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Adam Fales, Jordan Alexander Stein

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“Copyright, 1892, by Elizabeth S. Melville”: *Rethinking the Field Formation of Melville Studies*

ADAM FALES
University of Chicago

JORDAN ALEXANDER STEIN
Fordham University

The premise of this essay is that as scholars envision the future of Melville studies, we must also reckon with its past. We focus particular attention on what might be called the first Melville Revival, beginning in 1892 when Elizabeth Melville returned four of Herman’s novels to print. We argue that a considerable amount of the labor that Elizabeth expended sits plainly in archival records, where nonetheless Melville scholars rarely find her. As ours is not, however, the first reconsideration of Elizabeth’s contributions to her husband’s career, the second half of this essay attempts to understand the ways that Melville scholarship has perennially re-discovered Elizabeth over the past fifty years and then, unable to assimilate the discovery, re-forgotten her. Toward this essay’s conclusion, we show that to break this cycle, the future of Melville studies may require a rethinking of what scholars designate by the organizing concept-metaphor “Melville,” a rethinking that might expand our scholarly object beyond the man himself to encompass scenes of collaboration in the family and agencies irreducible to the author’s own.

It takes time for something false to become self-evident.

Pierre Bourdieu

Scholars in pursuit of archives are sometimes surprised to discover that one of the larger collections of manuscripts and documents by and about Herman Melville does not bear his name. The collection is called instead the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection, due to its provenance: Victor Hugo Paltsits, Keeper of Manuscripts at the New York Public Library (NYPL) in the 1910s, persuaded Melville’s cousin Catherine Gansevoort Lansing to deposit her family’s records with NYPL, due to their significance to New York state history. Herman’s place in the family papers was something of an afterthought, though his rise to literary prominence over the next decade and a half led

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Paltsits himself to correct the earlier omission and edit *Family Correspondence of Herman Melville 1830–1904* in 1929. And though it was well into the peak of Melville's twentieth-century fame that the Widener Library at Harvard acquired what is still the largest collection of Melville's papers, yet again the location and the provenance, as much as the famous writer, shaped the acquisition: Melville's granddaughter spent her married life a resident of Cambridge and donated not only her grandfather's papers but those of other relatives as well, to create the Eleanor Melville Metcalf Collection (now the basis of two collections, the Herman Melville Papers, 1761–1964 and the Melville Family Papers, both housed at Harvard's Houghton Library in its extensive rare books and manuscript collection since its opening in 1942).

A handful of scholars have acknowledged what these collection names already suggest: that the women of the Melville family did much to preserve Herman's reputation during the thirty interstitial years between his death in relative literary obscurity in 1891 and his revival and canonization as one of the great American authors beginning around 1921. But this insight is a revisionist one. The consensus that emerged in the decades following the Melville revival of the 1920s regarded these women's labor with a jaundiced eye. As Laurie Robertson-Lorant summarizes, "Early Melville biographers either ignored or denigrated the women in Melville's life. They portrayed Melville as an Olympian isolato surrounded by unintelligent women whose presence was a cross he had to bear" ("Melville and the Women in His Life" 16). In particular, the work that the women of the family undertook to establish and preserve Melville's posthumous reputation became almost invisible. Elliptical sentences in a book's acknowledgements often proffered the only indication that a Melville scholar in the 1920s or 1930s had benefited not only from the archives that Catherine Gansevoort Lansing bequeathed to NYPL, but also from the editions that Melville's wife Elizabeth brought back into print, from the correspondence with her father that Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter Rose Lathrop published, and from the unpublished papers that Metcalf made available before donating them to Harvard. The story of the Melville revival that scholars told too often began and ended with scholars.

If early Melville scholars thus privileged their own contributions and so-called discoveries over the saving labor of the women of the family, the same scholars did not exactly ignore those women. Rather, they kept them in the picture where they were painted in summarily unflattering ways—and none more so than Herman's wife, Elizabeth. Raymond Weaver described the Melvilles as poorly matched and their marriage as "a crucifixion" (340). Lewis Mumford found Elizabeth's writing "dutiful, girlish, commonplace," "inexpressive and jejune" (86). Metcalf remembered her grandmother in terms that matched the

scholars' assessments, for example that "life with a genius husband brought her much that she was emotionally unequal to; yet her loyalty and devotion to him were unswerving" (55). In the introduction to his *Melville's Marginalia*, Wilson Walker Cowen seriously considers Elizabeth as his project's antagonist, a destructive force who, Cowen insists without any conclusive evidence, erased the marginal notes Herman wrote in his books (xxii). Meanwhile, in an unpublished manuscript dating from somewhere around the 1950s, Egbert S. Oliver, while noting the many reasons the Melvilles might have been enamored with each other, still back-handedly denigrates Elizabeth and, for good measure, all nineteenth-century women of her class and hometown, with the exaggerated claim that "[s]he had never learned to use her muscles; in fact, no Boston lady of her day had muscles" (5). Early Melvilleans could not seem to determine whether Elizabeth's greatest offense was as a destructive, manipulative usurper or a hapless, corset-bound damsel.

Yet, as we have already suggested, far from opposing the scholarly undertakings of the Melville revival, the contributions of Elizabeth and the women in the Melville family materially underwrote many of those early scholastic endeavors—to such an extent that the present essay ventures to speculate that there would be no Melville studies without those contributions. The argument that follows fortifies this speculation by considering the archives, documents, and above all the editions of Herman's books for which Elizabeth was responsible. Melville studies, from our perspective, is built on a history of women's labor that has largely been erased and, when recognized, discounted. Accordingly, the premise of the present essay is that as scholars envision the future of Melville studies, we must also reckon with this aspect of its past.

Two aims follow from this premise, the first of which is simply reparative. We imagine that people should get credit for their work, that scholars should acknowledge those who came before them, and that the material infrastructures of things like document preservation and the republication of editions deserve recognition as essential activities on which scholarly reading and interpretation is often built. It is, therefore, bad practice for many early Melville scholars to have consigned to obscurity the labors performed by Elizabeth and the women in the Melville family, while simultaneously drawing from that infrastructure and claiming credit for the knowledge they built thereon; and we seek to advance better practices.

