The Arbiters of Reality

West, Peter

Published by The Ohio State University Press

West, Peter.
The Ohio State University Press, 2008.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/27870.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/27870

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1144803
INTRODUCTION


lum America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). Each in its own compelling way, these works portray mid-nineteenth-century America as a time when capitalism and democracy conspired to exploit the slippery line between information and entertainment, between truth and fiction, reality and artifice.

5. Tucher, Froth and Scum, 46.
6. See Neil Harris, Humbug.


9. Many historians have connected such a development to changes in print technologies, to the gradual urbanization of the American populace, and to an emerging market ethos. As Michael Schudson claims in Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers (New York: Basic Books, 1978), it was during the early years of the 1830s that the very idea of the “news”—the elevation of reportage over editorializing, of facts over opinion—was invented. Of course (as Schudson himself has more recently acknowledged in “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism,” for example), the nonpartisanship of early penny papers such as James Gordon Bennett’s New York Herald was to a great extent a rhetorical deception.

10. Quoted in Lehuu, Carnival on the Page, 37.


15. As is perhaps already clear, this use of “romance” in describing the narrative modes of Hawthorne and Melville is (at least nominally) at odds with the current critical view that has largely accepted Nina Baym’s claim that the words “novel” and “romance” were used interchangeably in nineteenth-century literary culture. See Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), especially chapter 11. Not at all seeking to challenge Baym’s careful and thoroughly convincing argument, I am embracing the term “romance” as a way of signifying Hawthorne’s and Melville’s shared view of their romantic fiction as a higher mode of truth-telling than the other representations available in the antebellum marketplace. In thus arguing that Hawthorne and Melville shared a theory of romantic fiction that saw their fiction as an escape from the unrealities of popular culture, I am, to a certain degree, reasserting the much-maligned view of Richard Chase and other mid-twentieth-century critics that the romance seeks “a world elsewhere.” And yet, as I hope will be clear in my individual readings, I approach what I am calling “romance” as the artifact of a model of romantic individualism that was made possible by the economic, technological, and social dynamics of antebellum culture.

16. Because I am writing, almost exclusively, about two male authors, I will rely on the gendered pronoun “he” when referring either to one of my authors or to a general-
ized “romancer” or “romantic author” that is meant to stand in for both Hawthorne and Melville. In all other cases, I will try to remain gender-neutral.


22. In his masterful study of Melville and “the rhetoric of humor,” John Bryant locates Melville in what he calls the highest “class” within “the culture of the liar” by virtue of his awareness that “our shared imaginative interplay is all of reality we can know” (*Melville and Repose: The Rhetoric of Humor in the American Renaissance* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 85)—an understanding that elevates him over those who merely lie or expose the liar. I am interested in how this ideal of Melvillean truth-telling was fundamentally dependent on the competing forms of truth-telling in circulation during these years; unlike Bryant, however, I see Melville as an artist who continually seeks out a philosophical authority external to what Bryant calls “the culture of the liar.” Thus while Bryant, like many other critics, suggests that Melville “tempts us to fall” (255) for the titular confidence man in his later novel, I disagree. Instead, I read the novel as an attempt at using the criterion of confidence to envision American society en masse—to portray the nation as a realm of con men and dupes—so as to imagine for the romantic artist an integrity untainted by the mass commodification of truth. As I suggest in chapter 6, Melville resembles not the con man but the unnamed figure in darkness at the novel’s end, who alone recognizes the reversible nature of the linked identities of confidence man and mass public.

23. Neil Harris writes that Barnum’s operational aesthetic “was served also by the ‘Is it fact or is it fiction?’ question Americans asked, not only of such Poe stories as ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ but of exotic travel narratives, like Melville’s *Typee*” (*Humbug*, 88).

24. In a journal entry dated April 24, 1852, Thoreau writes that “men of society . . . live on the surface, they are interested in the transient & fleeting—they are like driftwood on the flood—They ask for ever & only the news—the froth & scum of the eternal sea” (486–87).


Like Whalen, Paul Gilmore argues that Poe’s fiction ultimately upholds the marketplace’s profit motive, even as Poe makes repeated attempts “at transcending and exploiting the market and fantasizing an alternative model of white literary manhood” (Genuine Article, 124). Writing before both Whalen and Gilmore, Jonathan Elmer explores how Poe’s idiosyncratic literary art reflected the lack of highbrow/lowbrow distinctions in antebellum culture. Reading Poe as the ultimate “figure of mass culture” (Reading, 29), Elmer examines how “mass culture takes on its essential form in thematizing—and more especially, anathematizing—itself under the sign of unregulated affect” (8).

All three of these brilliant studies have greatly illuminated my own attempts at theorizing what Elmer calls the “co-implication of self and mass” (28). While Gilmore’s reading of antebellum literature and culture shares with my own project an attention to the authorial manipulation and exploitation of mass cultural forms, he is less willing to see in Hawthorne’s imagined relationship to these forms the romantic ideal of selfhood that I see as pervasive in his fiction. For example, Gilmore’s reading of Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables—like my own reading of the novel, which concludes chapter 3—reads the text against the backdrop of daguerreotypy. In his account, “Hawthorne attempts to use daguerreotypy to reimagine the bourgeois family and literary manhood by cleansing them of the racialized taint of economic exploitation” (Genuine Article, 147–48). Because Gilmore assumes that Hawthorne uses the daguerreotype to accommodate himself to middle-class life, he can see the novel’s conclusion only as evidence of an incomplete project of social amelioration: “The artistic failure of his novel’s conclusion then rests on his failure to imagine the possibility of more fluid racial boundaries, a possibility at once presented and denied in both minstrelsy and daguerreotypy” (148). In my own reading of the novel’s conclusion, however, I argue that Hawthorne’s ultimate objective is not to locate middle-class respectability for himself but to use Holgrave’s domestication into the middle class (the artifice of which is echoed in the novel’s contrived ending) to offset his own imagined autonomy from the terms of the middle class.


