaced through Ahab, that I contend most reverberates with Shakespeare's perverse energies.

Ishmael's sexual deviance hinges on what he calls his "wild, mystical *sympathetical* feeling;" (pg. 152) it is this "sympathy" that makes Ahab's "feud seem mine." Yet, what is the basis for Ishmael's "sympathy" with a feud that he seems to find at times grandly tragic and, at other times, ludicrous? What is it about Ahab's will to conquer that so compels Ishmael that he evokes Ahab's quest as a Gothic tale

of possession that is analogous to Macbeth's seduction by the queer, androgynous witches?

Perhaps even more importantly, what is it that compels Ishmael to wander in exile – as his namesake suggests – like Hester into a "labyrinth of mind," through what Melville has called "ontological heroics?"[312] For just as Hester struggled with the illicit sympathy brought on by the burden of wearing the Scarlet Letter, Ishmael struggles with the temptation of Ahab's hunt for the white whale – and he specifically figures this temptation as "whiteness" itself, an animated presence of non-being that swallows the world of the "milk and sperm of human kindness," (pg. 323) with the "maw and gulf of the ravenous salt-sea shark." (IV. i. 23-24)

Ishmael's name is itself a scarlet letter, willingly put on for the reader. Ishmael, Abraham's illegitimate son, forced to wander in exile in the desert to found a new nation, will be a "wild man"; like Hester, "his hand will be against every other man, and every man's hand against him." (KJ, Genesis 16:12) Yet unlike Hester, the circumstances of Ishmael's exile are not clear without some detective work.

We have already seen how the metaphysical void that was feared to be behind the mask of paper currency was dramatized through the ghost of Banquo ("Bank-Oh") upon the precipitation of the 1837 Bank Panic. Paradoxically, it was Andrew Jackson's attempt to return to the gold standard that destroyed the economy – and plunged the Melville family into financial ruin. Herman Melville's older brother, Gansevoort, was hit hardest. The boom in canals and railroads had encouraged Gansevoort to speculate using his mother's inheritance on western lands. [313] When the Bank Panic hit, western land prices plummeted, New York City banks suspended payment in gold and silver, paid only in "depreciated bank notes, "

[312] Letter to Hawthorne, June 29, 1851 in: Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pg. 542.
[313] Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pg. 107.

and "factories failed all over the country."[314]

The Melvilles were forced to move from their handsome house in Clinton Square, "away from the state capital," to a village where the rents were cheaper. Gansevoort suffered a nervous collapse as a result of this, and Herman Melville had to leave for Pittsfield "to run the farm." Like Ishmael, Melville was from an "old established family in the land" and was forced by economic circumstances, to take up, among other things, a poorly paying job "lording it as a country schoolmaster" before eventually shipping out to sea. To add to this, Ishmael has also worked as a "stone-mason," . . . "a great digger of ditches, canals and wells, wine-vaults, cellars, and cisterns of all sorts" (p. 349).

There is an almost contemporary account of a young man, from an upper middle-class background, who was forced into a sea-faring life due to the financial ruin of his family. His name is Philip C. Buskirk, and his plight uncannily mirrors that of the young Herman Melville. Like Melville's father, who died, leaving the family in dire financial straits that were compounded by the Bank Panic of 1837, Buskirk's father committed suicide by shooting himself in the head after he was financially ruined in 1845.[315] Buskirk was forced that year to leave Georgetown College and enter the US Marine Corps at the age of twelve, and became a sailor, keeping a meticulous diary throughout his tenure. Buskirk's diary dramatizes the unsupportable clash between his middle class upbringing and this life with the working class sailors on board ship, whose sexual practices – most especially their homosexual liaisons (which were quite common and were not punished by the officers who could otherwise be sadistic) – became both the occasion for his sexual awakening and an ongoing jeremiad against masturbation, "the withering hand of

[314] Parker, pg. 113.
[315] B. R. Burg and Buskirk Philip C. Van, *An American Seafarer in the Age of Sail: The Erotic Diaries of Philip C. Van Buskirk, 1851-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pg. 3.

disease," and sodomy that lasted for nineteen years. [316]

While Melville's ribald sense of humor, exemplified in his chapter, "The Cassock," about the whale's penis ("what a candidate for an archbishoprick," he exclaims), and Whitmanesque valorization of mutual masturbation seem to be light-years away from Buskirk's grim Puritanical jeremiads against the solitary vice, it is important to note that Ishmael employs a Gothic narrative mode, filled with dread and despair, in order to describe his emotions concerning Ahab. These have a parallel not only in Buskirk, but, as we have seen, in the innumerable Jacksonian jeremiads against masturbation. Buskirk's narrative suggests the very real sense of terror that ship-board sexuality could evoke in a middle-class sensibility. This is a feature of Melville's novel that is often underestimated. It also suggests the way that a middle-class sensibility could maintain its sense of class identity through the structure of a jeremiad against masturbation in the midst of a varied career.

On board the Pequod, Ishmael receives the pittance of the "seven hundred and seventy-seventh" (pg. 76) lay as a common sailor. While Ishmael claims that "common sailor" is precisely the job that he relishes most, it is also quite clear that he would never have been in a position to take such a lowly position had he not already been compromised financially. "It touches one's sense of honour," he admits, "and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it" (pg. 20).

On shore, Ishmael is subject to what he calls "hypos," (pg. 18) a combination of depression and nervous anxiety, that cause him to become filled with grim apprehensions of death:

> whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily

[316] Burg, pg. 31.

> pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet . . .
>
> (pg. 18)

The sea is hardly an adventure for him, in the conventional sense of the term. It is a substitute for "pistol and ball" (pg. 18) – an image that fuses suicide with an explicit suggestion of sexual aggression turned against the self. In his onshore life, Ishmael is threatened by a void that is impossible to extricate from the capitalist alienation and economic insecurity that characterize his position in antebellum society. In this respect Ishmael resembles the "pallid hopelessness" of Bartleby the Scrivener, the subordinate clerk in the "Dead Letter office in Washington." Ishmael laments that "all landsmen" share a plight similar to Bartleby's: their "week days" are "pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?" (p. 19).

Melville's paragraph about the ill-fated blacksmith, who shares Bartleby's nihilism, could just as easily have been written about Ishmael:

> Death seems the only desirable sequel for a career like this; but Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored; therefore, to the death-longing eyes of such men, who still have left in them some interior compunctions against suicide, does the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean alluringly spread forth his whole plain of unimaginable, taking terrors, and wonderful, new-life adventures; and from the hearts of infinite Pacifics . . .
>
> (pg. 369)

What Ishmael flees is a kind of living death on shore. That living death is poised between the oppression of an impersonal industrialized economy and the haunting prospect that such prosperity as can be won is, in fact, merely an illusion that will disintegrate.

The impossible burden of self-reliant manhood, which defined virility based upon the ownership of property in a world in which fortunes were made and lost

with frightening rapidity, was, for Ishmael, compensated for by a Gothic masculine persona characterized by histrionic, mercurial passivity. Despite the fact that this persona evokes perverse sexuality, it functions, paradoxically, as a form of identity politics that solidifies rather than subverting American self-reliance. Its very descent into abjection and Gothic excess evokes pity and solidarity rather than contempt, and it feeds budding capitalist ideology rather than subverting it.

As such, Ishmael's entrance into the underworld of what David Anthony calls "debtor masculinity" is both a vehicle for exploration of the perverse sexuality that so appalled the moral reformers of the antebellum era and it is also a story of his purification from this sexuality.[317] Like Hester, Ishmael's quest is to learn what he calls "attainable felicity" that is conspicuously "not" . . . "anywhere in the intellect or the fancy," but in "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country" (pg. 323). Such felicity will purge Ishmael of his own Young Goodman Brown type communion of evil, embodied in Ahab.

Such a narrative structure is consistent with the way that Americans attempt to dispense with Shakespearean perversity – particularly in *Macbeth*, but also with *Hamlet, Othello,* and *King Lear* – though *Moby-Dick* is, as I have argued, the most heroic attempt to do so. The novel presents Ishmael with the project of finding a solution for the haunted world of Shakespearean tragedy and, in the process, exorcising Shakespearean perversity, and at the same time, presenting a vision of middle class America redeemed by a unique form of evasive identity politics. Ishmael, like Hester, is the American pervert who has made good. He has, ostensibly, exorcised the anti-social aspect of his perversion, figured in Ahab, and gone on to become incorporated into the status quo, as a hero of progressive

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[317] D. Anthony, "Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic," *American Literature* 76, no. 4 (2004).

American middle class values. Ishmael is the precursor of American progress, as signified by gay marriage, and the right of homosexuals to enter the military.

MAW AND GULF

And yet, Melville's heroic attempt at containment is undermined at every turn by his uncanny ability to animate the void, which culminates in the dramatic reproduction of Shakespearean perversity in the "Whiteness of The Whale" chapter. It is the tension between two opposite impulses: the valiant effort at containment through the perverse jeremiad and the contaminating dread of perverse reading that gives *Moby-Dick* such a terrible power to communicate the complexities of America's response to Shakespearean perversity.

The "Counterpane" flashback occurs during Ishmael's disquieting and ultimately smolderingly homoerotic stay at the Spouter Inn with the Queequeg, the Cannibal and South Pacific islander from Kokovoco. Ishmael falls asleep in Queequeg's arms, and awakens with his eerily tattooed hand on the quilt next to him. The nightmare image dissolves into an image of democratic homoerotic fraternity, reminiscent of Whitman.

Queequeg's hand, though, recalls, for Ishmael, a childhood punishment he received from his stepmother for "cutting up some caper or other," he thinks vaguely that it was "trying to crawl up the chimney." Several critics have pointed out the phallic imagery of the chimney, and the fact that it evokes "another sexual crime, linked to darkness and dirt," (p. 78, Martin) namely masturbation – though

the sexual frisson with Queequeg clearly evokes sodomy for Ishmael as well. Melville later made abundantly clear that he understood the phallic potential of the chimney metaphor in his short-story, "I And My Chimney." This early childhood image of the sooty chimney is complimented by Queequego's phallic "ebony idol," Yojo, that is compared quite explicitly later to the whale's penis in "The Cassock." Ishmael's step-mother does not beat him, but locks him in his room for sixteen hours on the longest day of the year:

> Instantly I felt a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but *a supernatural hand* seemed placed in mine. My arm hung over the counterpane, and the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or *phantom*, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bed-side. For what seemed *ages piled on ages*, I lay there, *frozen* with the most *awful fears*, not daring to drag away my hand; yet ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the *horrid spell* would be broken.
>
> (pg. 37)

As Paul Brodkorb argues, the insubstantial, beckoning presence of the "supernatural hand," mirrors the boundless phantom of the whale that compels Ahab's monomaniacal quest.

Ishmael's recollection of that phantom hand, on the eve of his journey with Ahab vividly hints at the "supernatural soliciting" of Macbeth when he is granted the title of Thane of Cawdor, as prophesied by the witches. This isn't surprising, as Ishmael has set up the Spouter Inn with allusions to the witches in *Macbeth*. As he is staring at the large oil painting "so besmoked and every way defaced" that it was only through "diligent study" that it appeared that an ambitious young artist had, "in the time of the New England hags" . . . "endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched" (pg. 26). Among the many metaphors Ishmael conjures to evoke the painting, it is described as a "blasted heath." The "blasted heath," (I. iii. 76) in *Macbeth*, we will recall, is the place where the "imperfect speakers" . . . "so wild and withered in their attire, / That look not like the inhabitants of the earth" (I. iii. 39-

40) first greet Macbeth and Banquo.

The "supernatural hand" picks up the *Macbeth* imagery, evoking precisely the moment that Macbeth yields to the temptation to murder Duncan. Macbeth responds in a way that will be mirrored in Ishmael's narrative, with histrionic passivity and dread: "why do I yield to that suggestion (temptation) / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature?" (Mac. I. iii. 133-136). Macbeth does not struggle with temptation. Rather, he inadvertently "yield,"[s] and is genuinely shocked at himself, as if the one succumbing to temptation were an alien being. This is also the moment in *Macbeth* in which the world of dream and imagination is infiltrated by the ontology of Augustinian non-being: "nothing is but what is not" (I. iii. 141). As G. Wilson Knight observes succinctly, "reality and unreality change places."[318]

Likewise, in *Moby-Dick*, the "supernatural hand" acquires the metaphysical heft of Augustinian non-being while, at the same time, carrying the sexual connotation of masturbatory desire. It is the first hint of the ontology of Augustinian non-being, and it is linked directly to Ishmael's early sexual transgression. As Brodkorb argues:

> the supernatural hand as it is experienced *grows out of nothing visible*, absolute strangeness, *nothing itself.* In short, the earlier event contains the essence of the later: if it is characteristic of the strange to be only relatively explicable, it is characteristic of nothingness to resist any explanation whatever. Nothingness: the void, absence, non-meaning, nonform, noncoherence – this is what secretly underlies the present experience of Queequeg's arm concealed beneath the present's merely relative strangeness.
>
> (pg. 111)

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, criminal agency is associated with "offence's gilded hand" that may "shove by the justice" (III. iii. 38); In Clarence's dream in *Richard III*

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[318] G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy, with Three New Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pg. 153.

fortelling Richard's betrayal, Richard "struck me, tipping Clarence into the "tumbling billows of the main" (I. iv. 19-20) where he imagines himself drowning; but, it is in *Macbeth* that the "hand" imagery is most urgent and most intimately arrestingly connected to personal agency. Macbeth's curious phrase, "the eye wink at the hand" (I. iv. 53), suggests an unsettling conspiracy that prevents the *eye* from "knowing" the "deed" of the hand. At the same time, Macbeth's "wink" also suggests a child's fear of a hand that has become, suddenly, utterly alien and seems to be acting independently – as Ishmael's disembodied "supernatural hand" does.

And the hand imagery, as it develops in *Moby-Dick* leads again back to *Macbeth* and questions about agency and ontology:

> When by chance these precious parts in a nursing whale are cut by the hunter's lance, the mother's pouring milk and blood rivallingly discolour the sea for rods. The milk is very sweet and rich; it has been tasted by man; it might do well with strawberries. When overflowing with mutual esteem, the whales salute MORE HOMINUM.
>
> (pg. 303)

In this passage from the later chapter, "The Grand Armada," the sharp disjunction between Ishmael's amiable tone and the "mother's pouring milk and blood" that "discolour the sea for rods" recalls Ishmael's childhood experience of the "supernatural hand," his own agency, as alien. It continues the allusion to *Macbeth*'s most famous hand imagery, mixing his hallucination with the milk of human kindness: "This my hand will rather / the multitudinous seas incarnadine, / making the green one red" (II. ii. 61-3).

Macbeth's hand, staining the sea "red" suggests guilt, but it also suggests, as with Ishmael's "supernatural hand," *disassociation* from guilt. There is also a disturbing disjunction between the jaunty tone and the allusion to the English naval victory against the Spanish in "The Grand Armada." The *Macbeth* allusion, though, suggests a more deeply agonized subjection. Is it guilt at buried agency? Or is a

more difficult problem surfacing within Ishmael's *Macbeth* allusions?