The second aim for this investigation looks not back but forward. Our view is that the considerable amount of writing, documentation, ingenuity, and labor that Elizabeth expended sits plainly in archival records, where nonetheless Melville scholars rarely find her. As ours is not, however, the first reconsideration of Elizabeth's contributions to her husband's career, the second half

of this essay attempts to understand the ways that Melville scholarship over the past fifty years has perennially re-discovered Elizabeth and then, unable to assimilate the discovery, re-forgotten her. Toward this essay's conclusion, we shall argue that to break this cycle, the future of Melville studies may require a rethinking of what scholars designate by the organizing concept-metaphor "Melville"—a rethinking that might expand our scholarly object beyond the man himself to encompass scenes of collaboration in the family and agencies irreducible to the author's own.

A Few Very Slight Amendments: Elizabeth Among the Archives

In the decades following Herman's death, several of the Melville women undertook to preserve his legacy. Herman's younger sister Augusta sifted through and saved more than 500 family letters in a trunk, many now in the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection, making her, in Wyn Kelley's estimation, "a patient and dedicated writer and collector of family correspondence" ("My Literary Thirst" 47). In a subsequent essay, Kelley offers an analogous interpretation of Eleanor Melville Metcalf's editorial work as she prepared the first printed edition of Herman's 1849 travel diary, in which her expertise "went far beyond . . . basic skills" and through which her labor "has had a vital impact on Melville scholarship throughout the almost-century since she began it" ("Out of the Bread Box" 24). Congruent with Kelley's account of these women's contributions to the Melville scholarship, a handful of other scholars have sought to understand Elizabeth's place in the same work. Robertson-Lorant's account of "Melville and the Women in His Life" summarizes that "women were the Melville family historians and chroniclers" (18), an observation that gains specificity in her Melville biography, where she credits Elizabeth with "almost single-handedly" keeping "her husband's reputation alive until a new generation of readers better attuned to his sensibility discovered him" (536). Likewise, in her history of the Melville Revival, Clare L. Spark argues that "Shortly after Melville's death in 1891, Elizabeth began the campaign to recognize her once-famous husband that culminated in the Revival of the 1920s, concentrating her efforts on the republication of *Typee*" (133). Neither Robertson-Lorant nor Spark detail Elizabeth's campaign strategies, but abundant archival evidence exists among the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection, the Herman Melville Papers, and the Stedman Papers at Columbia's Rare Books Library. These archives neatly preserve evidence of the labors Elizabeth undertook to promote her own Melville revival beginning in the 1890s, which anticipated the acknowledged Revival of the 1920s.

Elizabeth's initial contribution to her husband's legacy after his death was to compile from document and memory the factual records that allowed early scholars to authenticate key details of his life. The Houghton collections now hold short biographical sketches by Elizabeth that Weaver and early biographers referenced and that Merton Sealts, Jr. reprinted in his *Early Lives of Herman Melville* (1974). But prior to the first scholarly Melville biography, Elizabeth's notes served as the factual basis for several biographical notices shortly after her husband's death, including one by Joseph Edwards Adams Smith in the *Pittsfield Evening Journal*, and others by Arthur Stedman, such as appeared in *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1891* and in the introduction he wrote for the 1892 edition of *Typee*. Elizabeth in fact maintained a correspondence with Stedman and his more famous father, Edmund Clarence Stedman, through which she helped to shape his writing and editing process. In one letter, for example, she corrects his information for the *Appleton's* article, writing "the date should be Sept 28—a typographical over sight [sic] probably, which it may not be too late to set right" (Letter to Arthur Stedman [18 March]). This correction indicates what readers of Elizabeth's extant correspondence should come to recognize as a characteristically patient attention to, and quiet authority over, the details of her late husband's life.

In addition to assuming this kind of authority, Elizabeth also assumed agency, making decisions and seeking alterations for subsequent editions of Herman's books. She exhibits not inconsiderable knowledge about those books in an undated "Memoranda for re-issue of 'Typee,'" copied in her best handwriting, which offers precise instructions for changes in the text for the 1892 reissue of Herman's first novel ("Memoranda"). The memo announces the changes were "(Made by Mr. Melville)," presumably shortly before his death, but they were put into effect by Elizabeth, who, in partnership with the Stedmans, oversaw the publication of this edition which took place the next year. To implement the memo's directions would have required that Elizabeth work with the Stedmans and their publisher to navigate and, in the general sense of the term, collate multiple editions of a work (in this case, the first American and British editions).

One of Herman's directions, however, she did not wish to follow. The line "Omit map, & both prefaces and dedication to Revised Edition" emends in pencil the neat copy of the original memo, suggesting subsequent revisions (Fig 1.). Of particular interest here is the dedication of *Typee*, which in the original edition read to "LEMUEL SHAW / Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts / This Little Work is Affectionately Inscribed by the Author," and which Herman, represented by the unedited memo, wanted to omit (H.

Melville 1846). But Elizabeth took a different view of this plan, altering Herman's instructions and writing in a January 27, 1893, letter to Stedman:

I have been carefully rereading the new edition of *Typee* with very great interest, for the detail had faded almost entirely from my mind.

Pray do not let it pass to a "second edition" (if there is hope of that) without letting me know in time to make a few very slight amendments, and one important addition—the dedication to my father which I am very sorry was omitted.

As above, Elizabeth displays a broad but functional knowledge of the features and timelines of book publishing, though here she also commands enough authority over Herman's works to alter his written intentions.

Elizabeth's motives for making these changes remain obscure, and the circumstantial evidence supports potentially contradictory possibilities: for example, that she was trying to preserve something of Herman's intentions from 1846, or else that she was defying his intentions from 1891, or even that she was doing something for herself. (Her name appears on the copyright page of the 1892 edition as "Elizabeth S. Melville," a quiet and partial acknowledgement of her Shaw lineage, which may not be irrelevant to her thinking about either the republication of Herman's books or herself at this juncture in her life.) Despite these open-ended and contradictory possibilities regarding her motives, however, what seems indisputable is that Elizabeth acts in this exchange with Stedman deliberately and with a decisive point of view. Estimations of her foolishness or her unscholarliness (such as those Weaver or Mumford or Cowen have variously levied) require that we ignore the agency that she clearly assumes over the republication of Herman's books.