32. This reading of “The Custom-House,” which is expanded in chapter 3, sees a more romantic Hawthorne than that described by Lauren Berlant, who argues in The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) that the “relation of personal experience to public form” in “The Custom-House” is not “a relation of the ‘real’ to the ‘inauthentic’” (3). In Berlant’s reading, Hawthorne engages in “the fantasy-work of national identity,” accepting each stage of his personal transformations as “a fundamental condition of identity” (2). While Hawthorne indeed writes autobiographically in “The Custom-House,” Berlant points out that “he reveals not ‘the inmost Me’ detached from social inscription but speaks in an exemplary way, as a citizen, taking care to play out the complex games of knowledge, power, and desire that transform him into a being intimate somehow with mass political culture” (3). As should already be clear, I am more interested in how the very shape of that unrepresented “inmost Me” depends on the public aspects of identity that Hawthorne clearly foregrounds. Significantly, my own portrayal of Hawthorne and Melville can be said to fall into what Berlant calls a more “symptomatic” school of romanticist scholar-
ship (she invokes the critical examples of Myra Jehlen and Sacvan Bercovitch), while her own work (like that of Donald Pease and Jonathan Arac, she notes) sees Hawthorne as “more powerfully registering and contesting” the “fractures” of American “social hierarchy” by “aligning with populist sentiments and insisting on the productive indeterminacy of national, personal, juridical, and political identity” (*Anatomy*, 9).

33. Part of my goal in the following chapters will be to unveil how the romancer’s self-conception as an arbiter of reality depended upon each author’s status as a white, northern, American male. Most significantly, chapter 6 will argue that Melville’s critique of the racial role-playing of American slavery in “Benito Cereno” reflected the binary racial logic of progressive authorship in the wake of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

34. Quotations from Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 4, 198, 200, 8–9. Trilling’s language of morality demands some clarification. As Trilling writes in “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” what he calls moral realism (epitomized in the nineteenth century by Henry James) involves the reader “in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional educations has led him to see it” (209). In other words, the acknowledgment of reality as a problem was for Trilling a moral project—invoking, he tells us at the end of the essay, the very fate of human freedom.


37. Throughout the 1990s, a new generation of “new Americanists” endeavored to “desublimate” the romance as a literary genre by reconnecting those critics most responsible for the romance thesis (namely Trilling, Chase, and F. O. Matthiessen) to the political contexts out of which their readings emerged. Donald Pease, in his introduction to *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), uses the phrase “desublimation” to describe the critical process by which new Americanist criticism has come to explore the “overdetermination” of romance as a “field-imaginary” that names “at once the genre within the field, the means of producing and interpreting its canonical objects, the relations between the field’s practitioners, the mediation between the field and its culture, and the means of separating culture from politics” (30). By uncovering the ideological assumptions and motivations underlying this account of American literary history, the new Americanists explored how the romance thesis has shaped our critical understanding of literature in the nineteenth century. At the heart of the new Americanist project was (and continues to be) a skepticism regarding the romance’s sense of itself as a “neutral territory” that exists in the realm of pure fancy, an
ethereal place “having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil.” As John McWilliams writes, “Insisting upon the removal of the Romance world from political and social contexts, Chase’s followers treated American Romances as instances of psychological modernity, thereby slighting their historical import for the world around them” (“The Rationale for ‘The American Romance,’” in Pease, *Revisionary Interventions*, 74). For the most sustained and eloquent response to the new Americanist desublimation of romance, see Thompson and Link.


43. My desire to disrupt the line between the romance’s critique of mass culture and romantic identity-making responds to what Winfried Fluck, in “‘The American Romance’ and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary” (*New Literary History* 27, no. 3 [1996]) sees as a misguided critical commitment to a neatly oppositional view of the romantic artist as either conformer or reformer: “Traditional theories of the American romance . . . are locked in a basic, restricted, and basically ahistorical opposition between conformism and rebellion and, hence, argue along the reductive semantic lines of society/conformism/realism on the one side versus individual/nonconformism/romance on the other” (444–45). Indeed, Fluck’s excellent essay argues that even the “radical revisionists” of new Americanism perpetuate this mythic oppositionalism by quietly privileging the dream of noncontingent selfhood. In discussing Michaels’s reading of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Fluck writes, “Where it ‘unmasks’ the romance as complicitous, it does so in the name of its own political romance of a society without coercion and restraints” (447).

44. Letter to Allan Melville, February 20, 1849, in *Correspondence*, 116. For a thorough book-length discussion of this letter, see Hennig Cohen and Donald Yannella, *Herman Melville’s Malcolm Letter: ‘Man’s Final Lore’* (New York: Fordham University Press and the New York Public Library, 1992). Among other insights, Cohen and Yannella tell us that the “Lambert” to which Melville refers is Daniel Lambert, a 739-pound member of the “Lambert Family,” or “the Highland Mammoth Boys,” who were exhibited by Barnum from 1846 to 1849.


46. Letter to Sophia Peabody, October 4, 1840, in ibid., 495.

47. Letter to Sophia Peabody, [October 4, 1841?], in ibid., 584.


1. On April 12, 1830, the *Boston Daily Commercial Gazette* reported on a town hall meeting in Salem that was attended by two thousand people. At this meeting, “A committee of vigilance, consisting of seven for each ward was raised, with full power to search every house, and interrogate every person, on any point that could lead to the detection of the murderer.”