For Brodtkorb, Ishmael's "supernatural hand" is a dreadful image that isn't just connected to, but *emanates from* the tormented boredom that he experiences as punishment by his step-mother. For Brodtkorb, the dynamic between Ishmael's childhood boredom and the experience of dread *mirrors* his adult dynamic between the emotions of despair and dread. As Kierkegaard argues, the dialectical movement between boredom or despair and dread is associated with the phenomenological experience of *non-being*. As such, it is intimately connected to the Augustinian problem of the perverse error that drives the will away from being towards non-being. Regarding the alluring fascination of dread and its relation to sin, Kierkegaard writes:

> Dread is an alien power which lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself away, nor has the will to do so; for one fears, but what one fears one desires.[319]

As Kierkegaard understood, dread makes a guilty person sympathetic because he or she is genuinely frightened by the deed that tempts them; yet, it also intensifies the temptation and contributes to the subjective feeling that transgression is inevitable:

> . . . he who through dread becomes guilty is innocent, for it was not himself but dread, an alien power, which laid hold of him, a power he did not love but dreaded - and yet he is guilty, for he sank in the dread which he loved even while he feared it.[320]

It is the psychological dynamic between the state of emptiness and despair and fascinated dread defined by Ishmael's encounter, as a child, with the "supernatural hand," that characterizes Ishmael's haunted allusions to *Macbeth*. In addition to Ishmael's supernatural solicitation, what evokes the mood of dread is his choice of vocabulary, a vocabulary of incantation that is intimately linked to *Moby-Dick*'s

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[319] Quoted in King-Kok Cheung, "Shakespeare and Kierkegaard: 'Dread' in Macbeth," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1984): pg. 431.
[320] Cheung, pg. 432.

Macbeth allusions. The hand is "supernatural;" it casts a "horrid spell;" it causes an "awful fear": Ishmael is "frozen" . . . for "ages piled on ages." Ishmael's psychological response to the "supernatural hand" will be alluded to again and again throughout *Moby-Dick*. And Ishmael's particular psychological dialectic, between dread and despair, is intimately connected with questions of agency that are directly related to *Macbeth*'s theatrical space of tortured, despairing confusion about ontology and epistemology.

Yet, there are more troubling implications to Ishmael's "supernatural hand" episode. For, as Ishmael's hand imagery develops, in the novel, it is intimately intertwined with its deeper philosophical speculation about ontology and epistemology. As Richard Moore writes:

> Ishmael goes to sea, in Peleg's words, 'to find out by experience what whaling is' (p. 71), and he takes the fact that he has 'had to do with whales with these *visible hands*' (p. 123) as exclusive warrant to speak the truth of the experience of whales and whaling.[321]

For Ishmael, it is the empirical experience of his "visible hands" that gives him the authority to speak the truth, not just about whaling, but epistemology and its relation to ontology. On one level, Ishmael's "visible hands" simply remind us that he is testifying to an adventure that he has *already experienced*. Yet, in an important way, Ishmael's "visible hands" evoke a Lockean epistemology of empirical experience – even as the "supernatural hand" suggests a dreadful, impalpable, alien fatality controlling events that controverts Ishmael's reassuringly robust Lockean epistemology. Ishmael's agonized space vacillating between the "visible hand" and the "supernatural hand" evokes a dramatic sequence in *Macbeth* which transfigures the empirical truth of the senses into a supernatural one. Macbeth addresses the

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[321] Richard S. Moore, *That Cunning Alphabet: Melville's Aesthetics of Nature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), pg. 82.

dagger:

> Thou marshall'st me *the way that I was* going,
> And such an instrument I was to use. -
> Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest;
> (II. i. 42)

Macbeth's surreal, almost oxymoronic use of the verb "marshallst," to lead, with its military connotations of discipline and obedience, in contrast to the past progressive, "the way that I was going," which suggests that Macbeth is following the course of a plan he himself has made in the past. Is he commanded by the dagger to murder Duncan, or is he carrying out a premeditated plan? The ambiguity suggests a fundamental inability to *know* the status of his action. It is the supernatural dagger, after all, that is seen through the sense that traditionally delivers the most trustworthy empirical information, "the eyes." Yet, Ishmael might say that Macbeth's empirical experience of the dagger is precisely what calls into question the validity of empiricism. Does the dagger, then, emerge from an ideal realm that calls Macbeth's murder into being? This cannot be certain either, for Macbeth recognizes that the dagger might be a result of "the bloody business" . . . "a false creation of the heat-oppressed brain." Macbeth's bubble of confusion occurs because the empirical and the ideal are *both* called into question. Referring to Ishmael, Brodtkorb calls this an "irony that conceals its direction of reference." It is worth quoting Brodtkorb in full on this crucial concept:

> . . . rhetorical irony presents without comment a contrariety between a phenomenon in the real or fictive worlds (or both) and what is said about it. Such irony has two broad purposes: to undercut the phenomenon, or, by silently noting the falsity of what the speaker says, to undercut the speaker's judgment. But Ishmaelean irony often blurs the necessary contrariety, because what is said is about phenomena that are in themselves ambiguous. Radically divergent opinions of them may be held by intelligent men, with the result that virtually anything Ishmael says about such phenomena will

strike certain readers as plausible and others as not.[322]

Using the example of Macbeth, one could simply claim, as Macbeth does, that he is fooling himself: "It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes." Yet, if we accept, as Brodtkorb would, that the dagger represents an accurate phenomenological account of Macbeth's state of mind, it is impossible to determine whether Macbeth's senses lie, spurred on by the "bloody business," or if they tell the truth. As *Moby-Dick* implies, an even darker irony might be at work. Neither version of events might be true - and Macbeth's dagger might actually be a "mystic sign" of an even darker principle, an ontology of "non-being."

Non-being, Brodtkorb contends, extends to every aspect of Ishmael's irony – so that his parables do not imply a moral, but, rather the negation of a moral. This leads Ishmael to a place of dangerous Shakespearean negation that could, conceivably, turn the orthodox structure of the perverse upside down.

In "The Mast Head," for example, the hypothetical stander on the mast-head drops, due to his pantheist dreaminess, through Descartian vortices into the sea:

> There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from *the inscrutable tides of God*. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (pg. 136)

As we will observe in a later chapter examining Dickinson's lyric poetry, Ishmael's use of a hypothetical "mast-head-stander" as a figure in his parable produces a space of mobile fantasy. A hypothetical figure exists in what I will call in *Macbeth* a

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[322] Paul Brodtkorb, *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pg. 2.

space of "not" or non-being. It is an *absent presence*. He is a figure generalized out of Ishmael's experience. The image of the material reality of a character with a specific history would anchor the figure. With a hypothetical figure, though, the aggressive, threatening fantasy of a being that, as Ahab says, "puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask" (pg. 140), suddenly seems weirdly plausible.

In a hypothetical example, one is in a place of *non-being* , where character is removed and the ultimate state of truth is indeterminate. Are the Descartian vortices that claim the mast-head stander a kind of Carlylean justice acting *through the mask*, appealing to a higher reality that the mast-head stander has, somehow, insulted with his dreaminess? Melville uses the clinical scientific term, "Descartian vortices" to suggest that the "summer sea" is merely an empirical reality. Yet the image is of the mast-head stander "hovering" over the Descartian vortices, as if over the jaws prepared to *swallow* the mast-head stander. As Richard Moore observes, Ishmael's "broaching of the Cartesian vortex" has critical implications for "both metaphysical and epistemological fronts":

> the fall from the masthead exposes at once the disunity of the soul and the body's exigencies of survival and also the horrific possibility that the material world is itself primarily a spiritless, mechanistic void.[323]

At the end of the novel, the white whale will surface through the mask of the sea to annihilate the *Pequod*'s "only-god-bullying hull" and drag it to the bottom of the ocean:

> And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round *in one vortex*, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight.
>
> (pg. 426)

[323] Moore, pg. 117.

Is the *Pequod* dragged down by an avenging god – or does the vortex of *nonbeing* simply swallow it? Ishmael's irony makes it impossible to tell. The result, though, is to inculcate the reader into the terrible sense that non-being itself is a persecuting figure. It becomes what, in Dickinson criticism, is called a "tableau vivant." Ishmael calls it "whiteness." In *Macbeth*'s terms, the ideality that swallows the mast-head stander is like the "maw and gulf of the ravin'd salt sea shark[s]" (IV i. 23-4).

Though they are not explicitly perverse, Ishamel's ironic parables *already produce* the dynamic of passive aggressive fantasy exemplified by the truly fertile and subversive perverse reading that Dickinson will develop.

QUEEQUEG AS PROSPERO

Yet, Ishmael is not left immured in a nightmare. For, Queequeg's fraternal hand foreshadows the "Squeeze of the Hand" chapter in which the squeezing by the sailors of spermaceti becomes a Whitmanesque symbol of fraternal democracy. Paradoxically, it is mutual masturbation that evokes the quintessentially American symbols of the "attainable felicity" of hearth and home. If the solitary vice evokes a community of evil, such as Ishmael experiences in relation to Ahab, a "mystical sympathy" that, at the same time, intensifies his own isolation and bars any mutual recognition, how is it that mutual masturbation can carry utopian ideals?

Melville's sexual politics, in this respect, can seem bewildering – and have, in my view, frequently been misread. What is important to remember is that just as

prostitution was regarded as *the* social vice, masturbation was regarded as the *solitary* vice. Melville establishes a clear distinction between social and antisocial desire.

As bizarre as it may seem, given the sexual prejudices of the time period, he clearly suggests that deleterious consequences of homoerotic mutual masturbation are mitigated by its fraternal and social nature, whereas Ishmael's *solitary* vice is the counterpart of Ahab's dangerous, narcissistic, "self-consuming" and "misanthrop[ic]" (pg. 326) desire for conquest. While the moralists of the time would have rejected Melville's sexual categories, they were perfectly consistent with the antebellum logic which pitted constructive and social desires against antisocial desires. It is not ironic then that Melville evokes "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country" in the same passage that he celebrates "the milk and sperm of human kindness." Such an equivalence would not have gotten past the censors, if it was stated explicitly, but it was perfectly consistent with the cultural logic that defined perverse sexual desire.

It is important to add that Queequeg's fraternal hand initiates another powerful Shakespearean theme in the novel. Queequeg has, rightly, been called the "reconciling principle" . . . "to offset the Romantic quest of Ahab."[324] Not only are Queequeg and Ishmael symbolically wedded in "The Counterpane" chapter, they become a kind of married couple through Queequeg's job, which requires him to insert the blubber hook into the whale's back. In order to carry out this duty, Queequeg and Ishmael must be tied together by a "monkey-rope," which binds their fates together:

> So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honour

[324] Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pg. 90.

> demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake. So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed.
> (pg. 255)

The "Siamese ligature" represents the mutual responsibility between people very different and, perhaps, quite far apart, that is the material counterpart of the fraternal "milk and sperm of human kindness." This is precisely the bond that Ahab curses when he must rely on the carpenter for his new ivory leg:

> Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness . . . I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books. I am so rich, I could have given bid for bid with the wealthiest Praetorians at the auction of the Roman empire (which was the world's); and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with.
> (pg. 360)

Ishmael's fraternal bond with Queequeg suggests the utopian possibility of regeneration through kinship. Yet, it is important to remember that Melville does not evoke revolutionary politics through this bond, but the familiar tropes of the "attainable felicity" of the middle class home. Also Ishmael's bond with queer Queequeg is on sea: on land, it is "country matters" (Ham. III. ii. 125) that count most.

Steve Mentz is right to associate Queequeg with Shakespeare's late romances, specifically *The Tempest* and *Pericles*. Mentz reads Queequeg, most persuasively, as a figure analogous to Marina, "a maritime human," born of the sea, who is part of a narrative of resurrection.[325] This is most powerfully illustrated in Queequeg's feat of "obstetrics" in "delivery of Tashtego" from the head of a sperm whale that has plunged overboard. Likewise, it is Queequeg's coffin that saves Ishmael from the vortex of the *Pequod* – and it is also notable that "resurrection" is what Ishmael awaits, as a child, when he is locked in his bedroom for sixteen hours

[325] Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (London: Continuum, 2009), pg. 69.

by his stepmother.

Yet Queequeg is a mystical figure with a quasi-magical power, like that of Prospero. As such, Queequeg embodies that utopian strain from Shakespeare's romances that we discovered in Emerson. Recall, for example, that Prospero possesses the power to resurrect the dead:

> graves at my command
> Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent art
> (V. i. 48-50)

In "Queequeg in his Coffin," Queequeg takes on some of Prospero's symbolic power to command the dead to rise. He is stricken by a terrible fever and wastes away to a shadow of himself. He even orders a coffin made for him. Yet he rallies, not out of a natural process, but through a mysterious act of will:

> They asked him, then, whether to live or die was a matter of his own sovereign will and pleasure. He answered, certainly. In a word, it was Queequeg's conceit, that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort.
>
> (pg. 366)

Ishmael's power to deliver Tashtego from death in the head of a sperm whale; his power to resurrect himself from certain death; and his fraternal hand that effects Ishmael's "resurrection" twice, once from the nightmarish solipsism of the "phantom hand," brought on by his stepmother's punishment, and from the colossal wreck of the *Pequod* precipitated by Ahab's quest, gives him a quasi-magical power that hints at Prospero's. Remember, for example, that Queequeg's "tattooing" is the work "of a departed prophet and seer of his island":

> who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold …
>
> (pp. 366-7)

Queequeg's very tattoos recall Emerson's phrase in *Nature*: "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put."[326] If the Prospero-like "prophet" and "seer" who wrote the hieroglyphics on Queequeg's body can – as Emerson claimed to be able to - read the mysterious cipher with its "complete theory of the heavens and earth," it is Queequeg who has internalized this wisdom in the novel. Yet, as we have seen, Queequeg's fraternal hand does not lead to a politics of revolution, but to the accommodation of "attainable felicity." It doesn't lead to homoerotic union between the two, but to Queequeg's death. It doesn't lead to a reconciliation with Ahab's deviant desire, but to a disavowal of it. Melville, at the end of *Moby-Dick* can write, "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb."[327] He can write those words largely because he has displaced Ishmael's perverse sexuality onto Ahab and has given the queer Cannibal Queequeg the project of rehabilitating Ishmael's wounded heterosexual masculinity.

Yet as compelling as the Gothic *Macbeth* narrative is in *Moby-Dick*, a complete reading of it leads to a blind alley. As the novel progresses, it becomes less evocative and more of a contrived Gothic apparatus. Ahab's demonic Parsee companion, the mysterious Fedalah, who evokes the "ghostly aboriginalness of earth's primal generations" (pg. 191) leads him through a series of all too predictable prophesies that echo those of the witches in *Macbeth*. The most spectacular prophesy is that only hemp can kill Ahab:

> "Drive, drive in your nails, oh ye waves! to their utmost heads drive them in! ye but strike a thing without a lid; and no coffin and no hearse can be mine: – hemp only can kill me! Ha! ha!"
> (pg. 422)

Of course, it is the hempen harpoon line that seizes Ahab around the neck "and

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[326] *Nature,* in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Joel Porte, *Essays & Lectures: Nature, Addresses and Lectures ; Essays, First and Second Series; Representative Men; English Traits; The Conduct of Life* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), pg. 7.
[327] Letter To Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 17, 1851, in: Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pg. 545.

voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone" (pg. 422). This rather contrived ending to the *Macbeth* allusions, though, is, in my view, an evasive blind alley. It attempts to distract with *Macbeth's* Gothic trappings from the animated void of "Whiteness" that Melville could not exorcise. Melville's Shakespeare allusions lead us to another massive struggle to impose the perverse jeremiad, and, ultimately, to an evasion and displacement of Ishmael's deviant sexuality upon Queequeg and Ahab, concealed by the novel's spectacular conclusion.