Indeed, Elizabeth deserves significant credit for the edition sometimes referred to as "Stedman's," not only because she fed him biographical information and worked to shape his editorial choices, but also because she in part underwrote it financially. Her ability to do so owes to her changing financial picture following Herman's death, over which it is worth pausing. Elizabeth was the sole inheritor of Herman \$13,261.31 estate, according to John Gretchko's recent examination of Herman's will ("The Will of Herman Melville" 95). Just over six months after her husband's death, in April 1892, Elizabeth also sold the Melville house on East 26th Street in New York (Gretchko, "Financial and Legal Evidence" 21–22). For this transaction, she received \$16,250 from Robert Hutcheson; according to the property valuations found by Warren Broderick, this price was substantially more than the home's value at the time (72). Gretchko also documents Elizabeth's motives for selling the house: "I sold the house in 26th st [sic], partly because housekeeping was such a care (for only us two [i.e. her and her oldest daughter]) and partly because the

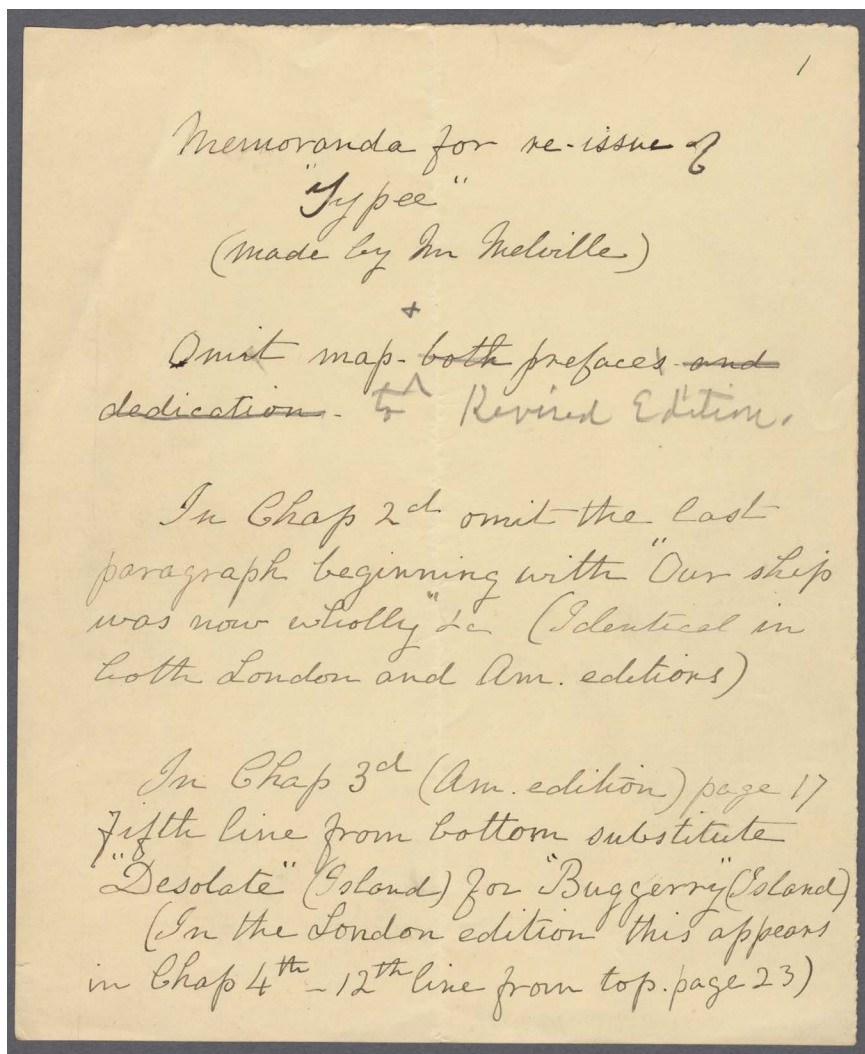


Fig. 1. "Memoranda for re-issue of 'Typee' (made by Mr. Melville)." Photo courtesy of Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

neighborhood had greatly changed for the worse" ("Financial and Legal Evidence" 22). Considering the "liberal" offer she received for the home and the reasons that Elizabeth avowed for giving it up, the evidence supplied by Gretchko and Broderick suggests that Elizabeth could not only recognize a lucrative financial opportunity, but also that she may have wished to use her money to pursue extra-domestic opportunities.

This context helps us situate how Elizabeth used her financial position to further Herman's legacy through her own publishing venture. The United States Book Company published the edition in 1892, after establishing an agreement with Elizabeth (United States Book Company). The Melville Papers house the records that Elizabeth maintained for this edition, including publisher correspondence in which she agrees to a decrease from a 10% commission to a 5% commission, then to a 2% commission for British publication (United States Book Company; Publishers Plate Renting Company; Dana Estes and Company). As the nineteenth-century publishing industry was not famed for its generosity to authors, it is certainly plausible to consider that United States Book Company was attempting to take advantage of an unsuspecting widow (Charvat 29–48; Winship 41, 44–47; Jackson 142–85). But it is also clear that Elizabeth understood and did not dispute the United States Book Company's terms, accepting what, given the overall financial picture of her early widowhood, she is unlikely to have failed to recognize as a financial loss.

In any case, Elizabeth was likely not working for financial gain. Given that she asked the Stedmans to intercede on her behalf a number of times, but not at all regarding these financial negotiations with the United States Book Company, it is reasonable to infer that Elizabeth had calculated that these editions would not likely have seen print without her willingness to accept decreased royalties. Elizabeth's apparent lack of interest in making money from the republication of Herman's books is further evident in the fact that she also took significant pride in these editions, remarking for instance on her excitement to order as many as six of each "in the different colored bindings" (Letter to Arthur Stedman [2 Nov.]). In the case of books that she was already subventing, such enthusiasm for expenditure furthers our sense that Elizabeth's motives for republication were other than profit.