2. *Salem Gazette*, April 8, 1830.
3. Ibid., April 20, 1830.
4. Ibid., June 1, 1830.
7. Ibid., October 5, 1830.
8. Ibid., January 5, 1831. While the charges that the committee of vigilance might have acted too rashly and with too much power appear nowhere in the early local coverage of the case, such suggestions were so widespread that Webster himself felt compelled to “defend . . . the Committee of Vigilance, and the citizens of Salem at large, from the imputations which he said learned counsel on the other side had attempted to cast upon them for the interest they had taken in bringing the perpetrators of so atrocious a crime to justice” (ibid., August 20, 1830). Other papers, such as the *Boston Daily Commercial Gazette*, defended in print “the conduct of the citizens of Salem, against the charges made against them in some of the many foolish and exaggerated statements, which have, from time to time, been published, of the various proceedings in reaction to the arrest and trials of [Frank Knapp]” (*Daily Commercial Gazette*, September 2, 1830). In condoning the second jury’s conviction of Frank Knapp, the writer was careful to attribute the “universal satisfaction” not to “any feelings of revenge” but “on account of the moral effect which the detection and punishment of such evil” carries with it.

10. Ibid., November 11, 1830.
11. Ibid., September 30, 1830.
15. Ibid., July 31, 1830.
17. Ibid., August 3, 1830; *New York Enquirer for the Country*, August 3, 1830.
19. Bennett himself reported this on August 17 in the *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer for the Country*.
21. In the days leading up to the first trial, for example, Bennett wrote of the rivalry between Salem and nearby Marblehead: “There was a species of rejoicing by firing off guns at Marblehead when these persons were set at liberty.” Continuing, Bennett claimed
that “secret and under-current attempts have been making to oppose the course of that committee, and to stem the torrent of public opinion. . . . Some few sparks of opposition to the committee have been struck out on the rocks of Marblehead” (Morning Courier and New York Enquirer for the Country, July 27, 1830).

22. Morning Courier and New York Enquirer for the Country, August 16, 1830.

23. See Boston Daily Commercial Gazette, August 27, 1830, for an excerpt from this pamphlet and an excerpted response from the Essex Register.


25. Salem Gazette, November 23, 1830.


CHAPTER 2


2. For a fascinating analysis of the role of the book peddler in early-nineteenth-century literary dissemination, see Zboray, Fictive People, chapter 3. Zboray notes that the traditional view casts the book peddler “in the role of an unwary facilitator of national communication” (38), an image that Hawthorne’s tale seems to be invoking. As we shall see, by contrasting the face-to-face gossiping of Pike with the transatlantic communication of the story of Higginbotham’s (rumored) death, Hawthorne relies on the quaintness of the peddler stereotype to portray the looming menace of modern journalism.


7. John Neal, “Story-telling,” New-England Magazine (Jan. 1835): 1, 4. It is worth pointing out that Brenda Wineapple, in Hawthorne: A Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), argues that Neal’s fiction from the 1820s was a major influence on the young Haw-
thorne. Neal, Wineapple writes, “loudly banged the drum for American literature without frills, a literature of democratic spunk, and he practiced what he preached in a spate of sensationalistic novels intended to shock the complacent bourgeoisie” (59).

10. G. R. Thompson has highlighted the “parallel between the conditions of the Higginbotham narrative and the frame narrative” (The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne’s Provincial Tales [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993], 225). In addressing the misleading advertisements of the storyteller’s fame, Thompson argues that “the parallels have the effect of blurring the distinction between the ‘fictive’ and the ‘real’ in the frame fiction (in addition to the blurring of these in the tale proper), an effect that is lost when ‘Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe’ is printed separate from the frame” (225–26).

12. “Old News” is in fact three sketches, which were published from February to May of 1835 in the New-England Magazine.
15. Ibid., February 21, 1834.
16. Ibid., April 14, 1834.
17. Letter to Boston Courier, September 9, 1826. Reprinted in Kenneth Walter Cameron, Genesis of Hawthorne’s “The Ambitious Guest” (Hartford, CT: Transcendental Books, 1955), 4. In choosing not to portray the discovery of the family’s remains, Hawthorne left out one of the most compelling details of the story. As many newspaper accounts reported, the Willey family dog survived the catastrophe and assisted rescuers in locating the corpses.
19. Hawthorne’s and Poe’s symbolic use of the individual letter actually reflects the rhetorical complexity of this mode of correspondence throughout the antebellum information revolution. Two months after the sweeping postal reforms of 1845 went into effect, an article appeared in The New Englander and Yale Review that outlined the implications and limitations of the new law. In attacking the drastically reduced rates charged to newspaper bundles that emerged out of the 1845 law, the author of this piece links such a practice to “a tax on the writers and receivers of letters” that is used to fund the “privileged class” of newspaper editors (“The New Post-Office Law,” 540). Against this depiction of the profit-driven, amoral newspaper, the author turns to the rhetorical object that, according to the logic of the essay, epitomizes “real” information—the individual letter: “We believe that the influence of an unlimited epistolary correspondence as would gradually yet rapidly spring up under the lowest possible uniform postage . . . would be worth more than all the influence of the newspapers in diffusing knowledge, in stimulating enterprise, in facilitating commerce, in promoting good morals, in educating the people, and in binding the country together as one body, and sending the pulsations of one heart and the glow of one life to its uttermost extremities” (542). Finally, the writer argues that the cost of sending a letter should not be “what the writer or receiver of a letter
or anything else can afford to pay or can be induced to pay without complaining”—that is, not a price that answers to the laws of supply and demand—but what the “operation of receiving, conveying, and delivering this particular article costs the government.” The post office should not follow “the rule by which prices are determined in trade,” for, as we are later reminded, “the post-office department is not a trading concern in respect to the assessment of postage” (544). On the most basic level, the essay suggests how the development of a not-for-profit system of information exchange would fuel economic expansion and centralization in the age of manifest destiny. But here we also see the individual letter invoked as a privileged ideal of information exchange that opposed the corruption of a commercial newspaper culture—even as it is seen as a way of “stimulating enterprise” and “facilitating commerce.” In other words, the individual letter was at once the marker of a prelapsarian ideal of authentic information and the rhetorical tool of a capitalist logic that saw information as an economic commodity.