THE DEADLY SPACE BETWEEN

Melville's struggle to impose the perverse jeremiad on his wayward Shakespearean identifications leads us to *Othello* and the "The Try Works" chapter, but to understand how courageously evasive the "The Try Works" chapter is, we must first grapple with *Billy Budd*, the novel he wrote thirty seven years later, just prior to his death, in which Melville addresses the newly emergent perverse sexual category, the homosexual. What we find is a specific pattern of cunning rhetorical evasion that recurs again in "The Try Works."

Although the "homosexual," did not exist as a sexological classification when Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*, it certainly did when he wrote *Billy Budd* – and he embodied one in the figure of the novel's charismatic villain, Claggart:

> But for the adequate comprehending of Claggart by a normal nature, these hints are insufficient. To pass from a normal nature to him one must cross "the deadly space between." And this is best done by indirection.
>
> Long ago an honest scholar my senior, said to me in reference to one who

> like himself is now no more, a man so unimpeachably respectable that against him nothing was ever openly said tho' among the few something was whispered, "Yes, X – – is a nut not to be cracked by the tap of a lady's fan. You are aware that I am the adherent of no organized religion much less of any philosophy built into a system. Well, for all that, I think that to try and get into X – – , enter his labyrinth, and get out again, without a clue derived from some source other than what is known as knowledge of the world – that were hardly possible, at least for me."[328]

This line, about the villain Claggart, exhibits, as Eve Sedgwick has observed, a striking ambiguity.[329] Ewan Fernie draws on Sedgwick for his richly detailed close-reading of Claggart's compelling and possessive desire.[330] My interest, though, is to zero in on the rhetoric of evasion in the above passage. For it is not simply the nature of "the homosexual" that is at issue here, but the "indirection" with which such information can be communicated to the reader. On one level, the difference between a "normal nature" and that of Claggart is depicted, evoking Thomas Campbell's line from "Battle of the Baltic" to depict "the deadly space between" two warships. The line also evokes, for Melville, Milton's phrase "dreadful interval" (VI. 105) for the distance between Heaven and Hell in the battle between the angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The first paragraph suggests a communication so fissile that it must be conveyed via "indirection." However, the second paragraph introduces the alternate figure of those who have "knowledge of the world." For these figures, X (knowledge of whom is so quarantined that he cannot even be named) is the familiar punch-line of a bawdy sexual joke: he is a "nut not to be cracked by the tap of a lady's fan." Yet, again, this atmosphere of jovial familiarity with X is undercut by

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[328] Herman Melville and Harrison Hayford, *Pierre, Or, The Ambiguities ; Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile ; The Piazza Tales ; The Confidence-man: His Masquerade ; Uncollected Prose ; Billy Budd, Sailor: (an inside Narrative)* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), pg. 1382.

[329] Eve Kosofsky. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 98-100.

[330] Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 201-207.

the image of the "labyrinth." If one is not properly initiated into the "knowledge of the world," one might "enter" but implicitly one might never "get out again." In other words, without the proper inoculation, one might be irreversibly corrupted by the "labyrinth" presented by Claggart's sexuality. Yet, to gain "knowledge of the world" requires the danger of placing oneself at risk of perversion by that very knowledge. For the reader, then, who cannot be trusted with the dangerous communication, the only answer is the "indirection" of a self-authorizing code. The initiated will smile knowingly – catching the jovial pun – but the dangerous knowledge will be inaccessible, hermetically sealed from those not eligible for the knowledge.

What Melville is attempting to ward off here is the suspicion that his purpose, as an author, is the transformation of the presumably "normal nature" of his reader into a perverse one. The dangerous potential is for the reader to traverse the "dreadful interval," the "deadly space between" heaven and hell – and to become immured in the hell of homosexuality forever.

Like the perverse knowledge of homosexuality, Ahab's monomania is specifically described as being a threat to Ishmael, both intellectual and moral. In "The Try-Works" chapter, the *Pequod* is described rushing into the darkness on her quest:

> freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul.
>
> (pg. 327)

In a passage that foreshadows the description of Claggart and recalls the description of Jonah in his attempt to flee from God, Ishmael describes his own perversion by the "monomaniac commander":

> Lo! in my brief sleep I had turned myself about, and was fronting the ship's

> stern, with my back to her prow and the compass. In an instant I faced back, just in time to prevent the vessel from flying up into the wind, and very probably capsizing her. How glad and how grateful the relief from this unnatural hallucination of the night, and the fatal contingency of being brought by the lee!
>
> (pg. 327-8)

Like Jonah, who attempts to flee from God, Ishmael is caught in a strange conundrum while steering the ship. He is almost possessed by the "hell" – lost in the "labyrinth" of Ahab's perversion, never to be extricated again. The passage almost turns into a repetition of the homily by Father Mapple, who tells the story of Jonah, who, in fleeing from God, comes to repent after realizing the "crooked chambers of his soul." Yet, in Melville's earlier novel, the author rejects the Augustinian binary view that he later embraces in his characterization of Claggart in *Billy Budd*.

Here, Melville voices the traditional Christian rhetoric that "the fire" represented by Captain Ahab's "monomaniac commander's soul" . . . "invert[s]" and "deaden"[s]. Just as Ishmael, while he has dozed and lapsed into a dream, has steered the ship off course, so he has been perverted by Ahab. Here, quite contrary to a "knowledge of the world" that ends in a bawdy pun, Melville dramatizes precisely the "dreadful interval," the "deadly space between" that he avoids describing in *Billy Budd* – that terminates in his "unnatural hallucination." Earlier, Ishmael describes the ascendency of Ahab over his soul, echoing the phrase "greedy ear" from *Othello*:

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With *greedy ears* I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge.
>
> (my italics, pg. 152)

In that passage from *Othello*, Desdemona is impressed by Othello's adventures:

> Wherein antres vast and deserts idle,

> Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
> It was my hint to speak – such was my process –
> And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
> And the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline;
> But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
> Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
> She'd come again, and with *a greedy ear*
> Devour up my discourse.
> (italics added, I. iii. 154-163)

In Ishmael's passage, which begins his recounting of the lore of Moby-Dick, there is a hint that he becomes a Desdemona captivated by Othello's stories of monsters, "the Cannibals" and the "Anthropophagi." More, Melville exhibited an explicit interest in the notion elaborated in *Othello*, that describes the contamination of "Dangerous conceits." Of the two passages he scored in *Othello*, Iago's boast in the soliloquy following his instructions to Emilia to steal Desdemona's handkerchief is one of them:

> This may do something.
> The Moor already changes with my poisons.
> Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons,
> Which, at the first, are scarce found to distaste;
> But, with a little act upon the blood,
> Burn like the mines of sulphur. – I did say so;
> (III. iii. 361-365)

If Ishmael is a Desdemona to Ahab's Othello, he is also potentially an Othello tormented by the "dangerous conceit" of an Iago, or he might be a Hamlet maddened into "oaths of violence and revenge" (pg. 152) by a potentially malignant "king's ghost in supernatural distress" (pg. 160).

Later in the "The Try-Works," Ishmael refers "indirectly" to his temptation by Ahab through the allegory of the inverted tiller. The "unaccountable drowsiness" he describes recalls the earlier parable of the Mast-head stander whose metaphysical dreams precipitate in his plunge "through Descartian Vortices" to the sea – never to

be heard of again. Far from "knowledge of the world" being something dreadful and jovial, in *Moby-Dick* Ishmael's imbibing of Ahab's knowledge of the perverse leads not towards annihilation or hell, but towards the wisdom of "*un*christian Soloman." Ishmael's commands to "Look not too long into the face of the fire, O man!" give way to a series of negative locutions that certainly present a masterful "labyrinth" of perverse "indirection":

> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth.
>
> (pg. 328)

The man who is not like "unchristian Solomon" is described as "undeveloped." Yet through guarded indirection, Melville here continues to undercut the words of the homily – valorizing the very "unchristian" wisdom that he ostensibly warns against:

> But even Solomon, he says, "the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain" (I.E., even while living) "in the congregation of the dead." Give not thyself up, then, to fire, *lest it invert thee, deaden thee*; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.
>
> (pg. 328)

In an even more cryptic paragraph, Solomon is used now ostensibly to admonish against "wandering out of the way of understanding" . . . into "the congregation of the dead." Yet, like the "man of the world," he asserts, paradoxically, that he has both been "deadened" and "inverted" at one time, but is now mobile – a denizen of both worlds - able to extricate himself from the "blackest gorges." Rather than becoming inextricably lost in a "labyrinth," he becomes "invisible" . . . "in the sunny spaces." The negations, reversals, and paradoxes of this passage foreshadow the duplicity that we find in Melville's depiction of Claggart.

They also position Ishmael in relation to Ahab in a way that is remarkably similar to Melville's later description of the reader in relation to Claggart. He is potentially "deadened" and "inverted," but in crossing the "dread interval," Ishmael's guarded, cryptic language oddly extracts Ahab's wisdom, while leaving his perversion exiled in the "blackest gorges." This cryptic language, with its richly balanced paradoxes, could suggest a courageous, humanistic psychological victory over Ahab's demagoguery, but, it also suggests something more dubious: Ishmael's *conversion.*

The reversals, negation, and paradoxes suggest an Ahab whose influence within Ishmael has been sieved of its toxic influences. As with the successful "man of the world," Ishmael has rendered innocuous Ahab's threatening toxins. Of course, Ahab is a fanatic, but Ishmael presents us a false choice: the fanatic or the man of "attainable felicity," the immaculate conformist Starbuck or the monomaniacal Ahab, the "blackest gorges" or the "sunny spaces." The reader is forced to traverse the "deadly space between" these radical polar opposites. John Bryant regards this as a position that interrogates ideology, but I suspect it is a position that attempts heroically to impose the perverse jeremiad that Ishmael's deft irony has called into question. It is a dynamic that, as in the example of *Billy Budd* and Ahab, displaces aggression onto a scapegoat "tempter," and requires sacrificial violence – rather than absorbing aggression into the self.

While Melville's imagery wreaks havoc on the binary of "straight" and "perverse," giving us a Solomon who is both admonishing and exemplifying the perverse, he also so structures Ishmael's "coming of age" story in relation to Ahab, making sure to establish a homiletic pattern in which the *Pequod*, captained by Ahab, represents the ship of America's state headed towards Armageddon and Ishmael as

America's potential salvation, so that Ishmael's "development" is to purge Ahab's toxic potential from himself. How else is this realized than through Ishmael, as a tragic dramatist, writing Ahab's spectacular demise? The writer who understood Shakespeare's "terrible" insoluble perversity, performs a sleight of hand, in the service of his Jeremiah persona, writing an ending that releases Ishmael from the terrible burden of Ahab, rather than putting out Ishmael's eyes. He is resurrected from the sea by Queequeg's coffin, but, we recall, the queer Queequeg has gone down into the vortex with Ahab, leaving Ishmael protected by his spirit, but free from the threat of his homoerotic feelings for him. Ahab's ending is a catharsis for the reader, but it is a catharsis in the service of the conversion of Ishmael from the awful threat posed by Ahab and, in a more covert way, Queequeg. Ishmael is transfigured, then, into the immaculate straight hero who fulfills the promise of his name:

> As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.
> (KJ Gen 17:20)

That nation, "multiplying exceedingly," with a "line that stretch[es] out to the crack of doom" (IV. i. 116), Melville hoped, would be America.

APPETITE AND RESISTANCE

And yet . . . While the powerful structuring force of the perverse in *Moby-Dick* is dominant, Melville's attempt to contain Shakespearean perversity is not wholly successful. His recourse to the perverse exceeds the pathological categories of the antebellum era, and opens up a dangerous experiential space of non-being for the reader that has the potential to destroy the structure of disavowal that attempts to contain it. For by evoking Shakespeare so forcefully, Melville also inadvertently reproduces a quasi-dramatic exchange between reader and text that mirrors fundamental elements of Shakespeare's dramaturgy. This engagement is disavowed so successfully that it has led critics themselves into the same process of disavowal that the structure of the perverse itself produces.

The publishing history of *Moby-Dick* makes this structure of disavowal even more apparent. For the closer one reads *Moby-Dick*, the more skeptical one becomes that Ishmael is, indeed, as distinct from Ahab as he claims to be. One central crux in the novel rests in the supposed typographical error in the original printing of *Moby-Dick*, which left Ahab's famous "grassy glades" speech (pg. 373) without quotations. What has baffled critics for two generations is the fact that the speech's attribution is far from certain. Reasoning that the speech is a soliloquy, consistent with those spoken by Ahab, editors have added quotation marks. However, the speech can just as easily be attributed to Ishmael. John Bryant argues that this ambiguity is part of a dialectical tension between Ishmael and Ahab that places the reader in an unresolvable state of tension. Bryant is worth quoting in full:

> Melville could not have foreseen this particular postmodern reading experience, but nevertheless it reinforces the established experience of the novel's revolutionary conditioning of the reader. Tripped up by the text itself, an errant set of quotation marks, and caught in the quandary of having to assign voices to ideas, we find ourselves revolving in and out of variant worlds – pitting Ahab's fears of nihility against Ishmael's faith, the politics of supremacy rooted in sterility against the politics of inclusion, rooted in sexualized community, an ontology of self against other, and the rhetoric of Shakespearean theatrics against the poetics of transcendence. Surely these conflicting ideologies manifest an age of revolution; but the deeper revolution is in the revolving that readers must perform in reading.[331]

Bryant's argument implies that Ishmael's indeterminate identity explodes the structure of the jeremiad, and by extension, the structuring power of the perverse. It does this through a unique and gripping engagement with the reader that prevents him or her from making precisely the move that sets up the perverse structure of disavowal and scapegoating that, as Dollimore argues, feeds the violence of history. Ultimately, I disagree with Bryant. As I have argued at length, the structuring force of Melville's perverse jeremiad is very much anchored in place. It attempts not merely to emulate Shakespeare, but to bury him. I also don't feel that there is any need to postulate Melville as a forebear of postmodernist criticism, though he may indeed be that. I argue that the matrix of Melville's *Macbeth* allusions lead back to an anxious grappling with a volatile use of non-being within Shakespeare's dramaturgy in that play. As Brodkorb argues, Melville experiments with this through Ishmael's ironic parables; however, this irony merges into a gripping dramatic engagement with the reader in the "Whiteness" chapter.

The use of non-being is intimately linked, as Ewan Fernie has shown, with Shakespeare's gripping dramatic engagement with the audience in *Macbeth*. For Macbeth is not only "hollowed out by his demonic behavior," but his "sin remains a sort of supercharged moment of negativity which exceeds all forms of ordinary

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[331] John Bryant, "Moby-Dick as Revolution," ed. Robert S. Levine, in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 88.

existence." [332] Augustinian non-being also functions, as Philip Davis has shown (referring more generally to the underpinning of Shakespeare's dramatic structure), to create spaces of "appetite and resistance," not only between characters on stage, but within the audience itself. Voids open up in *Macbeth* that collapse the distance between the murderous deeds on stage and the audience's imagination. In my view, this is at the ethical core of Melville's Gothic chapter on whiteness, which I have left, thus-far, without comment.

THE WHITENESS OF MACBETH

It is my contention that non-being itself is an animating, dramatic presence in *Macbeth*. This edgy, menacing void creates spaces of "appetite and resistance" which, as I have argued, make audience complicity inescapable.[333] Melville seems to have done the impossible in *Moby-Dick*, which is to extract this absent presence and incorporate it into the dynamics between novel and reader.