Yet pride was only one of the intangible values that the 1892 edition afforded Elizabeth. The books also served for her as a kind of calling card. After Herman's death, she appears to have sent a range of Melville's books (including those by him and others from his personal library) to a number of literary men. The Melville Papers hold a handful of letters written to Elizabeth through the 1890s from the likes of Richard Henry Stoddard, Elihu Vedder (to whom Melville had dedicated *Timoleon*), and the Stedmans—with all of whom Melville had corresponded in the 1880s—acknowledging remembrances she had sent after Herman's death. In 1894 W. Clark Russell, another of Melville's correspondents, sent Melville's oldest daughter, also named Elizabeth, an appreciation of "your father's little book" [*Timoleon*] and his regards to her mother (Letter to Elizabeth Melville). It is impossible to know how many books the elder Elizabeth sent that went unacknowledged. But it seems clear that where Herman,

toward the end of his life, pursued relative obscurity, eschewing literary society even when prominent men like the senior Stedman issued invitations to their clubs, Elizabeth nonetheless sought it for him posthumously (Dillingham 79). She was trying to secure her late husband's fame, and giving away books to literary men numbered among her strategies.

When the United States Book Company went into receivership and reorganized in 1894, Elizabeth worked to make sure Herman's books continued to sell through and after these financial troubles. Even as the company faced increasing financial difficulties, invoices and correspondence document the continued sales of the books that Elizabeth brought back into print. At the onset of the company's financial troubles, Elizabeth wrote to Stedman to ensure that the plates for Herman's books would not "fall into unworthy hands, or be destroyed. I could hardly be reconciled to that, for the desire of my heart has been to see my husband's books resurrected, as it were" (Letter to Arthur Stedman [1 Feb. 1893]). Stedman acted as a go-between for Elizabeth's communications with the United States Book Company, an arrangement that Kathleen E. Kier characterizes as Elizabeth's prudent approach to business: "Lizzie's desire for intermediaries to handle the less attractive aspects of her exchequer indicates wise concern for fine legal distinctions, rather than lack of personal courage. As daughter of the Chief Justice of Massachusetts, she had to be well aware of the value of counsel" (80–81). The United States Book Company's sales dwindled through mid-1898. As the plates for Herman's books changed hands, Elizabeth oversaw their safe transfer to the Publishers Plate Renting Company, who would rent the plates to Dana Estes and Company.

The Estes reissue saw an increase in sales, while meanwhile it appears the plates were subsequently rented to a number of other publishers, often in smaller editions aimed to comparably local circulation, because other impressions from the 1892 plates appear from publishers including A.L. Burt in New York, the Page Company in Boston, the St. Boltoph Society in Boston, D. D. Nickerson Company in Boston, and G. P. Putnam's in London. Of these subsequent impressions, only the Putnam's contract remains in Elizabeth's files, but her invoices from Dana Estes and Company nonetheless confirm what the existence of these other impressions implies, with Herman's books gradually making their way out into the world through Elizabeth's death on July 31, 1906. By our calculations, she spent nearly fifteen years working with publishers to circulate Herman's early novels, while Herman himself spent only about eleven.

The invoices that Elizabeth preserved show, furthermore, that the posthumous editions of Herman's four reissued titles sold nearly 8,500 copies—more than one third of Herman's lifetime American sales, which total just over 25,000 copies of *Typee*, *Omoo*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*. When G. Thomas Tanselle

calculated these numbers in the 1960s, he overlooked Elizabeth's contribution to these posthumous editions, other than observing that she received the meagre royalties, and instead credited these titles' release "under the supervision of Arthur Stedman" (202). Yet these numbers offer a quantitative measure of the extent of Elizabeth's work as well as constituting a respectable showing for an author who had largely gone out-of-print at the time of his death.

These invoices also unequivocally contradict the popular commonplace that Herman was unknown, unread, or unheard of before the Melville Revival of the 1920s. As Herman became between the 1890s and the 1920s "a cult figure among socialists, freethinkers, and students at major universities, especially young men and women intrigued by the sexual imagery of *Moby-Dick* and the early novels and by what they perceived to be Melville's homoeroticism" (Robertson-Lorant 614), and as anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and poets and homophiles like Edward Carpenter turned to Melville because "*Omoo*, *Typee*, and some of Melville's other stories of the South Pacific were already widely regarded by gay men as ethnographies of homosexuality" (Chauncey 284), these readers all owed something to Elizabeth's popularizing efforts beginning in 1892. It may sound absurd to draw a line between Elizabeth Melville and the likes of Malinowski or Carpenter, and we know of no evidence of any intellectual lineage between them; yet unless these readers chanced to unearth old nineteenth-century volumes, it is likely that they held Melville's books in their hands primarily thanks to Elizabeth's persistence in bringing those books back into print.

The readers reached by these posthumous editions illustrate the particular kind of writer that Herman became as a result of Elizabeth's first revival. Not well-known but not forgotten, read but only by those in the know, Herman's literary reputation was made by Elizabeth's legwork after 1892, though that reputation did not yet make him into a Great American Novelist. Instead, the first Melville revival resembles nothing so much as a tale of Victorian women and incipiently modern homophiles unwittingly conspiring to popularize dirty, formerly out-of-print books. It is, to say the least, a story that involves chance, accident, and irony.

Not the Worst Thing: Elizabeth among the Scholars

We have gone to some expository lengths to demonstrate that archival records exist to support our understanding of Elizabeth's contributions to Herman's posthumous reputation, and indeed many of these records themselves exist because Elizabeth preserved them. Yet in spite of the fact of these archives and the evidence of her labor they contain, Elizabeth

has rarely been given much credit for fomenting what we would recognize as the first Melville revival of 1891–1921. Some part of Elizabeth’s erasure, we have suggested, is due to garden-variety misogyny; another part, we have also said, is due to the tendency of scholars in the 1920s to champion their own research in the idiom of discovery. While both these reasons are objectionable, they are also embedded in the cultures that produce and have produced American literary scholarship since its inception as an academic discipline (Shumway 9, 72–75, 124–26). There is, however, one further reason that Elizabeth’s labors have been erased, and it is specific to the terrain of Melville studies.