CHAPTER 3


4. Cathy Davidson argues that in this passage “the daguerreotype aligns with the fluidity of the romance form in contrast to the mimetic rigidity required by the novel,” thereby allowing Hawthorne “to define the extrarepresentational responsibilities of the romance” (“Photographs of the Dead: Sherman, Daguerre, Hawthorne,” South Atlantic Quarterly 89 [1990]: 686, 687).


8. Certainly these moments from the notebooks (as well as sketches like “Sights from a Steeple” and “The Old Apple-Dealer”) should also be considered in the broader context of the figure of the flâneur. For an excellent overview of this tradition as it relates to Hawthorne and other nineteenth-century authors, see Dana Brand, The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

9. This is a reference to Helen Jewett, the New York prostitute who had been murdered two years earlier in one of the most famous crimes in American history up to that point. See Patricia Cline Cohen, The Murder of Helen Jewett (New York: Vintage, 1998), and Tucher, Froth and Scum.


11. It should be evident that my reading of “The Custom-House” disagrees with the
scholarly view of Hawthorne as a citizen who saw the romance as a way of encouraging what Donald Pease calls “civic virtue” (Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987], 74). Pease reads “The Custom-House” as a text by which Hawthorne “turned his writing into a means of letting others live through him, even as he came into full life through them. Writing became an occasion to sacrifice his self-interest for the interest of an entire community of persons. What resulted was what he called a republic of letters—‘somewhere else’” (76).


13. Intriguingly, Walsh points to two thinkers often associated with the idea of mimesis—Georg Lukács and Eric Auerbach—as largely responsible for its critical redefinition.


15. Dana Brand suggests that “Main Street” allowed Hawthorne to express “his frustration about the cultural conditions under which, as an American writer, he was expected to write” (“Panoramic Spectator,” 13).

16. If all texts were also commodities in Hawthorne’s world, the romancer vouchedsafed his own artistic purity by pointing to the mercenary approach to storytelling as anathema to the romancer’s castles in the air. It is not surprising, then, that his fiction often turns to the figure of the showman to offset his own preoccupation with the higher truths of romance. In “Ethan Brand,” for example, Hawthorne describes a Jew who goes through life “eking out the profits of the day” from a diorama whose illusions are marred by a “gigantic, Brown, hairy hand” belonging to the showman himself (Tales, 1060, 1061). When Brand reveals the unpardonable sin that has kept him away, the money-minded lime-burner rejects it as “humbug,” as if the depth of Brand’s (and the romancer’s) truths are defined by the shallowness of a public that prefers dioramas to moral insight. As Stephen Railton has argued about the story, Hawthorne performs his own literariness both by contrasting his tale with the Jew’s thrown-together panorama and by presenting the characters of “Ethan Brand” as more interested in the diorama than in Brand’s own story. See Railton, Authorship, 111–14.

17. Panoramas relied upon the invisibility of their machinery. As Joseph Moldenhauer tells us in “Thoreau, Hawthorne, and the Seven-Mile Panorama” (ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance 44, no. 4 [1998]), the operators and the various machinery (which included reels to unfurl and collect the enormous canvases, along with the gears used to turn each scroll) “could be hidden from the audience by theater curtains or some similar visual barrier that simultaneously framed the image” (229). Thus the showman of “Main Street” undercut the authority of his own panoramic exhibition by repeatedly drawing attention to the machinery on which it relied.


20. As Moldenhauer points out, panoramists sought various ways of enhancing “the sense that the two-hour illusion was above all else truthful, and that the artistry lay not in the painter’s selection, composition, and emphasis but in minute fidelity to ‘naturally beautiful’ material. The mirror metaphor so often adopted by the painters and impresarios of panoramas . . . announces the aesthetic standard by which the paintings were measured” (“Seven-Mile Panorama,” 232).
23. From an advertising sheet entitled *Lane’s Mammoth Panorama of the Hudson, or North River* . . . , announcing an exhibition of the panorama at Lynde Hall in Salem, on September 18, 1848. Found inside *Description of Lane’s Panorama of the Hudson River* (New York, 1848), at the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, MA).
25. My reading of the balcony scene is informed by Michael Warner’s lucid discussion, in “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” (in *Publics and Counterpublics* [New York: Zone Books, 2002]) of the “self-abstraction” that defines the mass subject against the republican self. While the ideal of republican virtue, Warner argues, “was designed exactly to avoid any rupture of self-difference between ordinary life and publicity” (160), the “mass public sphere tries to minimize the difference between . . . positivity and self-abstraction” (176).
26. As Tom Standage writes in *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker and Company, 1998), “The trouble with the electric telegraph was that, compared to the optical telegraphs that came before it, it seemed more like a conjuring trick than a means of communication” (41). In *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Jeffrey Sconce has argued that in its earliest years Morse’s technology was seen by many to have supernatural implications. Because the telegraph “made possible the instantaneous exchange of messages in the complete absence of physical bodies,” many commentators considered the telegraph “the most momentous innovation in human history” (21–22). Sconce describes the famous case of the Fox family, whose daughters claimed to hear rapping sounds that constituted messages from the world of the dead, sent to them through a “spiritual telegraph” (22). Antebellum Spiritualists, who believed that the dead could communicate with the living through living mediums, “eagerly linked Spiritualist phenomena with the similarly fantastic discourses of electromagnetic telegraphy” (24). Even those who were skeptical of such attitudes were fascinated by the technology’s “apparent ability to separate consciousness from the body” (25). Thus, “more than an arbitrary, fanciful, and wholly bizarre response to the innovation of a technological marvel, the spiritual telegraph’s contact with the dead represented, at least initially, a strangely ‘logical’ application of telegraphy consistent with period knowledges of electromagnetic science” (28–29).
27. In *News Over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), Menahem Blondheim writes, “The function of the AP in the news industry may be likened to that of a giant funnel. From the vast network of wires of the nation’s telegraph monopoly it gathered information from all over the country in its headquarters. There, the news was consolidated to a single report and . . . distributed throughout the country. Not all information that reached those headquarters went out, and what did was necessarily transformed in the process” (174).
29. Lawrence Buell describes the novel’s willingness to suspend time, to ignore the conventions of narrative writing, as “symptomatic of contemporary distrust of narrative
invention as against informational or moralistic content” (New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 356).