The witches in *Macbeth* are essentially *absent presences*: "what *seemed* corporal / melted as breath into the wind;" they make the material seem immaterial: "The earth hath bubbles as the water hath and these are of them" (I. iii. 78-9). As Terry Eagleton writes:

> Androgynous (bearded women), multiple (three-in-one) and 'imperfect speakers', the witches strike at the stable sexual and linguistic forms which the society of the play needs in order to survive . . . firm definitions are dissolved and binary opositions are eroded: fair is foul and foul is fair,

[332] Fernie, pg. 51.
[333] On reader complicity in *Macbeth*, see Ewan Fernie's chapter, "Demonic Macbeth," in *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), pg. 61.

nothing is but what is not.[334]

Yet, the first instance of the dramatic dynamic of perverse reading occurs not when the witches first appear, but when Macbeth first hears that one of their prophesies has come true. He has become Thane of Cawdor:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good: –
> If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man,
> That function is smothered in surmise,
> And *nothing is but what is not.*
> (italics added, I. iii. 129-140)

With those lines, "nothing is but what is not," an extraordinary absent space opens up between Macbeth and an alien part of himself - and between the audience and Macbeth. G. Wilson Knight, as we have already seen, has written of those lines with devastating simplicity: "Reality and unreality change places." Macbeth cries in horror, as he observes himself "yield"[ing] to a temptation ("suggestion") here, that he experiences as fantasy. The "murder" is "smothered" by all of Macbeth's phrases designating it as "fantastical": it is a "surmise"; a "horrid *image,*" "horrible imaginings." This speech reverses our assumption that "function," ("intellectual activity which is revealed in outward conduct") is threatening and "surmise" non-threatening. In fact, in the world of *Macbeth*, the opposite is true. "Surmise" acts with covert violence to "smother" function. Banquo, observing Macbeth in a trance, pointedly, observes: "Look, how our partner's rapt" (I. iii. 142). That word "rapt" perfectly describes the eruption of kinesthetic violence as "unreality" usurps reality.

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[334] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1987), pg. 2.

While it's difficult to deny that the play suggests that Macbeth's habitual method of self-description is a form of self-deceiving equivocation, Macbeth's aggressive fantasy is not so easily isolated and localizable in his character. The play suggests, dramatically, rather than philosophically, the possibility explored by Ishmael that the world itself is haunted not only by an ontological insubstantiality at its core, but by what Malcolm will later call "Confusion"['s] "Masterpiece"(II. iii. 63), the possibility that the perverse aesthetic of non-being is at the heart of the theatrical experience of the play itself.

For Macbeth's speech invites audience and reader fantasy. When Macbeth distances the "murder" from himself, with all of those qualifying phrases, he creates a space for the reader / audience to remove themselves from the murder's reality and identify with it as a voluptuous fantasy. More, while the reversal of the "real" and the "unreal," the disclaimers, and the slippery syntax susceptible to reversal, invite us to toy with the difference between the "thought" of "murder" and the "murder" of a "thought," the space of "not" is so constructed that it opens up a seemingly safe zone for the reader's own passive aggressive fantasies - only simultaneously to infiltrate the reader with a sense of boundless guilt, of an impossible magnitude. So that the abstract "surmise" always potentially threatens to become the active "smother"[er] of the reader.

In the scene in which Lady Macbeth overtly tempts Macbeth to murder Duncan, we find the same perverse reading and mobile fantasy solicited:

MACB. Pr'ythee, peace.
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more, *is none*.

LADY M. *What beast* was't then,
That made you break this enterprise with me?

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And, to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place,
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
> As you have done to this.
>
> (I. vii. 45-59)

Macbeth uses the qualifier, "he who does more is none," in his phrase, "I may do all that may become a man." By using the word "none" or "not-man," Macbeth has implicitly called into question the very stability of the category "man," upon which he is staking his moral ground. At the same time, the space of doubt, signified by the word, "none," creates a minute vacuum, filled, as all such absent spaces are in Shakespeare, with "appetite and resistance."

For Lady Macbeth, augmentation simply means infinite expansion "to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man." Yet, it is precisely "augmentation" that Banquo fears will threaten his honor: "So I lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchised and allegiance clear," (II. i. 26.2-28).

"None" becomes, oddly, a gap that is synonymous with that equivocal space of passive aggressive fantasy where one can become what one is "not." Here is Iago's line, after Othello's transformation into a similar kind of monster, "He is that he is; I may not breathe my censure what he might be; if what he might, *he is not.*" (*Oth.* IV. i. 272-4) It is to experience the horror of a fantasy seduction that reveals oneself to be alien to oneself, "a beast." Yet, far from merely teaching an isolated lesson about ambition or greed, the play ceaselessly provokes the nothingness and

augmentation that it seems to be horrified of. It continually produces spaces for the aggressive fantasies that it decries.

For James Calderwood, the "deed," Macbeth's murder of Duncan, is itself one of the play's absent spaces, filled up with audience fantasy:

> This imagery of sexual impotence, stimulation, and performance constitutes an erotic metaphor for murder, a kind of intermittent flashing onto the regicidal screen of a subliminal image of the sexual act. The effect is to confuse the two deeds in the audience's imagination and thus to "undo" the murder - that is, to contaminate its purity as an Aristotelean action that is whole and complete in itself. If the deed is both a murder and a sexual act, then it is neither a murder nor a sexual act but something monstrous and unnameable. [335]

The metaphors, in Lady Macbeth's temptation speech to Macbeth connect alcohol and sexual performance with the murder of Duncan.

> When in swinish sleep
> Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
> What cannot you and I perform upon
> The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
> His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
> Of our great quell? (I. vii. 67-72)

This imagery continues through the actual murder, ("I have done the deed"[II. ii. 14]). The Porter recapitulates the theme in a comic mode, playing off of Macbeth's equivocation:

> Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes;
> it provokes the desire, but it takes
> away the performance: therefore, much drink
> may be said to be an equivocator with lechery:
> it makes him, and it mars him; it sets
> him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him,
> and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and
> not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him
> in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.
> (II. iii. 27-33)

Yet, what the Porter, like a loyal subject, calls "equivocation," Macbeth and the

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[335] James L. Calderwood, *If It Were Done: Macbeth and Tragic Action* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pg. 45. See also Ewan Fernie, "And in that context, the gash'd stabs for ruin's wasteful entrance associate the King with rape." *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), pg. 60.

audience have experienced as a dangerous state of transgressive fantasy. While the Porter's speech seems a tonic designed to restore us to our senses, it actually plunges the audience into a deeper alienation because it is impossible fully to believe that we are not complicit either in Macbeth's murderous fantasy or in the abyss of doubt that has opened up through his immediate, dramatic experience of non-being.

"To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself!" Macbeth cries. Macbeth can "know the deed," but he must forget himself - or if he "know"[s] . . . "himself," he will, hypocritically, be concealing his deed. Yet, the questionable ontological status of the "deed" (it is described as "a new Gorgon" [III. ii. 69]; "the great doom's image" [II. iii. 75]; "death itself" [II. iii. 74]; that which "tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name"[II. iii. 61]) means that, in a very real sense, Macbeth *cannot* know the deed. And if, as the play suggests, the "deed" has ultimately, an unspecified ontological authority, then noumenal truth in the play may, literally, be *obscene*. As we recall, the echo (which has, according to the OED produced a folk etymology) of "scene" in "*ob*scene" evokes "the stage of a Greek or Roman theatre, including the platform on which the actors stood."[336] The *perverse* cannot be shown on stage. Responding to what might be characterized as the ontological change in the play after Duncan's murder, Donalbain observes, "there are daggers in men's smiles/ the near in blood, the nearer bloody" (III. iii. 138.1). Just prior to this, Banquo observes:

> And when we have our naked frailties hid
> That suffer in exposure, let us meet
> And question this most bloody piece of work.
> (II. iii. 123-5)

In a very real sense, Banquo, Donalbain, and Malcolm don't "suffer in exposure"

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[336] Oxford English Dictionary, "obscene, adj." http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/129823?redirectedFrom=obscene.

only because of the fact that they are still in their night-clothes, since they have been roused from sleep, or even from fear of Macbeth's treachery, but from an obscenity that must, like Iago's "work," Othello's murder of Desdemona immediately be "hid." As Lodovico cries, "The object poisons sight. / Let it be hid" (V.ii.373–375). What must immediately be hidden is that the murderous void *makes meaning* through a dangerous, transgressive experience by which "non-being" becomes a palpable absent presence that presents the audience with an existential risk: it may liberate them from murderous violence through tragic catharsis, but it also may realize an ontology, like that in *Moby Dick*, characterized by murder.

In the chapter, "The Spouter Inn," as we have discovered, Ishmael observes a painting filled with "unaccountable masses of shades and shadows." The painting seems to be from the time of the "New England hags" . . . it is a "blasted heath," a "nameless yeast." The painting finally resolves itself into an image of terrible horror that, if anything, is more shocking than any of the glimpses into "the seeds of time" that the witches in *Macbeth* afford:

> The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.
>
> (pg. 26)

When William Faulkner famously observed that *Moby-Dick* was a "Golgotha of the heart," he must have had in mind these "three mast-heads" Ishmael sees the whale impaling himself upon.[337] Yet if we follow the *Macbeth* echoes in *Moby-Dick*, the image of being transfixed and immobile like the whale is a re-presentation of Ishmael's childhood response to the "supernatural hand" . . . in which he was frozen for "ages piled on ages." The whale is also described, in "Loomings," in spectral

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[337] Quoted in Harold Bloom, *William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008), pg. 161.

terms, as a "hooded phantom;" Ishmael dreads the fact that his own deepest fate is intertwined in the horrible destiny depicted in the painting; yet, the ravished image of impaling suggests that an alien, unacknowledged, unrepresentable, sacred and *obscene* aspect of Ishmael's self intensely desires this and wills it. It is this Shakespearean non-being, filled with menacing danger and existential risk that I think is the ethical core of *Moby-Dick*. It is a core that Melville succeeds in denying through the powerful structuring agency of the perverse: most effectively by the drowning of queer Queequeg and the perverse Ahab in the same vortex. Melville's duplicitous plot device, though, does not succeed in closing the gap that he opened by evoking Shakespeare. To some extent, Melville reproduces the very dynamic in *Macbeth* that he later disavows in his chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale." I now turn to that chapter.

HERE IS A PLACE RESERVED

In the narrative of *Moby-Dick*, "The Whiteness of the Whale" supplies the reader with a crucial piece of information. Ishmael has said that he "gave myself up to the abandonment of the time":

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine.
>
> (pg. 152)

Yet this Ishmael, who becomes "one of that crew," is largely alien to us. Whiteness, couched as Ishmael's confession, where he purports to "explain myself" or else "all these chapters might be naught," does not give us insight, but a blank space, a

"place reserved," such as Macbeth's place occupied by Banquo's ghost, not for Ishmael, but for the reader. And, instead of gaining a comforting knowledge of Ishmael, the reader experiences the theatrical ghost of perverse reading.

At the very start of the chapter, the reader is *already* in the realm of perverse reading.

> It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, *else all these chapters might be naught*.
>
> (pg. 159, italics added)

If the reader doesn't understand the chapter on whiteness, "all these chapters might be naught;" if the reader does understand the chapter, as he or she will soon discover, the reader will recognize that he or she is *naught*. The chapter truly is a "white lead chapter on whiteness." It presents us with a double-negation that is strangely familiar from our reading of *Macbeth*: "To know this chapter on whiteness, 'twere best not know ourselves." This is the theatrical space of *perverse reading*.

The chapter begins by using the empirical principle of nineteenth century psychology, based upon Lockean associationism, offering a whole barrage of positive symbolic associations with "whiteness" stacked up behind a clause, "though" designed to fill those associations with doubt:

> *Though* in many natural objects, whiteness refiningly enhances beauty . . . in most august religions it has been made the symbol of divine spotlessness and power . . . yet, for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in *the innermost idea of this hue*, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.
>
> (pg. 159)

The "kindly associations," Melville suggests, are destroyed like a *papier maché* mask by an "*innermost idea* of this hue." This writhes and menaces into being, out of nowhere, with a "panic to the soul." As we witnessed earlier, Ishmael here subtly calls Locke's epistemology of the "visible hand" into question with a mysterious,

impalpable ideality that carries associations with *Macbeth*.

Ishmael attempts to clarify why this whiteness that he posits possesses an idealized significance, "heightens terror to the utmost bounds." Ishmael hypothesizes that perhaps it is the contrast between our expectation and the reality that truly startles and appalls; yet, even this explanation fails:

> That heightened hideousness, it might be said, only arises from the circumstance, that the irresponsible ferociousness of the creature stands invested in the fleece of celestial innocence and love; and hence, by bringing together two such opposite emotions in our minds, the Polar bear frightens us with so unnatural a contrast. But, even assuming all this to be true, yet, were it not for the whiteness, you would not have that intensified terror.
>
> (pg. 160)

What is truly frightening to Ishmael, though, is the sense that the horror comes from the violent force of transgression which makes whiteness of divinity indistinguishable from an imposter whiteness of the "irresponsible ferociousness" of the polar bear or the "abhorrent mildness" of the great white shark.

As we saw in *Macbeth*, this usurpation of whiteness (or, in Macbeth, nothingness) disrupts the binary opposition between good and evil, suggesting a dynamic power of murderous transgression and usurpation. More, like the murder of Duncan, this murderous transgression is not merely a feature of the novel's semiotic system, but claims to be an actual account of the meaning of whiteness itself.

As Ishmael develops his case, citing the "white squall" and the "headland shoals of combed white bears" that frighten sailors, he attempts to imagine test-cases in which the "ideality" of whiteness can be proved. Ishmael is not just trying to posit a metaphysics of non-being, he posits a *Macbeth*-like murderous *blank* behind appearances. Whiteness is a "mystic sign;" it is a "nameless thing;" but, this impalpable thing is also the aggressive "demonism of the world," rushing through

the mask with terrifying ferocity. He gives the example of a "strong young colt" who seems, without any prior conditioning, to possess "an instinct" for the horrible knowledge of whiteness:

> If one merely "shake"[s] a "fresh buffalo robe behind him so that he cannot see, but only smells its wild muskiness - why will he start, snort, and with bursting eyes paw the ground in phrensies of affright? There is no remembrance of any gorings of wild creatures in his green northern home? Though thousands of miles from Oregon, still when he smells that savage musk, the rending, goring bison herds are as present as to the deserted wild foal of the prarie which this instant they may be trampling to dust"
>
> (pg. 164)

The colt's "phrensies of affright," Ishmael reasons, must have a source. The quasi-philosophical talk of ideality conjures the world of his childhood with its vocabulary of "incantation," "enchantment," "spell," "legerdemain;" it evokes the mysterious "Spouter Inn" chapter where, as we recall, Ishmael peers at that painting of "shapeless masses" associated with a "blasted heath" and "New England hags." Yet the "white lead chapter on whiteness" culminates in a variation on the biblical image of "whited sepulchers," (KJ, Matthew 23:27) but Melville may also have picked up the Shakespearean technique of perverting that biblical image with sexual imagery: "Deified Nature absolutely *paints* like the harlot whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel house within" (pg. 165).

The echo may be from an aside in which Claudius responds to an observation by Polonius. Polonius, typically, offers a pious proverb that evokes in Claudius a very personal anguish:

> 'Tis too much prov'd - that with devotion's visage
> And pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.
> (III. i. 47-48)

Claudius cries to himself:

> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most *painted word*.