An overwhelming focus on Herman’s biography and career arc has dominated Melville studies from 1921 at least through the 1950s. Early Melville scholars funneled their labor to the writing of biographies, the transcription of letters, the documentation of Melville’s reading, book buying, and source material, and the authentication of details from the novels that might have been painted from life. Though critical takes on Melville’s works—that is to say, readings and interpretations, rather than more empirical projects—have also proliferated, even these often make recourse to estimable fact-finding projects like Jay Leyda’s *The Melville Log* (1951), or Merton Sealts Jr.’s *Melville’s Reading* (1966); meanwhile Hershel Parker’s massive two-volume *Herman Melville: A Biography* (1996, 2002) positions itself unmistakably as the inheritor of this tradition. Although many American authors have been subjects of biographies, emphasis on Melville’s life exceeds that which appears in studies of others like Hawthorne or Emerson.

This biographical and career-centered thrust of Melville studies has structurally marginalized Elizabeth because it defines as its object Herman’s life, rather than the impact or circulation of Herman’s texts. With Herman’s life as the presumptive object of Melville studies, the temporal boundary of the field makes a hard stop at 1891—as consultation of otherwise encyclopedic volumes by the likes of Leyda or Parker immediately confirms. But as we have shown, a significant part of Elizabeth’s labor only begins the year after Melville’s death. How, given the logic of the field, could her edition of *Typee* not be left out of, for example, John Bryant’s otherwise imaginative textual study of that book’s multiple revisions and iterations? The very comprehensiveness of Bryant’s work takes as its asymptote “the earliest recorded instance of Melville’s unfolding,” insisting that it “cannot speak for the unfoldings of a career as it unfolded throughout nineteenth-century America” (250). Bryant’s example, though considerably different in scope and method from projects like Leyda’s or Parker’s, nonetheless tends to recognize the object of Melville studies within similar temporal parameters as theirs. To choose another example, we can see a related phenomenon framing the recent special issue of *Leviathan* on

“Late Melvilles,” whose contributors collectively examine biases in the field that have influenced scholars’ tendencies to overlook key aspects of the study of Melville, especially his late work. Yet the emphasis of the issue lands on the work—that is to say, on Melville at the end of his career and life—and much less so on the lateness: his work’s afterlives beyond 1891. Though the issue’s contributors follow its editor, Cody Marrs, and ask, “in what, precisely, does Melville’s lateness inhere?” (3), still it remains easy for their essays to ignore Elizabeth’s influence on the late Melville. From our vantage, looking at Elizabeth’s labor, even the earliest of works like *Typee* become late works, as both the author and culture return their attention to it at a temporal remove. Yet the “field imaginary” of Melville studies defines and frames its object in such a way that ineluctably makes Elizabeth’s labor beside the point (Pease 11).

This conclusion about the field formation of Melville studies is worth stressing, because we are not the first scholars to have discovered Elizabeth’s and other women’s labor in the archive. While there have been multiple such discoveries over nearly five decades, their impact has been concentrated into isolated volumes, panels, and conversations, such as the 2006 edited collection *Melville and Women* (Schultz and Springer). And, as we will see, citations to many pioneering studies of Elizabeth are infrequent, an uptake that makes such work look optional, rather than essential, to the field.

The first major reassessment appeared in Amy Elizabeth Puett’s 1969 Northwestern dissertation “Melville’s Wife: A Study of Elizabeth Shaw Melville,” directed by Harrison Hayford. Puett documented Elizabeth’s labors copying Herman’s writing during his lifetime, such as individual works like *Mardi*, “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” and much of his poetry, including the preparation and revision of *John Marr* and *Timoleon* (58, 73–75, 115–18, 126–27, 147–50, 180–83). Puett further argued for Elizabeth’s contributions to Herman’s legacy, accounting for and interpreting Elizabeth’s posthumous editing of *Billy Budd* and *Weeds and Wildings Chiefly* (175–80), and narrating Elizabeth’s labor on the 1892 edition of Herman’s works, consistent with our account above. But Puett’s revision of Elizabeth’s place in Herman’s career had little influence on scholarly conversations. Unlike many Melville dissertations of the period, especially those under the supervision of prominent scholars like Hayford, Puett’s was rarely cited, and the only part to find publication was a few pages pertaining to a letter she unearthed about a possible biographical source for *Pierre* (Emmers 339–43). That is to say, the only published portion of a study of Elizabeth was primarily concerned with Herman.

A decade later, in a series of three short essays for *Melville Society Extracts*, Joyce Deveau Kennedy offered a revisionist take on Elizabeth, drawing in part on Puett, and pursuing the fairly novel approach of interpreting Elizabeth’s

correspondence as documenting her own, rather than her husband's, perspective. Kennedy finds "a well-educated woman with a sense of humor" ("Elizabeth and Herman" 4), who was considerably "more cosmopolitan than many of Melville's biographers have realized" ("Elizabeth and Herman [Part II]" 3). The appearance of Kennedy's transcriptions of Elizabeth's letters in the *Extracts*—even more so than a dissertation such as Puett's—meant that few attentive Melvilleans could have missed them. Yet the relatively spare citations to Kennedy's short essays tend to lump them with the 1975 publication of letters by and about Elizabeth on which basis scholars have debated whether and to what extent Herman beat her (Kring and Carey 137–41; Yanella and Parker 11–15; Renker, "Wife Beating" 123). This engagement does not tend to advance the aspect of Kennedy's argument that encourages us to see the Melvilles' life from Elizabeth's perspective.

Kier's 1980 essay, "The Revival that Failed," remains one of the rare contributions to Melville studies both to cite Puett's work and to advance Kennedy's argument on its own terms. It surveys the archival material in Columbia's Stedman papers and judiciously interprets Elizabeth's tone in her letters to Stedman as evidence that prior Melvilleans' poor estimation of Elizabeth was misguided. Kier's essay argues that Elizabeth's continued labor shows "the United States Book Company's edition might better be called Stedman's *and* hers" (76, original emphasis); yet it reaches an overly modest conclusion about the impact of the 1892 edition and does not approach the claim (found in Robertson-Lorant, Spark, and the present essay) that Elizabeth's "failed" revival materially underpinned the Melville Revival of the 1920s. Differences of interpretation alone, however, probably do not account for the reception of Kier's argument, which is negligible even by the standards of scholarship on Elizabeth Melville. Despite Kier's other well-received contributions to the field, the single, peer-reviewed essay on Melville to cite her 1980 essay was published in 2018—by one of us (Stein).