31. As Ronald Thomas writes, “the novel reminds its readers that, like the narrative that contains these images, the photograph is a representation of a thing in need of interpretation. It is not the thing itself” (“Double Exposures,” 110).


34. And so it should not come as a surprise that when Hawthorne wrote to his publisher about the troubles he was having concluding Seven Gables, he did so in the language of the daguerreotypist: “It darkens damnably towards the close, but I shall try hard to pour some setting sunshine over it” (letter to J. T. Fields, December 1, 1850, in The Letters, 1843–1853, vol. 16 of The Centenary Edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson [Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1985], 376). Holgrave, Cathy Davidson reminds us, is described by Hawthorne’s narrator as a proletarian wanderer who has bounced from job to job—including, not surprisingly, newspaper editor and peddler. Intriguingly, however, Holgrave is also an author, one who has published in both Graham’s and Godey’s. Perhaps, then, Hawthorne is attempting to define the autonomy of the romancer over the magazine writer that he used to be. So when Holgrave finally gives up his writing career for domestic life at the novel’s end, the character’s entry into the middle class offsets the romantic autonomy that Hawthorne, by this time a husband and father, implicitly claims. In Meredith McGill’s excellent reading of the novel, she charts how Seven Gables participated in the process by which Hawthorne sought to extricate himself from “his many years of publishing anonymous, pseudonymous, and authored tales and sketches” and reposition himself as “a major author” (American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853 [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003], 219, 220).

35. I would suggest that the reader, at the conclusion of Seven Gables, is in a position also analogous to that of Annie and Danforth in the concluding moments of “The Artist of the Beautiful.” Like those characters, the reader is left with a work of fiction in her hands—as the romancer occupies a more genuine reality.

36. In one of the earliest and most influential new historicist treatments of Hawthorne’s fiction, Brook Thomas wrote, “Closer to the foundation of his society, Hawthorne was in a better position than his British counterparts were to see that social reality is a construct, that to be interested in society is not necessarily to describe what is already there but to show how a possible world would be organized if human beings had the freedom to choose” (“The House of the Seven Gables: Reading the Romance of America,” PMLA 97, no. 2 [1982]: 196). Thomas argues that the romance’s unwillingness to shape “the social contradictions it explores [into] . . . unities and harmonies,” a view of romance he takes from Richard Chase’s famous account of the form, makes it a dynamic vehicle for “imagining an alternative to the society the romancer inherits” (195, 196). Thomas’s excellent
reading reveals how Hawthorne’s novel “questions the impersonal, rational authority of a democracy’s most sacred texts—its legal documents” (199). While his reading of *Seven Gables* highlights the limitations of Hawthornean romance as an agent of moral reform—“the reformer seems capable of offering only a system that, like a romance, is an extension of his imagination” (203)—Thomas never falters from the basic assumption that Hawthorne’s goal is such reform: his Hawthorne “asks not for assent [from his reader] but for participation and consent. Authority becomes intersubjective, not subjective. The basis for a community is thus established” (207).

More recently, Grantland Rice has charted how the commercialization of American print culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries threatened to replace the civic dimensions of authorship with more professional, market-oriented concerns. Rice’s meticulous account of the evolution of the early American print culture, and of the effect of this transformation on the category of the “author” through the mid-nineteenth century, opens up the study of antebellum literature by inviting us to comprehend the work of an author such as Hawthorne as a response to the commercialization of American print culture. In his concluding discussion of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Rice writes that Hawthorne confronted “a commercial print culture which threatened to rob the individual of his or her capacity to participate in public affairs and his or her ability to envision a world different than that which was rendered by custom and tradition” (*The Transformation of Authorship in America* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 177). In the face of such a challenge, Rice argues, Hawthorne “translated the disinterested civic conscience of the classical citizen into the disinterested aesthetic conscience of the modern author,” a move marked by the conception of “romance” as a neutral territory that could connect the contemporaneous present with a particular past. While Rice’s work makes possible a view of Hawthornean romance as a response to changing print conditions, his Hawthorne reaches out to a reading public that was increasingly exploited and corrupted by the underwriters of a new mass print culture. Privileging Hawthorne’s commitment to a “disinterested social activism” that was rapidly receding into the past (even as he acknowledges how the romancer “idealized” such a past), Rice attends to Hawthorne’s critique of antebellum commercialism as if it were grounded in the author’s disinterested concern for the fate of his reading public.