(italics added, III. i. 51-53)

In "Whiteness," color itself becomes a hypocritical imposter. More, as the allusion to *Hamlet*'s Claudius suggests, colors might be themselves merely a "painted word." For Emerson, who developed a semiotics based on the proposition that "particular natural facts correspond to particular spiritual facts," this passage might be particularly devastating. Ishmael uses Locke, with his epistemology of the "visible hand" to point out a *Macbeth* -like revelation, that light does not "inhere in substances," making the appearances of substances themselves impalpable. Or:

> The great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge.
>
> (pg. 165)

Only Ross's statement in *Macbeth* approaches the devastating horror of Melville's whiteness: "nothing / But who knows nothing is once seen to smile" (IV. iii. 166-7).

At the same time, the space of whiteness, like the haunted "space reserved" at Macbeth's feast, cries out for a dangerous, haunted complicity with its readers. Are the "butterfly cheeks of young girls" horrifically disfigured by the revelation that they are merely the manifestation of Nature that "paints like the harlot" or have young girls themselves become harlot-like? Are the polar bears, with an "irresponsible ferociousness" that surfaces from beneath a "fleece of celestial innocence," feared animals or are they *identified* with by Ishmael and, by implication, the reader? Ishmael imagines the young colt made mad with terror by the "savage musk" that conjures images of "rending goring bison herds;" whiteness itself by means of its "indefiniteness" . . . "stabs us from behind with thoughts of things unknown" (pg. 165); Yet, the images of "frenzy" in the space of whiteness that is perverse reading are reversible. Ishmael converts these images into murderous violence that, at the end of the chapter, *springs into being*. In the final Macbeth-like

sentence, converting persecution into aggression, Ishmael cries, "And of all these things, the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" (pg. 165). His intent is not that the reader experiences sympathy with Ishmael's aggression, but that the reader too cries with him with a similar murderous rage. His intent is also that the reader hears him or herself crying in murderous rage, and recoils in horror, not at Ishmael, but at him or herself. That self-overhearing is, perhaps, the only exit from the mad dilemma of perverse displacement that we have encountered in this reading. Yet, even to give it a humanistic meaning is to falsify it and, thereby, to diminish the existential risk it entails.

In the very next chapter, "The Chart," the "independent being" of Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the whale will be described as an "unfathered birth," a "creature" that renders his soul a "blank." This "blank"[ness] is the place of whiteness. And the "white room" is the obscene place of perverse reading.

EMILY DICKINSON, AMERICAN IAGO:

PERVERSE READING

I AM NOT WHAT I AM

Emily Dickinson could well say with Iago, "I am not what I am." Her gripping dramatic lyrics and deft irony present us with the great counter-tradition in the American tradition of the perverse that I have surveyed. Dickinson is the one true nay-sayer, whose corrosive irony presents the reader with a genuine "utopia," a no-place that doesn't project identity into the future, but negates all identity whatsoever. While it is far from clear that Dickinson had any intention of challenging American ideology at its core, it is quite clear that she employed sexual politics against her male readers in such a way that deliberately disintegrated the very ground on which confident assertions of masculine ego – including assertions about the structure of history and America's place in it – were possible.[338]

Rather than presenting American as *the* solution to the tragic history of the Old World on the back of Shakespeare's great tragedies, Dickinson exuberantly identifies with *Othello*'s Iago, casting her shocked male reader in the uneasy position of a humiliated Othello.[339] In doing so, Dickinson turns Augustinian non-being on its head by cultivating in her reader a positive, ironic, subversive non-being that cannot be subsumed into an identity politics.

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[338] Robert McClure. Smith, *The Seductions of Emily Dickinson* (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama, 1996).

[339] Recall, for example, Whitman's hope that the "author of" *Othello* and *Hamlet* might be read as "putting on record the first full exposé" of the "political theory" that "America has come on earth to abnegate and replace." Walt Whitman, *November Boughs* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1888), pp. 53.

Lee Edelman cites irony as the trope that establishes a critical distance for the critic of America's seemingly irresistible rhetoric of reproductive futurism. Edelman quotes Paul de Man in a way that is applicable to Dickinson's lyrics: "any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative."[340] Edelman goes on to assert, "The corrosive force of irony thus carries a charge for de Man quite similar to that of the death drive." Its purpose is to undo the 'text machine" because irony "undoes any narrative consistency of lines" . . . "undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration." Far from merely a habitual trope, though, Dickinson animates her irony by creating a Shakespearean dramatic persona and spaces that collapse the distance between narrator and reader, plunging her reader into an active experience of the very "Death-Drive" that Edelman evokes. Consistent with my argument, I suggest that the term Augustinian "non-being" is preferable to the "Death-Drive," because it evokes the specific history that I have demonstrated plays such an active role in the shaping of American teleology (and consequently, ideology). Dickinson animates Augustinian non-being through the figure of Iago in order to create an active space of non-identity within her reader that makes such teleology impossible.

PIERCÉD THROUGH THE EAR

Emily Dickinson has become a legend in American literature. The story of the recluse, the "virgin spinster" who never left her father's house, but wrote the greatest lyrical poetry in the history of the American canon is seared into the American

[340] Quoted in Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pg. 23.

popular imagination. Many unfamiliar with Dickinson's poetry have heard of the reclusive woman who disregarded the conventions of her time – and stubbornly discovered her own aesthetic vision by breaking all of the rules established by the leading literary authorities of her day. Her verse of uncanny power with unforgettable first lines like "I heard a Fly buzz when I died" (591) and "My Life had stood a Loaded Gun" (764)[341] seem to dissolve conventions – and reach down to a level of primary reality that has exercised a permanent fascination on American readers.

With the publication in 2006 of Páraic Finnerty's critically acclaimed book, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare*, the crucial question has emerged again: what is the nature of the relationship between Dickinson's poetry and Shakespeare's plays? For years, critics have found a veritable treasure trove of suggestive allusions to Shakespeare throughout Dickinson's poetry and letters: sunset described as "Cleopatra's Company repeated in the sky" (696); a woman's life - lost in a suffocating marriage - is mourned echoing Ariel's song from *The Tempest*:

It lay unmentioned – as the Sea
Develop Pearl, and Weed,
But only to Himself – be known
The Fathoms they abide
(857)

Another poem begins, "If What we could – were what we would" (540) strangely echoing Ophelia's "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be." [342] (IV. v. 44) Critics have particularly delighted in Dickinson's expressed preference for *Antony and Cleopatra*, observing Dickinson's ability to flout gender conventions by identifying with both roles when it suited her – even, most suggestively, taking on

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[341] Emily Dickinson and R. W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999). *All future references to Emily Dickinson's poetry will be from this edition.*
[342] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the role of Antony in a note to her sister-in-law, Sue Bowles, "Egypt thou knew'st!" (from "Egypt, thou knew'st too well!"[III. xi. 56.2]).[343]

Finnerty's recent book offers tantalizing details about Dickinson's interest in Shakespeare's *Othello*. In addition to being heavily marked in Dickinson's family copy of Shakespeare, *Othello* is the only play that Dickinson may have seen in production.[344] Relying on letters, poems, and theater history, Finnerty focuses on Dickinson's controversial identification with *Othello*'s tragic protagonist. Finnerty's study, with its emphasis on theater history, though, ignores far more intriguing parallels, between Dickinson's unusual departures in syntax and word-selection and the language in *Othello*.

These structural parallels show that Dickinson mastered a technique intrinsic to the way that Shakespeare develops intense, intimate, and dangerous interpersonal relationships between characters on the stage. More than any other character in Shakespeare, Dickinson most often identified not with *Othello*'s protagonist, but *Othello*'s famous arch-villain: Iago. Dickinson and Iago use hypothetical cases, ambiguous pronouns, the subjunctive mood, and infinitive clauses that dislocate from time and place, to create a dangerously remote, ambiguous interpersonal space between listener (Othello) and speaker (Iago), reader and poem, that is, then, "*piercéd*"[345] (I. iii. 217) by metaphor with alarming, intimate implications. What is created is a language filled with a scintillating sense of dramatic suspense – as the audience's ear (and the reader's eye) learn that droningly remote hypotheticals can quickly reverse to become the site of immediate danger.

The capacity of Dickinson's poetry seemingly to reach from the page and

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[343] Páraic Finnerty, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (Amherst and Boston, University of Massachusetts, 2006), pg. 147.
[344] Finnerty, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare*, pg. 161.
[345] William Shakespeare, *Othello, the Moor of Venice,* ed. Michael Neill, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). All future references to *Othello* will be to this edition.

seize the reader, embroiling her in the agonized crisis of belief that is their central theme – has been well documented. Susan Juhasz, among others, has long argued that Dickinson's poetry engages its readers in a performance.[346] Indeed, she has given live performances of improvised "readings" of Dickinson poems – with great success.[347]

Part of what has made Dickinson's poems so successful as performance-pieces is the way that they wreak havoc on normative categories. Dickinson's poems "queer" their subject matter by "press[ing] upon systems of classification . . . to torture their lines of demarcation."[348]

This tendency has been called "Queer" because it destabilizes normative dichotomies such as male / female, heterosexual / homosexual, and natural / unnatural. [349] Susan Juhasz defines "Queer" like this:

> "Queer" is a verb, an adjective, and a noun. The verb means to skew or thwart. The adjective means unconventional, strange, suspicious. Queer as a noun was originally a derogatory term for male homosexuals. It has been reclaimed in academic theory as a tool to question and disarrange normative systems of behavior and identity in our culture, especially as they regulate gender, sexuality, and desire.[350]

What "Queer" Dickinson misses, though, is that the havoc Dickinson wreaks on normative conceptual boundaries is inseparable from the fact that her lyrics act upon the reader in ways that are inescapably associated with drama. As quasi-dramatic rhetoric, they do not "disarrange normative systems" in the neat way that "academic theory" suggests they do. Rather, as self-consciously dramatic rhetoric they act upon the reader in ways that are evasive, manipulative, insincere and often profoundly

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[346] Juhasz, Susan, Cristanne Millar, Martha Nell Smith, *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).
[347] Ibid.
[348] Juhasz, Susan, 'Amplitude of Queer Desire in Dickinson's Erotic Language', *The Emily Dickinson Journal,* 14.2 (2005), pg. 8.
[349] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, *Seventh Edition* (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), pg. 255.
[350] Juhasz, 'Amplitude of Queer Desire', pg. 24.

immoral. Although this is part of the dynamic fiction that Dickinson's poems create in conjunction with her reader, the poems also produce a kind of thinking that has real form and substance, embodied in rhetorical structures, syntax and word selection that produce a particular form of "unconventional" thought that I call by the name of "perverse reading." Perverse reading is the spontaneous reader response to the solicitation of Dickinson's dramatic language. It is a "building" of meaning that occurs within a context defined by uninflected verb moods that are without present, past, or future, but that are pregnant with concepts both murderous and fertile.

THE SURFACE OF POETIC DRAMA

Emily Dickinson's poetry appears, on the surface, to be lyric poetry, written in the Romantic tradition; but this is misleading. As Dickinson herself has written in her famous letter to Higginson, she perceived herself as "Representative of the Verse" and her figures as "supposed persons"[351] (L269). Dickinson's poetry is related to the dramatic monologue, but it is principally a drama of ideas:

> [Dickinson's poems] suspend conclusions, undermine the positions from which they start, balance different and often antithetical attitudes, play them off against one another. Assertions clash, and leave each other weakened and frail.[352]

Although Dickinson was not concerned with representing character, her attention to these "antithetical attitudes" creates the kind of "self-effacement we associate with a

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[351] Emily Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson Volume II*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), pg. 412.
[352] Gibson, Andrew, 'Emily Dickinson and the Poetry of Hypothesis', *Essays in Criticism* 33 (1983): pg. 227.

dramatic art."[353] Certainly, a drama of ideas that Gibson calls the "poetry of hypothesis" is at work, but Dickinson's poetry has unique features which involve her reader in a truly unique form of engagement. Robert Weisbuch isolates one of these features when he observes that Dickinson's poems often seem on the surface to report events, but, in fact, they lack the basic "situational matrix" [354] that constitutes lyric poetry: a protagonist, a setting, a clearly defined event. Instead, an elaborate analogy takes the place of the poem's "scene":

> When Dickinson's poems pose as reportorial, the speaker does not proclaim, "I was there – this is what happened to me"; instead, he implies, "I was somewhere – the exact place doesn't matter – and this analogy will constitute the meaning of that experience, minus the experiential trimmings.[355]

As a result of this "scenelessness," Dickinson's readers rush to fill the vacuum with interpretation. Interestingly, much of the debate about Dickinson's signature poems, "It was not Death, for I stood up," (355), "I felt a Funeral in my Brain" (280), "My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun" (764), is based on the vast difference in "scenes" supplied by readers who are compelled to engage in what Iago calls "build"[ing] from "scattering and unsure observances" (III. iii. 150).

While critical interpretation is always a form of performance, Dickinson's apparently static and opaque poems actually incite the reader into the dynamism of the performance that they seem reticently to eschew. The reader does not just gain an aesthetic view of the whole, but is an intimate co-creator who supplies the building blocks of the aesthetic event. As Susan Juhasz observes, Dickinson's poetry becomes a site at which a "performance" of the reader's "subjectivity" takes place:

> Dickinson's poems take to an extreme the inclination of the lyric genre towards the constructed liminality of its subjective presence, the outline of a

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[353] Gibson, 'Poetry of Hypothesis', pg. 227.

[354] Robert Weisbuch, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pg. 19.

[355] Ibid.

> self in an unplaced moment. Hence the reader is even more than usually required to enact the contours of the speech-act or moment in interpretation, an enactment that constitutes performance in that the poem provides the only text for that implied subjectivity.[356]

Juhasz, McClure Smith, and Noble, quite legitimately, see these performative acts by the reader as opportunities to challenge the normative patterns of engagement according to gender and sexual orientation. Many of Dickinson's best poems, though, have specific features, such as ambiguous pronouns, the subjunctive mood, clauses modifying two sentences, that direct the reader's performance in a way that I would argue is best described as perverse.

DRAMATIC REVERSAL

At the same time that Dickinson's "sceneless" poems have a unique way of collapsing the distance between reader and text, Dickinson makes the act of deciphering her poetry into an experience infused with drama. This drama is based upon a power dynamics that Gary Lee Stonum has called "the structure of mastery":

> Mastery is a pervasive structure in [Dickinson's] work . . . and it appears variously as a predicament, a temptation, and a threat . . . conflict between self and other is basic to the romantic sublime and a similarly jealous competition produces and sustains the structure of mastery.[357]

Stonum goes to great lengths to demonstrate the way that Dickinson distances herself from the tradition of the structure of mastery constructed between poem and reader, typical of the Romantic sublime; but, I would argue that what Stonum calls

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[356] Juhasz, Suzanne and Cristanne Miller. 'Performances of gender in Dickinson's poetry.' The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson. Ed. Wendy Martin. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge Collections Online. Cambridge University Press. 30 April 2010, pg. 110.

[357] Stonum, *The Dickinson Sublime*, pg. 149.

Dickinsons' reticence, her attitude of "hesitation" and "deferral"[358] towards the structure of mastery, is actually evidence of her mastery of a dramatic tension between poem and reader that is more effective because it is so reticently concealed.