This pattern of discovery and failed uptake continued into the 1990s with Robertson-Lorant's *Melville: A Biography* (1996). Exemplifying what she retrospectively summarizes as a "both/and' approach" to biography, Robertson-Lorant's narrative proceeds by keeping open multiple possible interpretations of the author's life and work at the same time ("Melville and Feminist Biography" 13), showing, for example, how Herman could both be "egotistical and cruel to those who loved him" but also rely on their kindness and support ("Melville and the Women in His Life" 34). She further shows that this care most often stemmed from Elizabeth's dedication to her husband and his work, and Robertson-Lorant attempts to highlight how much this work mattered even if it cannot be recovered: "At no little cost to her own comfort and security, Lizzie

Melville kept her sanity and self-respect intact and kept her husband's literary legacy alive after his death in 1891. She was as heroic in her way as he was in his, and in the end she understood him best and took whatever secrets she had with her to the grave" (34).

While Robertson-Lorant's biography paints a portrait of Elizabeth that leaves room for a kind of Melville studies that could take account of Elizabeth's labor after Herman's death, such possibilities were largely eclipsed by the co-incident publication that same year of the first volume of Parker's *Herman Melville: A Biography*. The scope and erudition of Parker's research on Melville is in many respects beyond question, but his biography did not incorporate and instead closed off the room that Robertson-Lorant's work had left open for Melville studies, even though Parker's second volume appeared six years after both of their biographies were published. For instance, in its final sentence, the second volume ventriloquizes Elizabeth's reflections on her late husband: "Marrying him did not seem the worst thing she ever did" (2002, 923). Parker's use of litotes ("did not seem the worst") contrasts sharply with Robertson-Lorant's deployment of the same device ("no little cost"), for his gestures wryly, with a nod to the flights of irony in Melville's own prose style, while her litotic estimation of Elizabeth's work during and after Herman's life manifests a far more humble mood, questioning any scholar's ability to understand the full extent of Elizabeth's contribution. These two uses of litotes—an appropriately Melvillean device that resembles the twists and turns of scholarly recovery and erasure we trace here—illustrate the nearly opposite ends to which historical accounts of Elizabeth have been put. The different senses evoked by each litotic double-negative show that the fact of Elizabeth's appearance in a scholar's work is not sufficient to the task of representing her perspective (as we might recall from the words of Weaver, Mumford, Cowen, and Oliver cited above).

Surveying the field and its consistent overlooking of Elizabeth's contribution, we are offering an intervention not into what Melville scholarship knows, but rather into what it knows how to know. Thus, from our perspective, it is not that the facts of Parker's biography are wrong, so much as his facts are framed around the assumption that someone like Elizabeth is valuable to history and scholarship primarily because she gives us insights into Herman's life. She does not exist on her own in Melville scholarship, even though her archives indicate plainly that she not only existed on her own after her husband's death but furthermore read, wrote, traveled, engaged in significant financial transactions, and indeed took on a part-time career editing and promoting her late husband's work. It is of course possible, likely even, that Elizabeth's life gives us insights into Herman's; but the issue we are raising is that among Melville scholars the

equal and opposite perspective—that his life lends insight into hers—while just as true, has with great consistency been chauvinistically ignored, even in the relatively rare moments over the last fifty years when the possibility has been raised.

We acknowledge and credit Parker with having recovered much of the material documentation of how the Melville women underwrote Herman's labors and preserved his reputation, and yet we object that his interpretations of this material just as often fail to consider the possibility that women's labor is meaningful or something other than inevitable. For example, in section 8 of the "Historical Note" to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Moby-Dick* (published in 1988, before either Robertson-Lorant's and Parker's biographies), Parker discusses the reception history of the 1892 editions—what he calls "the four books that Arthur Stedman eventually got into print," amplifying the consensus view that obscures the actual division of labor on this edition, such as Puett and Kier documented and we discuss above (749). Here, then, is a rare moment in the scholarship that does look past Herman's death in 1891, and yet as Parker's narrative situates the 1892 edition (which "evoked some important comment on Melville") amid a rich detailing of Melville's readers throughout the late nineteenth century—from Fabian Socialists and readers we might now recognize as homosexuals to early Melville scholars like Henry Stephens Salt (732–49)—it elides Elizabeth completely. Parker is admittedly focusing on the story of Herman's evolving reputation, and the reader reception of the 1892 editions is plausibly part of that story. Yet by omitting discussion of Elizabeth, Parker also elides not just her agency behind this edition's publication history, but also he elides the fact that she too was one of this edition's readers. That, as she wrote to Stedman, she read *Typee* in its 1892 edition, becomes unassimilable to the posthumous reader reception of Melville, and Parker instead situates the "Melville boom" among what he glosses as "many readers, male or female" but what he in fact details as a community of overwhelmingly male (and just one lesbian) readers (749, 742). In a comprehensive, aspirationally exhaustive, 181-page "Historical Note," Elizabeth's status as a reader, promoter, and devotee of Herman's work becomes an overlooked detail.