37. See, for example, Lauren Berlant’s important work on Hawthorne’s engagement with what she calls “the fantasy-work of national identity” (*Anatomy*, 2).

CHAPTER 4

1. In his biography of Melville, *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Andrew Delbanco devotes an entire chapter to the often-overlooked impact of mid-1840s New York City on the young author’s life and work. As Delbanco tells us, in early 1845 Melville was in New York often, stopping in at the law firm of his brothers Allan and Gansevoort regularly enough that he was apparently known as the “runaway brother” (87). Delbanco writes that by the summer of 1847 (when Melville and his new wife made the decision to move full time to the city), “Melville had become a figure on the New York literary scene” (91). For an excellent book-length discussion of Melville’s relationship to New York culture, see Bergmann, *God in the Street: New York Writing from the Penny Press to Melville* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

2. Dryden, *Thematics*, 21. Richard Brodhead has argued that “Melville does not have
a well-defined philosophy—or rather he has a hundred of them. But what all his formulations have in common is a sense of reality as something finally mysterious or unknowable” (*Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976], 126). Just as significantly, Brodhead connects Melville’s desire to “challenge[e] the credentials of any representational art” (129) with Hawthorne’s own rejection of perfect representation—so that these two romantic authors are ultimately defined in his book, as in my own, by a shared sense of reality as something that cannot be adequately reproduced or captured.


6. See Robert Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), especially chapter 1. As Johannsen writes, “The press’s ‘telegraphic era’ began with the Mexican War” (19). In a brief discussion of the use of war correspondents and news expresses during the war, Johannsen illustrates that “the war coincided with the era of the penny press, a time when technology, marketing innovations, and a dramatic increase in literacy all combined to produce a veritable ‘print explosion’” (18).


9. An article from the *New York Herald* on June 27, 1846, was typical in its expansionist imagining of a time when the telegraph wires “may yet extend . . . to the halls of Montezuma.”


13. Shelley Streeby, in *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), argues that this unifying of “America” into a single body elided the question of difference as a threat to national unity in part by isolating an external enemy—Mexico—that reinforced the cohesiveness of the American body. Reading George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico*, Streeby outlines Lippard’s vision of individual American bodies reacting in unison to war news from Mexico, a vision in which “the national community as a collective body . . . convulses, quivers, and thrills to the news of the U.S.-Mexican War” (54).


17. Note the parallels between this piece and the satirical poem “The Last Newsboy,” which appeared in *Yankee Doodle* and which I discuss below. In the poem, the magazine’s editors seem to mock the popular idea that the telegraph would soon make newspapers
obsolete.
20. For a thorough account of the Young America movement, see Edward L. Widmer, Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Widmer makes clear the complexity of the movement, in part by challenging the popular view that O’Sullivan was its most significant spokesperson.
22. Streeby, American Sensations, 55. While Streeby reveals how Lippard’s fiction “could be said to incorporate marginal whites such as the Irish into the American ‘race’” (60), she reads the dime novels of Augustine Joseph Hickey Duganne to illustrate the popular conception of Mexico as both similar to the United States and somewhat alien—“largely because of the mixtures of multiple ‘races’ and the persistence of feudalism and colonial institutions” (195).
23. Indeed, these anecdotes were so popular that The Taylor Anecdote Book appeared in 1848.
27. Ibid., July 25, 1847, 2.
28. One obvious reason Barnum might be called a “necromancer” is the case of Joice Heth, with whom Barnum toured in 1835, claiming that the elderly slave was the former nurse of George Washington. See Reiss, The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
30. Ibid., April 25, 1847.
32. Ibid., July 15, 1847.
34. Newspapers were not the only places where this contrast of American and Mexican dispatches appeared. In his A Complete History of the Mexican War (Baltimore: Hutchinson and Seebold, 1849), N. C. Brooks juxtaposes Taylor’s official account of Palo Alto with that of General Mariano Arista. Between Taylor’s and Arista’s dispatches, Brooks writes the following: “In striking contrast with this plain statement is the account of the vanquished Arista, addressed to the Mexican Minister of War and Marine, and dated, ‘In sight of the enemy, May 8.’ Though in sight of the enemy, the Mexican commander was at the time in retreat. This omission, however, is of little moment, when we consider the many misstatements of his dispatch” (134).
35. Of course, the very myth of a unified American identity was itself a response to an era that, as Shelley Streeby points out, was “marked by increasing sectionalism, struggles over slavery, the formation of an urban industrial working class, and nativist hatred directed at the new, mostly German and Irish, immigrants whose numbers increased rapidly after 1845” (American Sensations, 39).
38. Corydon Donnavan, Adventures in Mexico (Cincinnati: Robinson and Jones, 1847), 67 (hereafter cited parenthetically). The emphases are Donnavan’s.
41. By the end of the decade, writers were attacking even authorized journalistic use of the telegraph as a means of manipulating information for financial gain—so that the line between news and speculation became increasingly hard to distinguish. When the Associated Press was established at the end of the 1840s as a way of consolidating various newspaper interests into one centralized organization, opponents claimed that this consolidation of news transmission was nothing short of fraudulent. One opponent of such press associations, writing in 1850, argued to the commissioners of the Nova Scotia Telegraph that the agreement between the AP and their telegraph company unfairly benefited the publishers of morning newspapers in Boston by exclusively transmitting the news for an organization that excluded evening papers. The writer, in addressing the “inequity of control” over the news, describes such as practice as a “fraud” played upon the people of Boston. The fact that the author of this attack was himself a publisher of an evening paper in Boston only underscores how intertwined business and information had become in such a short period of time.
44. Melville, Correspondence, 40. While he does go on, as Edward Widmer points out, to claim that “something great is impending” (Flowering, 87) (which Widmer reads as a hint by Melville that “a final struggle against England is in the air”), what is probably more meaningful is the very tension in this one letter between his nationalistic dreaming and the rejection of the war as mere spectacle. Crucial to any reading of this letter is the fact of Gansevoort’s political involvement and of Herman’s awareness of their differences in this regard. Lynn Horth, in the note introducing this letter, argues that the letter is “clearly intended to distract Melville’s ailing brother” (Correspondence, 39).
45. One piece on the questionable authenticity of the Chinese junk that appeared in Yankee Doodle has been attributed by many scholars to Melville himself. See “On the Chinese Junk” and the accompanying note (beginning on page 784) in Piazza Tales (hereafter cited parenthetically).
46. “Watching the Telegraph” (Yankee Doodle 1, no. 11 [December 19, 1846]: 158); “Telegraph Office” (Yankee Doodle 1, no. 11 [December 19, 1846]: 72); and “The Last Newsboy” (Yankee Doodle 1, no. 7 [November 21, 1846]: 72).
47. Another attack on the myth of telegraphic authenticity can be found in the 1848 story “News from Mexico,” from Anne W. Abbot’s How to Spoil a Good Citizen; and Other Stories (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, and S. G. Simkins, 1848). Abbot’s story, in which two characters debate the merits of the war, begins with the patriotic Jonathan teasing his friend, John Hammond, for subscribing to a paper too worried about being hoax to report the latest news from the front lines. Ultimately, “News from Mexico” allows the author to give voice (in the character of John) to the argument that Mexican lands are being unjustly annexed by the United States. But what is most fascinating about the story is the way its author attacks the newspaper’s role in the “great talk about patriotism,” which the story describes as an “old cloak” that is covering up the country’s moral wrongdoing. While Jonathan claims throughout the story to merely report on the latest news taken from his paper, the way our author presents his character’s recounting of the
news suggests that the story of the American victory of Mexico had already been written, even before the details arrived in print.