Dickinson's poems gain vitality by dramatizing vast disparities in size and power, ("The Brain -- is wider than the Sky" [598]). Gnats and Giants (444), "Daisy" and the "Himmaleh" (460), a schoolboy and Mount "Vesuvius" (1691): these vast power disparities charge the interpretive space between reader and poem. A poem's narrator can, for example, retain an attitude of obsequious servitude to a "Master" (427) reader only to subject the reader to a shocking status reversal. [359]

Andrew Gibson isolates Dickinson's use of the "subjunctive mood" as the most important formal feature in her work that contributes to her moments of explosive dramatic reversal:

> The effect of the troubling subjunctive is to make the point seem conditional . . . Once we recognize that a corrosive scepticism has entered the poem, then, as is so often the case with Dickinson, the very shape of the poem begins to change, and uncertainties proliferate.[360]

David Porter has observed that, in addition to the subjunctive mood, Dickinson also uses ambiguous subjects, the passive voice, negations, and dropped articles.[361] For Porter, these techniques produce a poetry that possesses no "final reality" . . . "intent on saying itself and not on signifying a specific world."[362] It is the lack of a "specific world," though, that gives Dickinson's poetry that peculiarly vital and menacing dramatic intensity.

In "Sunset at Night – is natural –" Dickinson's combines dramatic reversal of power roles with the use of the hypothetical subjunctive mood in order to create a

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[358] Ibid.
[359] Robert McClure Smith, 'Dickinson and the Masochistic Aesthetic', *The Emily Dickinson Journal,* 7.2, (1998), pg. 2.
[360] Gibson, 'Poetry of Hypothesis' pg. 227.
[361] Porter, *Dickinson, the modern idiom*, pp. 39-58.
[362] Ibid., pg. 55.

quasi-dramatic space that threatens with dreadful possibilities:

> Sunset at Night—is natural—
> But Sunset on the Dawn
> Reverses Nature—Master—
> So Midnight's—due—at Noon.
>
> Eclipses be – predicted –
> And Science bows them in –
> But do one face us suddenly –
> Jehovah's Watch – is wrong. (427)

In the first stanza, Dickinson assigns the reader the title of "Master"; then, she "Reverses Nature" imagining the world where "Midnight" displaces the sun. This coy usurpation of the reader's power creates a tense struggle between reader and poem. It is not that Dickinson's speaker has claimed superiority over the reader; she has revealed a tragically disordered world where the very term "Master" is rendered ridiculous. As we will later see, polarization and reversal of power dynamics are characteristic features of Iago's rhetoric. These allow him to create an intense, dramatic interpersonal space between himself and Othello – while remaining hidden behind a veneer of obsequious formality.

Another feature present here that we will later discover in Iago's rhetoric is Dickinson's use of the subjunctive mood, "Eclipses *be* predicted." The subjunctive mood functions here precisely as Gibson has suggested. It allows Dickinson to make the "Eclipse"[] seem both distant, because it is not tied to a particular person, place or time, and also intimately menacing at the same time. When Dickinson personifies "Eclipse"[] in line 3 of the second stanza, "Do one *face us* suddenly," the remoteness is pierced with dangerous intimacy. Dickinson's reversal is so mesmerizing we may forget that it is based upon a polarized power imbalance that the poem itself has produced. The moment at which the "eclipse"[] seems to turn towards us

"face"[ing] us, has a theatrical flare, the surprise of a lived experience – but, this rabbit (or eclipse) that the poem has pulled out of a hat is one that is half-created by the reader's own anxiety, prompted by the poet's use of the subjunctive.

In "Sunset at Night—is natural –", Dickinson creates a closed, intimate, interpersonal space with the reader in which "noon" becomes blotted out, replaced by a dreadful "Midnight." This ominous "Midnight" is emblematic of the perilous vacant, hypothetical space Dickinson's poems repeatedly produce. It is a theatrical space very familiar to those who have engaged in Shakespearean tragedy, where "nothing is but what is not." Like one of the "bubbles" (I. iii. 78) where the Weird Sisters appear in *Macbeth*, Dickinson's poems, with their gnomic abstraction, cheerfully eschewing referential reality while, at the same time, turning metaphysical reality upside down, open up a menacingly intimate, concealed space between reader and poem, where past and present are lost – and the most sacred truth becomes hypothetical: it is the very space, as we will see, that Iago thrives in.

THE SUGGESTION SINISTER

Emily Dickinson's family owned a copy of *Shakespeare's Complete Works*, edited by the English publisher and author, Charles Knight. In his introduction to *Othello*, Knight offers a dryly didactic, schematic reading of the play. While Knight's propensity towards Victorian moralizing may have grated against Dickinson's subtle, complex understanding of Shakespeare, Knight's introduction to *Othello* offers something that Dickinson always looked for in Shakespeare's plays: characters turned into types that represent ideas in conflict. As we have seen, Dickinson's poetry has narrating figures and situations described by analogy, but the drama in Dickinson's poetry

often lies in her ability to transgress the boundaries between seemingly antithetical ideas. Dickinson scholars have long understood the way that Dickinson schematized the dichotomy between Egypt and Rome upon which *Antony and Cleopatra* is built with her exotic "Wild Nights" and her austere "New Englandly,"[363] but her engagement with *Othello* is so intrinsic to her own poetic style that it has been missed. "Whoever disenchants" has so effectively absorbed Iago's rhetoric that it has become just as Iago would have liked it: nearly invisible. A close examination of the poem, however, reveals startling affinities with Iago's rhetoric. "Whoever disenchants" uses a proverbial form, ambiguous pronouns, dropped articles, negation, and the subjunctive mood to create an intimate, personal space equal in its undeniable anarchic power and concentrated menace to that created by Iago in the temptation scene in *Othello*. Like Iago, Dickinson attacks the most fundamental unit of meaning: individual words.

In Knight's reading, Iago becomes a "Man of the World", a principle of skepticism who tempts an "enthusiastic" Othello into doubt of the "truth purity" not only of Desdemona, but of a metaphysical Christian ideal of truth itself:

> When the innocent and the high-minded submit themselves to the tutelage of *the man of the world*, as he is called, the process of mental change is precisely that produced in the mind of Othello. The poetry of life is gone. On them never more, "The freshness of the heart can fall like dew." They abandon themselves to the betrayer, and they prostrate themselves before the energy of his 'gain'd knowledge.'.[364]

Where Knight sees "poetry" only in the frothy idealism that is ruined by Iago, Dickinson sees an electrical tension in the surprise infiltration of doubt by her own "Man of the world" figure that she calls "experience" (910). In "Whoever

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[363] Judith Farr, 'Emily Dickinson's "Engulfing" Play: Antony and Cleopatra', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1990), pg. 231.
[364] William Shakespeare, *The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and Poems of William Shakespeare with a Biography and Studies of his Works*, ed. Charles Knight (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1853), pg. 337.

disenchants", Dickinson presents a dramatic tension reminiscent of the "temptation" that Knight describes in *Othello*:

> Whoever disenchants
> A single Human soul
> By failure of irreverence
> Is guilty of the whole.
>
> As guileless as a Bird
> As graphic as a star
> Till the suggestion sinister
> Things are not what they are – (1475)

"Whoever disenchants", at first, seems an indictment of the Iago-like "Man of the World" that Knight decries in his introduction to *Othello*. The narrator suggests that anyone who "disenchants," whose hard-edged realism steals what Knight calls earlier the "poetry of life," bears the same responsibility as Lucifer for original sin, "Is guilty of the whole." This figure appears "guileless" and "graphic." As readers, we prepare ourselves for the poem to deliver a satisfying revelation of the evil nature of the figure who corrupts innocent "Human soul"[s] with his "suggestion sinister." Instead of delivering a predictable moral pacifier at the end, Dickinson does something quite startling, she inserts a line that echoes the moment when *Othello*'s villain, Iago, declares his hypocrisy, "I am not what I am" (I. i. 66), but Dickinson alters the line to read "*Things* are not what they are"; so that the reader hears the echo of Iago's confession of guile and hypocrisy transposed upon a declaration about the philosophical nature of "Things" themselves, the object world. At the same time, Dickinson's alteration of Iago's line in the middle of her poem about the corruption of innocence by those who "disenchant" actually succeeds in accomplishing with the reader what Iago accomplishes with Othello: it splits the object world from its signifier, producing a form of knowledge that cannot be trusted. At a primary level, the reader's relationship to the object world and, as we will see, to language itself, is

altered by the poem.

"Whoever disenchants" is in the conditional mood. It presents the hypothetical, general case of an ambiguous "Whoever" who is condemned for the practice of "disenchant"[ing] "Human soul" [s]. If the poem had simply remained abstract and proverbial, it would be indistinguishable from other didactic poetry of the nineteenth century. Stanza two, though, enacts what has been called a "tableau vivant."[365] It describes this "Whoever" engaged in an intimate transgressive, personal action that contradicts the abstract, proverbial form that the first stanza is couched in:

> As guileless as a Bird
> As graphic as a star
> Till the suggestion sinister
> Things are not what they are –

As we have seen, the final line of the poem pertains to the nature of "Thing"[s] themselves, implicitly altering the way that the reader views the universe; the hypothetical case becomes, suddenly, intensely personal without explicitly indicating that it is doing so.

In the scene popularly known as the Temptation Scene (Act III, scene 3), Iago teases Othello with what appears to be a sinister, unspeakable secret about Desdemona, resorting to the indirect language of proverbs. Like Dickinson, Iago parries with proverbs and stabs with pointed words. Like Dickinson, he begins with ambiguous, abstract proverbs. Dickinson herself underlined this one:

> Poor and content is rich, and rich enough,
> But riches fineless is as poor as winter
> To him that ever fears he shall be poor. (III. iii. 174-175)

Soon, though, the proverbial wisdom, matched with what appears to be stock

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[365] McClure Smith, 'Emily Dickinson and the Masochistic Aesthetic', pg. 2. The term "tableau vivant" is used in Dickinson criticism to describe the way that apparently abstract, static, hypothetical figures become vividly animated.

allegorical imagery, conveys "tableau vivants" that register cannibalistic violence. Jealousy ceases to be a static figure and assumes startling specificity. It becomes a "green eye'd monster which doth mock/ The meat it feeds on." (III. iii. 170-72). Iago's insinuation, like Dickinson's exists in the half-light of innuendo. Iago doesn't acknowledge the savage intensity of the image; yet, Iago's figure of Jealousy is so menacing because of the way that it animates dead abstraction, so that it becomes a vivid, embodied, imminent threat.

Dickinson's own proverbial "Whoever" transforms, in her final lines, into an unnamed "disenchant"[er] precisely because the figure is so ambiguous. Dickinson's ability to move from a pose of monumentalremote traditional knowledge to startling, intimate specificity is a tactic that she may have learned from Iago.

Negation is a technique that Dickinson frequently uses in order to precipitate her quasi-dramatic reversals. Negations encourage a perverse reading by eroding our confidence in assertions they purport to signify. In "Whoever disenchants", the final negation, "things are not what they are," cues the reader to begin reversing both negative and positive terms, one by one: "disenchants," "failure of irreverence," "guileless" and "graphic." In the process of doing this, the entire landscape of the poem changes. The person who "disenchants" may not be like Knight's "Man of the World" who poisons, stealing the "poetry of life." In fact, as we have seen, he or she suddenly seems like a lone, misunderstood prophet who recognizes that what passes for "reverence" has become so profoundly hypocritical that the only way to approach reverence is a "failure of irreverence." In stanza two, the poet introduces two clauses: "As guileless as a Bird /As graphic as a star." These clauses appear to refer to all those who "disenchant"; but, once the magnetic poles of the poem have shifted, not only does the one who "disenchant"[s] begin to seem an embattled

innocent – but entire clusters of associated images alter: the "Whole" who were, apparently, "graphic as a star," suddenly seem disquietingly menacing; they become suspiciously associated with "Birds" disturbingly corrupt and full of "guile." By the time we hear the "suggestion sinister," there is a sense that this "suggestion" may be "sinister" (or destructive) to the "Whole," but, for the reader, the poem's deliberate use of the cipher of negation suggests a fissile communication more important because it must be kept hidden from the prying eyes of the uninitiated.

More, the phrase, "*the* suggestion sinister" is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood creates a "suggestion sinister" that is not restricted to its ostensible subject, those who "disenchant"; it could be connected to the subject of the hypothetical case that the poem explores, but the visceral punch in that phrase "*the* suggestion sinister" suggests that the one delivering the message to the reader, encoded in "the suggestion sinister," might actually be the narrator of the poem herself. In fact, the entire perverse reading is directed by this concealed narrator who "is not what" [she] "is," just as she alters the universe for the reader into a place where "Things are not what they are."

Iago also plays this semiotic game of reversal with Othello, using negation and the subjunctive. Here is Iago at a crucial moment of reversal during the Temptation Scene in Act III:

IAGO

For Michael Cassio,
I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest,

OTHELLO

I think so too.

IAGO

Men should be what they seem,
Or those that be not, would they might seem none.

OTHELLO

Certain, men should be what they seem.

IAGO

Why then I think Cassio's an honest man.

OTHELLO

Nay, there's more in this . . .
(I. iii. 127-132)

Iago's crucial lines here resemble a two stanza Dickinson poem. His first comment seems to be a direct, unqualified declaration, "For Michael Cassio, I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest." Then, in response to Othello's slightly ambiguous, "I think so," Iago becomes positively Dickinsonian:

Men should be what they seem,
Or those that be not, would they might seem none.
(II. iii. 125.2-126)

Iago's hypothetical, "Men should be what they seem," turns to the equivocating subjunctive mood when he offers an alternative scenario that writhes with dangerous possibilities locked in the coded language of negation: "those that be not, would they might seem none."

Iago's formulation of deceptive men, "those that be not," is a negation of a negation. He is expressing the wish that all hollow men would "seem" as empty as they actually are. The audience, aware of Iago's deception, know that this would make them as invisible, as hidden – as Iago himself is. To Othello, though, Iago suggests a form of deceptiveness that is so elusive it is impossible for an ordinary person to decipher on their own. Iago makes use of the power of negation and the subjunctive mood not only to plunge Othello into a sense of bottomless uncertainty about the status of "honest men," but the subjunctive mood, combined with Iago's

coiled negations, suggests something hidden and menacing about the condition of "be"[ing]. In fact, Iago succeeds here in using the negation in combination with the subjunctive mood to garner a spurious, gnomic authority upon himself and, at the same time, to plunge Othello into anxiety about the nature of all signs.

Othello's exclamation, "Nay, there's more in this . . ." suggests that he reads Iago's line exactly as Dickinson's readers might read "Whoever disenchants." He reads Iago perversely, drawing the conclusion not only that Cassio might not be an honest man, but that the entire object world that "seem"[s] "honest" might also be suspect. Our own postmodern bias privileges doubt over belief, but *Othello* makes clear that a state of imaginative construction pressured by the anxiety of semiotic uncertainty is actually a place where murder and chaos can be conceived as well as legitimate skepticism about a spurious order. Dickinson's suspension of the moral order is not just intellectual; it isn't even just a poetic fiction; it takes place in a real hypothetical space, using a verb mood that is not locked in the past, present, or future tense, but is pregnant with both benign and murderous possibilities.