Parker's position in the field—and specifically his prominence as heir to an empirical-biographical tradition that we argue has uniquely dominated Melville studies—earns his interpretations a particular scrutiny. The problem we are diagnosing, however, is baked into Melville studies as a field, and so, while it would be difficult to find an approach to Melville more temperamentally distinct from Parker's, and more topically aligned with our own, than that of Elizabeth Renker, it is worth noting that her work in fact makes some of the same critical moves as Parker's. Renker's widely read, cited, and debated 1994 essay,

“Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page,” and her *Strike Through the Mask: Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing* (1996) marshal a deep dive into the archival material on the Melville family both to illuminate the psychology that motivated Herman’s engagement with the materiality of his own work, and, bravely, to expose the violence and misogyny that adheres in the work and the life. But with surprising consistency, Renker’s investigation, even as it conjectures on Elizabeth’s lived experience, interprets this experience in terms of what it might tell us about Herman, eliding Elizabeth as an object and subject of knowledge in and of herself. In the introduction to *Strike Through the Mask*, for example, Renker notes that Elizabeth, along with Herman’s sisters, “had become his copyists, producing fair copies from which they omitted punctuation,” but understands the meaning of this arrangement in terms of Herman’s psychology: “Punctuation marking in particular has a puncturing quality in the relation it expresses between the page and the writer’s hand” (xxi). Renker points our gaze between Elizabeth’s page and Herman’s hand and finds meaning and agency principally in the latter, skipping the deliberate and careful labor that produced that page in order to focus on the violent and “puncturing” hand that works upon it. Even as Renker made claims that others refused and delved into material that occasioned an “excoriating” response (Davidson 673), her work ironically reproduced some of the structural inequalities of labor and attention that occasioned Elizabeth’s abuse.

To recap: we have seen that multiple scholars have discovered Elizabeth’s contributions to Herman’s career, and many more have failed to assimilate these discoveries. The recurrence and yet the tepid reception of this work suggests that one issue at stake in Melville studies is not discovery but rather longevity. Elizabeth’s story has become a case study in revisionist history that refuses to remain revised. We have seen that many of the most highly regarded biographical and documentary works on Herman take no notice of Elizabeth’s posthumous preservation of her husband’s legacy. The problems with this avoidance are compounded by the fact that Elizabeth’s labor remarkably resembles the same work that scholars would go on to do. Following the Melville Revival of the 1920s, scholars produced a flurry of catalogs, bibliographies, biographies, logs, and other reference works to document Herman’s life, work, and reputation. Elizabeth was doing just this, albeit without any of the scholars’ resources or infrastructure supporting her. She kept track of the reviews, copyrights, reissues, and finances for Melville’s books, and she wrote biographical sketches of his life. She corresponded with literary figures and noted errors that appeared in print. We can only imagine that, were legitimate academic enterprises based around resourceful widows, there would have been no need for a second Melville revival.

Ironically, Elizabeth's own work prefigures some of the errors that the scholarly Melvilleans would go on to make. For example, Puett notes a miscalculation in Elizabeth's "memoranda" on her husband's life, in which Elizabeth refers to *Typee's* four-month timeline (rather than the actual four weeks) for Herman's "detention in the Typee Valley": "Interestingly, Lizzie's sketch set a precedent for a practice all of Melville's early biographers would adopt. She suggested going to Melville's books for the facts of his biography" (190). Perhaps because Elizabeth was already making so many of the same moves as early Melvilleans, she also made the same mistakes.

Ignorant but Fascinated: Elizabeth Among the Authors

We have been arguing that the scholarly erasure of Elizabeth's labor inheres in the conceptual and the historical foundation of Melville studies, which is organized comparatively tightly around the author's life and career. Accordingly, the temporal parameters for Melville studies have typically stopped in 1891, so that Elizabeth's labors from 1892 onward fall normatively outside the field's purview. Ironically enough, as we have also shown, it was women like Elizabeth who made Melville biography a possibility, and yet it is this same mode of scholarship that the fact of their labor urges us to move beyond.

We are not suggesting that Elizabeth's structurally overlooked labors necessitate an outright abandonment of literary biography or author studies, but we are insisting that an uninterrupted engagement with these modes has not, and likely will not, correct the field's blind spots around its debts to Elizabeth and the other Melville women. Because the problem is not going to remedy itself—attempts to correct it from within the field have been consistently unassimilated—we have been arguing that the persistence of this problem invites a reevaluation of the commonly held bounds of the biography or the author as such. To put a fine point on the matter, it is not only unlikely but, as we are arguing at some length, demonstrable that Melville could not have had the same career, during his life and after his death, without Elizabeth's contributions. Yet the shape of the field, which designates Herman as the author and Elizabeth as, at most, a copyist and letter writer, will ceaselessly eclipse Elizabeth with Herman unless the parameters of the field are widened to make room for her. The question, then, is how to go about making that room. By way of conclusion, we offer three models.

First, the work of an expanded Melville studies points us in the direction of studies of textual circulation. The small shift from studying Melville to studying the dissemination of Melville's texts would render the 1891 date an illogical

stopping point and would indeed point Melvilleans beyond the biography and the author. Such a move has precedent, including in Parker's meta-study, *Melville Biography* (459–80), though it finds particularly salutary expression in Natasha Hurley's recent account of the emergence of what she calls "the gay and lesbian novel," which considers *Typee*'s uptake among homophiles like Charles Warren Stoddard as a first example. Hurley argues that this latter-day circulation of the text, quite apart from anything Melville designed in 1846, "produces a model for understanding how circulation and literary form in tandem produce the frame of reference required for reading other kinds of queer literary life before they emerge as such" (48). Above, we very generally connected Elizabeth's 1892 editions with this same pattern of textual circulation, and Hurley's methodological expansion advances this knowledge for Melville studies, even as more remains to be seen about how the circulation and effects of Melville's texts can challenge the field-paradigm that privileges the timeline of his career.

Second, the work of an expanded Melville studies requires a new historiography for the field, and in particular begs a motivated rereading of the story of the Melville Revival itself. Consider, for instance, the story Metcalf tells in *Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle* about how authority over Herman's legacy fell to her mother, the Melvilles' youngest and only married daughter, Frances Thomas. Through this lineage, Metcalf positions herself as the rightful inheritor of Herman's legacy. Her account of coming into possession of Herman's belongings foreshadows the Melville Revival's broader move from ignorance to discovery: "I would get [the trunk of Herman's belongings] out now and then, look through the contents, read here and there, utterly ignorant but fascinated . . . At this time I shared my grandfather's taste in *things*, rather than knew aught of what was in his *mind*" (292–93; original emphasis). Metcalf narrates how this material was eventually handed over to a scholar—Raymond Weaver—in the exchange that traditionally inaugurates the Melville Revival.