49. For a fascinating account of Melville’s debt in *Moby-Dick* to antebellum popular culture, see David Reynolds, “‘Its wood could only be American!’: *Moby-Dick* and Antebellum Popular Culture,” in *Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1992), as well as his groundbreaking *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). While Reynolds has convincingly argued in both works that “Melville’s narrative art was one of wide-ranging assimilation and literary transformation” (“‘Its wood.’” 523), I see Melville as more of an ironic, even hostile, borrower from mass culture—often invoking its terms only to assert the supremacy of his own art. In this way, my Melville is closer to the one described in Railton, *Authorship*, chapter 8.

50. For the authoritative account of the relationship of the early English novel to truth-telling discourses, see Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions*. In opposing *Roxana* to *Don Quixote*, for example, Davis argues that Defoe’s reliance on an authenticating document is “uniquely novelistic” (16).


CHAPTER 5

1. Geoffrey Sanborn, *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). As Sanborn writes of Tommo’s discovery of what appear to be human bones, “even if we accept that there are human bones in the vessel, we cannot take it for granted that the flesh missing from these bones has been eaten.” Sanborn reveals that “it was widely recognized throughout the early nineteenth century that the discovery of human remains did not count as evidence of cannibalism” (111).

2. Samson has written that in *Typee* Melville rewrites his own textual sources by making such “perceptual conflict” a subject of his own narratives. See *White Lies: Melville’s Narratives of Facts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). But Samson’s approach, as Elizabeth Renker points out, “is meant to bolster his ultimate argument that Melville was politically forward-thinking and engaged in a deliberate and conscious critique of his sources as representations of ‘white’ ideology” (“Melville’s Spell in *Typee,*” *Arizona Quarterly* 51, no. 2 [1995]: 4).


4. In addition to Sanborn, see Paul Lyons, “From Man-Eaters to Spam-Eaters: Literary Tourism and the Discourse of Cannibalism from Herman Melville to Paul Theroux” (*Arizona Quarterly* 51, no. 2 [Summer 1995]: 33–62), and Alex Calder, “‘The Thrice Mysterious Taboo’: Melville’s *Typee* and the Perception of Culture” (*Representations* 67 [1999]: 27–43).
5. For two excellent discussions of the fate of *Typee* as text, see John Bryant, “Manuscript, Edition, Revision: Reading *Typee* with Trifocals,” in *Melville’s Evermoving Dawn: Centennial Essays*, ed. John Bryant and Robert Milder (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997), and Leon Howard’s “Historical Note” in *Typee*.

6. For a full account of Toby’s emergence, see Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), chapter 22.


8. Rowe, “Melville’s *Typee*,” 258. Rowe argues that “*Typee* is one of the first U.S. literary texts to establish a connection between the institutions of slavery in the United States and the Euroamerican colonialism in Polynesia” (255). While Rowe does not address Melville’s pro-England sentiment in the appendix that was published in the book’s first American and British editions, he suggests that Melville’s text argues “that the domestic sins of slavery and westward expansion were already finding their equivalents in foreign policies just as insidious” (256).