TRANSGRESSING THE BOUNDARIES

"The Malay—took the Pearl—" (451) (or "The Malay", as I will refer to it from now on) offers us a striking glimpse of Dickinson's mind in the process of incorporating some of the most elemental features of Shakespeare's dramatic language in *Othello*. The premise behind "The Malay" is one that is familiar to those with even a cursory knowledge of Dickinson: it is a poem exploring an agonized struggle between figures that represent two perennial Dickinsonian categories:

"gain" and "loss."[366] Perhaps Dickinson's most famous poem, "Success is counted sweetest" (67), explores a scenario in which the victorious "Purple Host" are barred from a knowledge the "defeated" possess: the knowledge of the "definition" of "Victory." The victors are oddly displaced by the losers because their victory lacks the firm boundaries established by language's power to "define"[]. As we will discover, this establishment of drama through drawing and transgressing clear conceptual boundaries is a crucial feature of Iago's language. Dickinson returned to this scenario when she imagined a death-bed scene in "Upon Concluded Lives":

> Upon Concluded Lives
> There's nothing cooler falls—
> Than Life's sweet Calculations—
> The mixing Bells and Palls—
>
> Make Lacerating Tune—
> To Ears the Dying Side—
> 'Tis Coronal—and Funeral—
> Saluting—in the Road—
> (735)

The moment of dying, here, is the moment of the "mixing" of categories; the "Lacerating tune" is the surreal conflation of "Bells and Palls," "Coronal" and "Funeral." The power to define is identified with the prostrate, passive dying person who witnesses the disintegration of categories; this unlikely privileged position that Dickinson compares in another poem to "being but an Ear" (340) is also the receptive place that anticipates ultimate transgression. Dickinson fit the act of reading and writing in her categories of "loss" and gain"; she felt that the gulf between reader and writer was as great as that between the dying and the living. That ultimate position of "loss," in which the categories that define identity are erased, is the dramatic position that Dickinson sought for her reader in relation to

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[366] Finnerty, *Dickinson's Shakespeare,* pg. 173. Finnerty mentions a related theme of "economic gain and loss" in *Othello*, but he doesn't explore the reverberations of this theme in Dickinson's own work – or its consequences for the relationship between reader and poem.

her poetry.

Some of Dickinson's most unusual poems dramatize the relation between poet and reader. In "I would not paint a picture" (348), Dickinson describes the act of reading as a state of acutely conscious loss she calls "sumptuous despair." In "This was a Poet – It is That", the poet is imagined as a thief who steals from the impoverished reader who has watched the pilfered "Images" "perish[]" just within reach, "by the Door –":

> This was a Poet — It is That
> Distills amazing sense
> From ordinary Meanings —
> And Attar so immense
>
> From the familiar species
> That perished by the Door —
> We wonder it was not Ourselves
> Arrested it — before —
>
> Of Pictures, the Discloser —
> The Poet — it is He —
> Entitles Us — by Contrast —
> To ceaseless Poverty —
>
> Of portion — so unconscious —
> The Robbing — could not harm —
> Himself — to Him — a Fortune —
> Exterior — to Time — (446)

The despairing reader is left "wonder"[ing] why she did not "arrest" the precious images before the poet-thief nabbed them. In a whimsical conclusion, Dickinson's fictional reader rules out the possibility of "Robbing" the Poet because she keeps her "Fortune" where it is safe: "Exterior – to Time –."

Not only did Dickinson construct the relationship between reader and writer as a form of "Robbing," but Dickinson was deeply interested in the theme of robbery in *Othello*. In her own version of *Othello*, these lines are underlined:

> For your sake, jewel,
> I am glad at soul I have no other child (I. iii. 195-6)

> The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;
> He robs himself that spends a bootless grief. (I. iii. 206-7)[367]

Dickinson knew the second quotation well enough to cite it in a letter: Beloved Shakespeare says, '*He that is robbed and smiles, steals something from the thief*"[368]

For Dickinson, it appears, "Robbing" was the key to unlock *Othello*'s themes of possession and sexual jealousy: "Robbing" was also the gritty, dramatic, displacing metaphor that Dickinson used to imagine the volatile interaction between *Othello*'s central characters. In her most accomplished exploration of the themes from *Othello*, she depicts an Earl who claims to be the victim of a "Pearl" theft:

> The Malay – took the Pearl –
> Not – I – the Earl –
> I – feared the Sea – too much
> Unsanctified – to touch –
>
> Praying that I might be
> Worthy – the Destiny –
> The Swarthy fellow swam –
> And bore my Jewel – Home –
>
> Home to the Hut! What lot
> Had I – the Jewel – got –
> Borne on a Dusky Breast –
> I had not deemed a Vest
> Of Amber – fit –
>
> The Negro never knew
> I – wooed it – too –
> To gain, or be undone –
> Alike to Him – One –
> (451)

Páraic Finnerty has done path-breaking work in discovering how Dickinson engages *Othello*'s theme of jealousy in "The Malay."[369] The Earl is, according to Finnerty, an Iago-like figure who is seized by jealousy at the Othello-like Malay's nabbing of his "Pearl," an allusion to Desdemona:

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[367] Finnerty, *Dickinson's Shakespeare,* pg. 173.
[368] Finnerty, pg. 131.
[369] Finnerty, *Dickinson's Shakespeare*, 170-174.

> of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; (V. ii. 345-48)

This activates associations in *Othello* not just with jealousy, but with racial difference and the male conflation of sexual potency and what Othello calls "occupation" (III. iii. 354), Dickinson's *Webster's* would have clued Dickinson's readers in to the fact that an "Earl" . . ."""is now a mere title, unconnected with any territorial jurisdiction";[370] so that Dickinson creates in her Iago-like Earl an unbounded male racism that feeds both on his own voyeuristic wish to *be* the more assertive Malay – and also on his own half-acknowledged impotence.

What Finnerty and other critics haven't understood is the way that "The Malay"['s] theme of gain, loss, and unintentional "Robbing" places it at the heart of a dramatic relationship between reader and poem in Dickinson - and, in Shakespeare's play, between Iago and Othello. If one explores the polarization of figures and concepts in "The Malay" – and reads this backwards through *Othello*, one can find the ground for the conception of *Othello* suggested in "The Malay." More importantly, though, through our glimpse of the way that Dickinson captures the dangerous transgression that takes place between Iago and Othello, we can better understand our own *identity* as readers with Othello – because, as Dickinson understood, to experience Iago's language is to experience the loss of identity that she associated with her ideal reading experience.

Although it is not among those passages Dickinson underlined, Dickinson's poem strongly suggests that she found this passage in *Othello* particularly intriguing:

> Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
> In following him, I follow *but myself* – (italics added, I. i. 57-58)

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[370] Emily Dickinson Lexicon project (EDL) at Brigham Young University (BYU). <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2348536>.

Iago's gnomic lines are embedded within a larger passage, but these lines have a force that requires our independent attention. Iago here offers a paradoxical Dickinsonian formula; he asserts his identity as distinct from Othello: Iago is a servant "follow"[er]; Othello is one to be followed; Iago is a Venetian, "The Moor" is an outsider; Othello is generous, Iago follows "but myself." At the same time, Iago's very proposition invites a Dickinsonian reversal. Iago asserts that he is separate from Othello, but the ambiguity of the second line, "In following him, I follow *but myself,*" foreshadows, for the audience, the appalling nature of the drama that will unfold: Iago will, literally, follow "but myself" by, impossibly, erasing the distinction between them – and swallowing up the noble "Moor" with "myself." Iago's lines would have had great interest for Dickinson – as, within a very tight space, with a gnomic, paradoxical resonance very similar to her own poetry, Iago's lines polarize him and Othello into opposites, and present the paradox of the conflation of those opposites that he is planning to effect.

We have already seen the way that Dickinson imagines Iago and Othello, not only as representing opposite poles conceptually, but as fitting her own categories for reader and writer. Iago, as we saw, becomes the perverse inscriber; Othello becomes the apt pupil, for whom reading is a form of transgression that collapses the boundary between himself and Iago, even as it transgresses the conceptual boundary that defines the ideal he holds sacred. The audience's dread and fascination is based, in part, upon observing Iago's ingenuity at effecting the displacement of identity in *Othello* that he implicitly promises to effect in those early, paradoxical Dickinsonian lines. The disparity in ethnicity, in status, in character between Othello and Iago – all contribute to the appalling dread when Iago triumphantly collapses the distinction between them, suggesting, as Dickinson's "Malay" poem also does – that

the boundary between basest and highest is something that can be transgressed with terrifying speed. Iago's concise Dickinsonian lines in Act IV sum up the appalling reversal in positions he has effected:

> He is that he is: I may not breathe my censure
> What he might be; if what he might, he is not,
> I would to heaven he were. (IV. ii. 262-4)

Iago's observation about Othello "He is that he is" recalls his own earlier declaration of duplicity, "I am not what I am" (I. i. 66). Iago's later phrasing triumphantly suggests an Othello as monstrously graphic – and visible as he is hidden and treacherous. Dickinson may have observed the way that, in a tiny space, Iago conveys dynamic power by feigning obsequiousness, "I may not breathe my censure/ What he might be" and quietly exults, with a gleeful sense of concealed power, at his ability entirely to displace Othello's existence with "not": "If what he might, he is *not.*" Iago's genius at defining precise boundaries based upon his own polarized categories and hierarchies – "Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago" (I. i. 58) – and his giddy process of inverting these same hierarchies and categories – "If what he might, he is *not*" – is a strategy that Dickinson's own poem relies upon implicitly.

Dickinson's Earl's assertion at the start of "The Malay" is uncannily similar to Iago's:

> The Malay—took the Pearl—
> Not—I—the Earl—

Just as in *Othello*, we have here a polarization of the two central figures – though in Dickinson's poem, the Iago and Othello figures are, characteristically, reversed. The Earl begins by asserting his noble status, with his title; he identifies "the Malay" as foreigner; he also suggests that the Malay has behaved the way that a savage might; he has violated common decency by taking a "Pearl" that the Earl's noble, civilized

status would prevent him from doing "Not—I—the Earl." As we learned earlier, by giving her noble a designation that "is now a mere title, unconnected with any territorial jurisdiction," she gives her reader a cryptic clue that the Earl's status may be overturned.

The Earl's contrasts between himself and the Malay couldn't be more extreme, but the disjunction between his descriptions of the Malay's enjoyment of his "Pearl" and his own protests of "Not – I – the Earl –," never having a thought to do what he imagines the Malay has done with the Pearl, begin to cause a subtle, Dickinsonian sense of doubt to creep in regarding whether, indeed, the "Sea" was "too much/ Unsanctified" for the Earl "to touch" – or if the Malay had just done what he wished to do all along, namely behave like the "Swarthy fellow" and swim ("swam"), in the "Sea."

At the same time as this suspicion creeps in, the Earl's vocabulary, associated with European civilization and courtly love, "Pearl," "feared," "Unsanctified," "Praying," "Worthy," "Destiny" – alongside "Swarthy fellow swam," "Hut," "Borne on a Dusky Breast," "Vest/ Of Amber" – creates a sense of impending dread at the collapse in identity between the Earl and the man the Earl calls "Negro," evoking the lowest scale on the racial register of Dickinson's day, in stanza 4. Alongside the dramatic monologue, Dickinson has created a conceptual drama that parallels Shakespeare's in *Othello*. The tension of the polar opposition she has established – along with her ironic hints that destabilize that tension – lead the reader into a form of perverse semiotics familiar to this study.

The reader who senses what seems like an avid identification between the "Praying" Earl and the Malay he reviles might suddenly latch onto a clause that seems promiscuously to refer to two sentences at once – and a personal pronoun that

seems to refer to both the Earl and the Malay at once. Regarding this feature of the poem, Weisbuch writes:

> Even the syntax contributes to the passive-active contrast: in the second stanza, the "I" of the gerundive subordinate clause is replaced in the main clause by the "Swarthy fellow." (Obviously, the phrase does not mean that "the swarthy fellow prayed for me as he dove" but that "I prayed, while he performed.")[371]

Weisbuch astutely notes the fact that the pronoun "I" could modify either "Swarthy fellow" or the "Praying" Earl. Weisbuch discounts the inference a reader might make that the "Swarthy fellow" might be the one who 'prayed for me as he dove' – and yet this is precisely the kind of perverse reading that Dickinson encourages. What the image does is disconcertingly and jarringly to fuse the courtly Earl with the man who swims in the "Sea" that the Earl has only imagined – but, it is precisely the possibility that the Earl's wild fantasy collapses the carefully constructed barrier between himself and the "Swarthy fellow" that the poem's ambiguous pronoun – and clause – opens up for the reader. Just as we saw with "Whoever disenchants," this feature also collapses distance between the reader and the poem – because it happens in the half-light of a poem that Dickinson compels the reader to "build." The polar opposition is certainly there, but in order for the dangerous and perverse fantasy space to open up, the reader must *make* the *perverse connection*.

When we look at Iago's pivotal passage in the temptation scene, not only is Dickinson's absorbed engagement in the dynamics of gain and loss in *Othello* quite clear, but something even more peculiar happens: Iago uses an ambiguous pronoun that is quite reminiscent of Dickinson's. It also serves a similar purpose, to create a semiotic puzzle that *produces dread* by undoing a polarizing rhetoric that the passage itself creates:

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[371] Weisbuch, pg. 58.

OTH: And yet, how nature erring from itself . . .

IAGO: Ay, there's the point: as, to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends,
Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.
But, pardon me, I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent.
(III.iii.226-235)

Like Dickinson, Iago seizes upon a form of syntax and word selection that succeeds in being precise while retaining the abstraction of a hypothetical. Iago does this by using several tricks at once. First, his interruption of Othello automatically creates ambiguity because it is unclear whether Iago is continuing Othello's subject or starting a new one. At the same time, Iago interrupts with an infinitive clause ("not *to affect*") with a reflexive pronoun "her own." Although this infinitive clause with a reflexive pronoun doesn't exactly present a hypothetical subject that Iago can, then, cast doubt upon, as he did with the subjunctive we saw in our earlier section, "Perverse Reading", Iago's infinitive clause here does something much more startling than that. [372] It *seems* precisely to describe Desdemona based upon "*her own*" . . . "clime, complexion, and degree." The infinitive clause, dislocated in time and space passes by rapidly so that Othello may barely notice that Iago has said, "***not*** *to affect* many proposed matches"; so Iago's unexpressed subject, Desdemona, is solely defined according to a rigid hierarchy of country, race, and status ("clime, complexion, and degree") and she is, at the same time, through that innocent infinitive, "not to affect," suspiciously disassociated from the very markers that Iago has used to confer identity upon her. It hardly needs mentioning, in part, because

these rhetorical structures of gain and loss proliferate throughout *Othello* – though they are here most poignant - that Iago's construction of Desdemona is suspect like Dickinson's Earl. She has become, figuratively, a noble with a shadow of suspicion cast upon her.

Even more interesting, though, is the way that, by being so specific about defining Desdemona according to "clime, complexion, and degree," Iago has already painted Othello as the Malay figure whose victory (marriage) debases what he has gained. In order to blur the lines of demarcation between the courtly Desdemona and a Desdemona possessed by a "nature" that begins quickly to look very unnatural ("very *nature* will instruct her towards some second choice" [italics added, II. i. 227]), Iago finishes his clause by expressing, ostensibly, the subject of his comparison "nature"; but, "nature," at the same time, serves as the grammatical subject of the reflexive pronoun, "her own." It is only when Iago states, in the next line, "One may smell in such a will most rank", that the strong parallel structure, "will" and "affect", clarifies that it is not Desdemona's, but "*her own*" "will" that is the expressed subject of the sentence. In causing Othello's ear to hear "nature" as the grammatical subject of that earlier clause, though, Iago unlocks all of the ominous, portentous heft of Brabantio's earlier lines that Othello has just repeated – and Iago's clause has seemed to modify:

> For *nature* so preposterously to err,
> Not being deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
> Sans witchcraft could not.
> (italics added, I. iii. 62-64)

So that when Iago finally hammers on that dreadful line, "One may smell in such, a *will most rank*," that "will most rank" gains metaphorical power and disturbing pungency by the curious elision between the expressed subject of the previous clause, "nature" and the clarified subject of the sentence "a will most rank." It is as if

erring nature itself writhes into being before Iago's nauseatingly intimate verb "smell." This is a metaphorical adultery that Othello (the "reader") must half-create with his ear. Desdemona's union with a malicious other whom, Iago implies cannot be mentioned because he is so threatening to Desdemona's "clime, complexion, and degree" – described as a "foul disproportion" – is also a graphic "scene" that must be constructed in the perverse imagination of a listener. Like so many of Dickinson's figures, the exact scene is precise with regard to hierarchy, "disproportion" being powerfully suggestive with regard to the action (recalling "the beast with two backs" [I. i. 117]), with the identity of the two figures determined by the hierarchy (Othello and Desdemona), but also indeterminate because one "foul disproportion" could beget an inconceivable number of similar acts. The dramatic effectiveness of Iago's lines requires that Othello must be profoundly complicit, as a listener, not only in deciphering his ambiguous syntax, but also in committing the anarchical implosion of spurious distinctions that Iago establishes as the foundation of the passage. If Iago's temptation is a stick of dynamite, Othello's perverse deciphering ignites the fuse – and his agonized imagination detonates the explosive.