However, beginning the Revival story with this handoff paints a skewed portrait of how Herman came to his present prominence, for the story Metcalf tells is complicit with the eradication of the very authority she also claims through lineage. Her story takes for granted that Melville's legacy was something sought out by scholars, who discovered it in the possession of "ignorant but fascinated" women like herself (a characterization that, as Wyn Kelley has demonstrated, ignores that by the time these words were printed in 1953 Metcalf had proven herself to be an accomplished textual editor and a published poet ["Out of the Bread Box" 26–31]). Her own account rhetorically diminishes the talent and influence she wielded as she parlayed the credentials and institutional access of men like Weaver to preserve the legacy of her grandfather, a legacy that was at least important enough to her that she wrote a book about it.

Our interpretation of Metcalf's actions gains further traction when considered in light of Elizabeth's working relationship with Arthur Stedman and other publishing men: like her grandmother, Metcalf can be seen to wield power in a classically gendered fashion, by appearing to yield it. Rereading the actions of the Melville women as motivated partnerships with scholars and other well-resourced literary men paints a more flattering and, frankly, much more logical portrait of the women who promoted Herman's legacy until it could receive institutionalized support. Rather than a series of "unintelligent, disingenuous" women (Kier 75), one instead sees a lineage of un-credentialed but resourceful women, who found ways to generate the institutional, financial, and scholarly support that they likely desired but could not access directly.

Finally, and most searchingly, the work of an expanded Melville studies requires recalibrating how and in what terms the field values the originality that adheres in "the author." We have argued that, like other women in the Melville family, Elizabeth can and should be estimated as a figure of significant agency, authority, and also irony in the development of Herman's legacy. If, therefore, there is no Herman as we know him without Elizabeth, thinking of them as necessary if unequal co-producers of what we have historically called Herman's novels and poems offers the beginnings of a far more inclusive, and also far more accurate, picture. But this is not a zero-sum game; giving Elizabeth's labor its due does not mean taking something away from Herman. Rather, it should mean a reconsideration of originality's position as a standard and marker of authorial value. Such a reconsideration pulls away from the dominant conception of an individualistic, Romantic-era notion of authorship and makes room instead for other ways to understand an author's life, including in terms of the people they included in that life.

This last move has no significant precedents in Melville studies, but we recognize a model emerging from revisionist work in the history of academic disciplines, as this scholarship in particular lends itself to an understanding of the effects and conditions under which literature is studied. The key analytic here is not the author (or critic, or scholar, or another creative individual) so much as the social and historical conditions that shape creativity itself. For example, we recognize a potential analogy between, on the one hand, our conception of Elizabeth's overlapping roles as wife, co-producer, and custodian of Herman's work, and, on the other hand, Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan's arguments about the early computational humanist Josephine Miles who, far from living her life as an early pioneer, was shunted into this minimally prestigious work in the 1940s and 1950s due to the contingencies of gender and disability. Buurma and Heffernan cite Miles's story as an example

“of how we might write a history of literary scholarship that does not center originality and individual accomplishment” (n.p.).

Buurma and Heffernan furthermore imply that recovery projects nominating Miles as an early woman pioneer tend to ignore contradictory evidence that Miles herself provided when she credited her collaborators. Miles went to great lengths to preserve the names of her multiple female collaborators, such as two graduate students, Mary Jackman and Helen S. Agoa, whose names Miles put alongside hers on the cover of one project, while elsewhere in prefaces and interviews, she emphasized the importance of people like Penny Gee. The fact that these names are not widely known is not because Miles tried to fashion herself as an originary genius but rather because most of our received models for academic and literary labor emphasize such work in the idiom of individual accomplishment. The paradigm of individual creativity makes it easy for scholars to elide the work of subordinate collaborators, rather than understand their contributions.

We are suggesting that, analogous with this model for rethinking Miles's contribution in relation to the collaborators she credited, we can rethink Herman's contribution in relation to the wife he rarely credit. Despite some obvious differences between these stories, we think Elizabeth's history offers a potentially cognate case, tending toward a related conclusion. Certainly, an author-centric model for Melville studies makes little sense for the posthumous editions of Herman's work that were necessarily produced through a confluence of labor between Elizabeth and the Stedmans, to say nothing of the numerous employees across multiple publishing houses, nor of Herman himself. In lieu of an author-centric way of considering the literary productions that bear Herman's name, we propose what might instead be called a wife-centric consideration. This alternative aims to capture the agencies besides Herman's that went into his writing and publishing, acknowledging that some of those additional agents, very much including the wife, Elizabeth, sought to promote Herman's authorship in lieu of their own—and, ironically, thereby worked to center the author we claim to de-center. Whatever one wishes to call it, however, the field needs alternatives to a narrow conception of literary authority that blinds scholars to what the archives make fairly plain—as in the case of Miles's forgotten collaborators whom she nonetheless kept crediting, or of the verso of the title page to “Stedman's edition,” which reads, in its entirety, “Copyright, 1892, by Elizabeth S. Melville.”

Our wager in this essay has been that the prospect of incorporating Elizabeth into Melville studies would offer much more than it would erase. For one, Elizabeth has been treated perennially as a discovery in and of herself; whereas a discussion of her contributions to literary history could—in our view,

should—be understood as a vantage from which to make future discoveries. Accepting the fact of her labor would encourage the field to develop models of literary production that do not center authorial originality, and those efforts in turn might open a model for author studies that does not limit itself to a single person. In so doing, Melville studies may begin to look like something else, engaging with as many interlocutors through as many modes of literary labor and inquiry as drove the life and work of Elizabeth, not to mention that of her more famous husband. It is not for this essay fully to imagine what rewriting Melville Studies entails, but unearthing some of that past from Elizabeth's perspective presents one avenue, which we have shown heads toward new histories of textual circulation, historiography, and collaborative textual production. We have demonstrated that the archives contain abundant evidence of Elizabeth's contribution, much of which is not exactly news. It follows that the task ahead is not for Melville studies to learn about Elizabeth, for that is easily enough done. Rather, the task ahead is to measure all that Elizabeth might help us to unlearn.

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