Dickinson's dynamic and menacing reproduction of Shakespeare's dramaturgy on the page is light-years from Whitman's experiments in identity formation that require the displacement of diseased sexuality on the "cadavers" that "block up the passageway" on the road to America's optimistic future; it is alien to the purification of little Pearl, who learns not to "fight constantly against the world but would be a woman in it;" it is quite different from Ishmael's exorcism of Ahab and the drowning of the queer, but life-giving Queequeg; it is, in fact, the no-place from which any true assessment of America's seemingly irresistibly optimistic identity politics, attached to the label of an implacable "progress," should spring.

CONCLUSION

AMERICA'S PERVERSE SHAKESPEARE

With the commemoration of Shakespeare's four hundred fiftieth birthday in 2014 and the impending four hundredth anniversary of his death in 2016, the shadow of Shakespeare swerves again into view. As Emerson states, with inadvertent prescience, "His mind is the horizon beyond which, at present, *we do not see*."[373] Is the shadow destined to blind us with the self-enclosed predictability of America's perverse jeremiad? This thesis has shown that such an ominously closed future doesn't have to be.

Each of the five American authors in my study had dissident, though mostly disavowed responses to Shakespeare. Emerson's attempt to convert America into an enchanted island was haunted by harrowing intimations of perversity, disease, and death from *Hamlet*. His attempt to bleach his island paradise of Caliban seems to have evoked a living doppelgänger in Whitman whom he first embraced, but later attempted prudishly to evade for his remaining career.

Whitman's early attempt to confront the perverse in Caliban resulted in one of the most significant structures of disavowal in the history of homosexuality. As the unwilling father of gay liberation, Whitman's decision to evade what he considered to be the prurient sexuality of Shakespeare and to identify his own heroic "unperverted" ("Memorandum at a Venture") sexuality with women's liberation

[373] Italics added, Emerson, pg. 718.

prefigured the identity politics that has bound gay rights irrevocably with the neoliberal economic agenda. Such an alliance has had unintended consequences.[374]

Despite important historical differences, the gay rights movement, especially as it evolved in the 1980's and 90's, was predicated on the affirmation of middle class values similar to those advanced by the movement for women's equality, advocated for by Whitman in the 1880's. The understandable need to gain acceptance by affirming an "unperverted" form of sexuality succeeded in inadvertently legitimizing a structure of disavowal. What is at issue is not the legitimate demand by ostracized groups for equality under the law; it is that the discourse of the perverse has the capacity to naturalize violence so that it is nearly invisible. As Jonathan Dollimore argues:

> And yet it seems to me that liberation, far from eradicating the kind of sexual disgust felt by [André] Gide may have intensified it; certainly it has helped produce new ways of concealing or repressing it; and of encouraging people to displace and project their experience of it into politically acceptable forms of bigotry. We are still invited to express disgust publicly in relation to many things, most of all, perhaps paedophilia.[375]

For Dollimore, homosexual liberation in the affirmative tradition of Gide did not eliminate homophobia; it created the opportunity for new displacements and projections. Lee Edelman concurs, arguing that "queerness" can only enter the "political sphere" once it has "shift[ed] the figural burden of queerness onto someone else"…"The *structural position* of queerness, after all" he adds, "and the need to fill it remain." [376]

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[374] There has been a growing recognition among Queer theorists that the affirmative political stance of gay activists has been inadequate. See, for example, Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[375] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sex, Literature, and Censorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pg. 50.

[376] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pg. 27.

Anthropologist Roger Lancaster, in his detailed analysis of the relationship between what he calls America's current "sex panic" and its carceral system, describes the way that America's prison population has quadrupled in the last thirty years to 753 per 100,000 in 2010, five to ten times more people per capita than other developed countries; at the same time, starting in 1990, a whole new form of civil commitment developed which mirrored the 19th century masturbation panic in terms of its psychiatric rationale and its cultural resonance.[377] Paradoxically what drove the expansion of the prison system and the emergence of new forms of civil commitment, according to Lancaster, was not a professional psychiatric movement, as in the 19th century, or the government's attempt to consolidate its police powers, but a populist social movement: the victim's rights movement, based upon the model of "leftist social movements – civil rights, the women's movement, gay liberation."[378]

By 2008, twenty states had adopted sexual violent predator (SVP) laws and the United States Congress had passed a civil commitment provision as part of the Adam Walsh Act. As of 2006, there were 3646 people held in indefinite civil commitment as SVPs at an average cost of $97,000 per person per year.[379] Of the over 3000 individuals detained since 1990, just fifty have been released because psychiatrists determined that they were rehabilitated and no longer posed a risk to

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[377] Roger N. Lancaster, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 142. See also the full chapter "Zero Tolerance Crime and Punishment in the Punitive State", pp. 141-166.
[378] Lancaster, pg. 194.
[379] Eric S. Janus and Robert A. Prentky, "Sexual Predator Laws: A Two-Decade Retrospective," *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 21, no. 2 (December 2008): pg. 91. The term "SVP" includes a number of paraphilias, including sadism, rape and exhibitionism. I was unable to find the percentage of pedophiles currently held in civil commitment and listed in sex offender registries under the designation SVP, but I think it is safe to assert that the pedophile is symbolically regarded as the quintessential SVP.

the community.[380] From the start, sex offender registries have been advanced as a more popular and less costly alternative to civil commitment. The number of people on sex offender registries in the United States in 2010 was 228 per 100,000 and Human Rights Watch reported that the total number of people on the registries in the United States in 2011 (the last year for which there are complete statistics) was 740,000.[381]

The US Supreme Court, in its 1997 Kansas v. Henricks decision, soundly rejected the idea that the SVP laws did not satisfy a key prerequisite of civil commitment, proof of a "mental disorder."[382] This has not caused the controversy to disappear, however. The question at issue is whether a "mental abnormality" constitutes a real pathology or if it is simply, as Davidson argues in a 2008 Philoctetes Roundtable discussion, a term that designates a type of sexual behaviour that is considered morally reprehensible.[383] The principle measure of sexual deviance is "phallometric testing" using the notorious penile plethysmograph (which measures penile circumference and volume in response to a variety of pictures, scenes, clips, and audio dialogue). From these measurements, psychiatrists are able to determine an individual's "pedophile index," which is used to evaluate the danger of re-offense.[384] What the penile plethysmograph measures, however, is not a well-understood mental pathology affecting volition and resulting in bad behaviour, but desire itself. As Holly A. Miller et al. observe:

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[380] John L. Schwab, "DUE PROCESS AND "THE WORST OF THE WORST": MENTAL COMPETENCE IN SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR CIVIL COMMITMENT PROCEEDINGS," *Columbia Law Review* 112, no. 4 (May 2012): pg. 917.
[381] Lancaster, pg. 235. See also "US: More Harm Than Good," May 1, 2013, accessed August 08, 2014, doi:Human Rights Watch.
[382] See, e.g., Kansas v. Hendricks, 521 U.S. 346 (1997).
[383] Arnold Davidson, "Philoctetes - Paraphilias," Philoctetes RSS, October 18, 2008, section goes here, accessed January 08, 2015, http://philoctetes.org/past_programs/paraphilias.
[384] Holly A. Miller, Amy E. Amenta, and Mary Alice Conroy, "Sexually Violent Predator Evaluations: Empirical Evidence, Strategies for Professionals, and Research Directions," *Law and Human Behavior* 29, no. 1 (February 2005): pg. 37.

> There is no empirical proof that an individual diagnosed with a personality disorder or paraphilia actually has a neuropsychological abnormality, or, if present, the degree to which that abnormality may impair behavioural control.[385]

The distinction is crucial because if people are being placed in civil commitment not because they have an underlying pathology, but because of their bad behaviour, then the intervention would be punitive and not justified as a form of rehabilitation. Even more troubling, Davidson observes, if civil commitment is based upon a deviance from sexual "function" as opposed to underlying mental pathology, then there is no meaningful medical distinction between 19th century diagnoses of hysteria and masturbatory insanity and a current diagnosis of SVP.[386]

Anna Schaffner argues that our cultural obsession with pedophiles is merely a sign that the "law has taken the place of psychiatry."[387] Schaffner writes:

> . . . it is the law which 'makes a distinction between permissible 'paraphiles' and social 'paraphiles' whose acts make them liable to criminal proceedings, namely rapists, paedophiles, mad killers, sex criminals, exhibitionists, grave robbers, and stalkers'.[388]

In the same breath, Schaffner quotes Elisabeth Roudinesco, who contends that "paedophilia has replaced inversion as the incarnation of the most hateful perversion . . . because it attacks childhood and therefore the future of humanity."[389] Ironically, this line of argumentation derives directly from Aquinas and his teleological view of sexual acts. Aquinas, we will recall, regarded sexual perversion as an attack on the "species" – and, therefore, as an insult not only to God, but an attempt to murder humanity's future. Schaffner's language converts the pedophile into a figure who isn't merely committing a crime – a subject of the "law" – but one

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385 Miller et al., pg. 42.
386 Davidson, Paraphelias Roundtable Discussion.
387 Anna Katharina. Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pg. 263.
388 Ibid. pg. 263.
389 Ibid. pg. 264. Quoted from Elisabeth Roudinesco and David Macey, *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), pg. 142.

that is committing a metaphysical assault on the future.

The trouble with this rhetoric is not that it is wrong to assert an important distinction between the sexual "difference" that was punished in the 19th and early to mid 20th centuries (and has been, in the past decades, frequently celebrated) and the sexual crimes against the vulnerable that are prosecuted today, but that such a distinction does not mean that one has banished the moral and metaphysical categories of the 19th century.[390] A metaphysical view of pedophilia removes it from the realm of law and order into the Thomistic realm of infinite justice, the psychiatric realm of conversion therapy and the imaginative realm of "the scarlet letter." A view that justifies unlimited punishment on the basis not of criminal behavior, but on a form of deviant sexual desire makes all sexual minorities vulnerable.[391] It also has a powerful cultural impact that, as I have shown, is intimately connected to literary representations of perverse sexuality.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Shakespeare's plays unearth and dramatize a perverse sexuality that cannot be accommodated by psychiatric

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[390] Schaffner writes, "Whilst the majority of nineteenth-century sexologists were interested in establishing firm parameters for what is healthy and normal *ex negativo*" . . . "modernist writers" . . . "began to revalorize conceptions of the perversions at the beginning of the twentieth century, paving the way for a shift from the notion of sexual *deviance* to that of sexual *difference.*" *Modernism and Perversion,* pg. 4.

Foucault, on the other hand, argues, in his famous 1979 interview with Guy Hocquenghem, that the liberation of "sexual difference" merely created new, more aggressive forms of disciplinary power: "what is emerging is a new penal system, a new legislative system, whose function is not so much to punish offenses against these general laws concerning decency, as to protect populations and parts of populations regarded as particularly vulnerable. In other words, the legislator will not justify the measures that he is proposing by saying: the universal decency of mankind must be defended. What he will say is: there are people for whom others' sexuality may become a permanent danger." Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988), pg. 276.

[391] For a succinct summary of the controversy among psychologists over the term "paraphilia" (consistent with my treatment here) in the most recent DSM-5 (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) see Michelle A. McManus et al., "Paraphilias: Definition, Diagnosis and Treatment," *US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health* 5 (2013).

categories or cultural narratives. Hawthorne, employing the psychiatric categories for the diseased imagination, derived from Lockean psychology, attempted to extricate himself from *Macbeth*'s tragic ontology by presenting Dimmesdale as a sexual pervert who ultimately saves America's middle class values by converting his sin into repentance. Hawthorne, though, was haunted, by the ghost of incest in *Hamlet*, and transferred this onto the strange relationship between Dimmesdale and Pearl. Ultimately, Dimmesdale's apparent self-sacrifice through his public confession and subsequent death succeeds in converting Pearl to the very restrictions of antebellum womanhood that her anarchic childhood promised to free her from. T. Walter Herbert argues persuasively that there is a link between Pearl and Hawthorne's own delivery of his anarchic and non-conformist daughter, Una, into the hands of quack doctors, who employed an early experimental form of electro-shock therapy to treat her for what psychiatrists regarded as a disease. Even in his personal life, Hawthorne may never have escaped from the ironies of the perverse.[392]

Melville and Dickinson, on the other hand, read Shakespeare more violently and disturbingly. It is my contention that they learned from Shakespeare how to animate the void that Augustine describes as non-being and that Lee Edelman, evoking Freud, describes as the Death Drive. The gripping and inescapable complicity that Melville produces in his "Whiteness" chapter and Dickinson produces everywhere as a dramatic sexual politics, gives us a path towards a dangerous and experimental American Shakespeare criticism in the present, to counter the reactionary Shakespeare under the banner of American progress. For, as Ewan Fernie has observed in his chapter on Angelo, Shakespeare leads us into

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[392] T. Walter Herbert, "Una Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter,*" in *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, ed. Leland S. Person (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), pp. 522-540.

uncomfortable and dangerous identifications.[393] What person, as Melville points out, "in his own proper character," could admit an identification with sexual criminals, the abject outcasts of society?

Arthur Lindley has argued, forcefully, that the "very doctrine of general depravity . . . licenses dissent" by making everyone equally guilty.[394] This abject sense of complicity is certainly what Shakespeare's perverse reading evokes. However, Shakespeare also does something different than that. He dramatically produces the void, tears at the roots of unconscious energies, and makes them into a present, experiential, inescapable confrontation. Such a dramatic process is not merely critical. It to some extent runs the risk of reproducing those violent forces that society condemns. This leads to a radical openness, as Fernie points out, and, as I have observed, led, in part, to the shattering between reality and theater, practiced with consummate skill by Junius Booth and reproduced by his son John Wilkes Booth, in the tragic assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Shakespeare's influence on each of the American authors in my study makes it clear that perverse identifications do counterbalance the structuring forces of the perverse jeremiad. These anarchic identifications cannot be domesticated. To use Leo Bersani's phrase, that is a positive "value."[395] Sex cannot be redeemed, but its anarchic energies can be claimed.

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[393] Fernie, pp. 191-200.

[394] Lindley evokes the concept of "carnival," in his description of Augustinian non-being, which is also theatrical. Arthur Lindley, *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1996), pg. 36.

[395] "Gays and women must of course fight the violence directed against them, and I am certainly not arguing for a complicity with misogynist and homophobic fantasies. I am, however, arguing against that form of complicity that consists in accepting, even finding new ways to defend, our culture's lies about sexuality" . . . "But what if we said, for example, not that it is wrong to think of so-called passive sex as 'demeaning,' but rather that *the value of sexuality itself is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it?*" Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* 43 (Winter 1987): pg. 222.

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