14. In his brilliant reading of Melville’s treatment of cannibalism, Geoffrey Sanborn unveils the truth of cannibalism in *Typee* to be its very status as a sign—that is, Sanborn argues that cannibalism’s theatricality is the aspect of it that is most real. Sanborn’s Melville is a theorist of the highest order, one whose interest in the “articulation of dynamics of anxiety and menace in the colonial encounter” (xiii) anticipates the work of both Homi Bhabha and Slavoj Žižek. He sees in Melville’s writing a fascination with the dynamics of colonial contact, which anticipates Bhabha’s work on the same subject, and an awareness of cannibalism as “a screen masking a void,” which adumbrates Žižek’s ideas (Sign of the Cannibal, xiv). Specifically, Sanborn points to the moment near the end of *Typee*, when Tommo finally sees what appear to be human bones, to suggest that Melville’s use of this evidence of cannibalism highlights how the bones are most real in their theatricality. In another excellent reading, Leonard Cassuto asks that we read *Typee* in the context of antebellum racial freak shows, which provided an outlet for national doubts regarding racial essentialism. Like Sanborn, Cassuto recognizes cannibalism in Melville’s narrative to be a titillating presence, but his reading reveals how Melville’s Tommo resists being made into a freak show exhibit—specifically, by refusing to be tattooed. The whole book, Cassuto argues, may be read as a “tattooing narrative” (in which highly tattooed sailors would reveal the stories behind each marking) without the tattoos; Tommo “fears being imprisoned inside the narrative of a freak show exhibit pamphlet” (“‘What an object he would have made of me!’: Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville’s *Typee*,” in *Freak-
ery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson [New York: New York University Press, 1996], 241). In his own account of the book’s depiction of cannibalism, Alex Calder argues that Melville relies upon the concept of “taboo” to allow a place for “a remainder . . . something more than can be said” in the author’s narrative account. In Calder’s reading, Melville relinquishes the need to access all meaning, turning instead to narrative “mimicry” of the Typee. Finally, Calder writes, such mimicry becomes “a camouflage one adopts in response to a perceived disjunction between self and milieu . . . a quasi-automatic but potentially strategic response to ambiguity” (“Melville’s Typee,” 39).


16. Brook Thomas writes that Typee “lays bare the imperialistic motives behind the introduction of Christianity to non-Western cultures, the savagery it causes rather than eliminates. Most important, if opponents of slavery think the eradication of slavery from America’s shores will finally make America the land of the free, Melville’s works offer example after example demonstrating exploitation in the ‘free’ states” (Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, and Melville [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 137).

17. In a later rhetorical use of telegraphy that illustrates what Melville was writing against, Ezra Gannett in 1858 saw in Morse’s technology the promise of a Christianity-based imperialism: “The most remarkable effect [of the telegraph], if I may judge from my own narrow thought, will be the approach to a practical unity of the human race; of which we have never yet had a foreshadowing, except in the gospel of Christ. Actually, the race has been divided into as distinct portions as if they lived on separate planets. Jealous of one another, or mutually unknown, they have exchanged no sympathies, united in no common labors, recognized no obligations of kindred blood. . . . The death-blow has been struck to barbarism. An exclusive policy must yield to the universal solvent. . . . It is an institution for the people. Its office is to diffuse intelligence; its effect, to allay differences” (“The Oceanic Telegraph,” North American Review 87, no. 181 [October 1858]: 543–44). In descriptions such as this, the logic of the telegraphic metaphor entirely overshadows the reality of the technology as a means of linguistic communication. Gannett’s faith in the technology’s ability to “diffuse intelligence” and “allay differences” rests on the assumption that Western modes of information exchange are a “universal solvent”—that is, that the telegraph as a method of disembodied communication is an impartial, apolitical ideal.

18. For discussions of the significance of tattooing in Typee, see Cassuto; Otter, Melville’s Anatomies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), chapter 1; and Sanborn, chapter 2.

19. Letter to Duyckinck, February 12, 1851, in Correspondence, 180.


21. Letter to Lemuel Shaw, October 6, 1849, in ibid., 139.


23. In truth, of course, Melville’s and Hawthorne’s imaginations were different in some rather fundamental ways. Though the two authors shared a sense of the inauthenticity of mid-nineteenth-century life, each differed in the way he imagined the relationship between his romantic fiction and what I have called the problem of reality. Against the lies of antebellum life, Hawthorne was able to articulate the more authentic “reality” he shared with Sophia, or the “free air” of romance, both rhetorical realms that could be positively
imagined and communicated. But if Hawthorne was a citizen of somewhere else, Melville seems more often an eternal noncitizen—of whatever culture he found himself in, in the United States or abroad. Thus the telegraph, the antebellum avatar of informational timeliness and reliability, appears in Melville’s imagination as a powerful symbol by which the romancer can distance his own art of telling the truth from the truth-telling ideals of antebellum culture.

CHAPTER 6

1. See Coviello, “The American in Charity.” In a provocative reading of Melville’s text, Dana Luciano argues that the novella’s exploration of historical memory “can best be understood in light of the cultural work performed by the contemporary [i.e., early twenty-first-century] counter-monument, which Melville’s narrative anticipates and elucidates” (“Melville’s Untimely History; ‘Benito Cereno’ as Counter-Monumental Narrative,” Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory 60, no. 3 [2004]: 34). Maurice S. Lee has recently pointed out how many twentieth-century critics claimed for “Benito Cereno” an uncanny relevance to particular twentieth-century cultural moments—as if, Lee writes, Melville “apparently speaks to us at the expense of an earlier them” (“Melville’s Subversive Political Philosophy: ‘Benito Cereno’ and the Fate of Speech,” American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography 72, no. 3 [2000]: 513). In attempting to make sense of this critical phenomenon, Lee argues that “the story anticipates our reactions. It is sensitive to the psychology of Otherness” (512). In his final paragraph, Lee concludes, “Melville’s hermeneutics lean more toward new than old, more toward a differentially interpreted past than any recoverable history.” As Lee tells us, “one province of literature, and one labor of those who would read it, is to seek and imagine an honest speech—in the antebellum then, in our present now, and in the ongoing talk over ‘Benito Cereno’ from which . . . something further will follow” (514).


4. Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, [1 June?] 1851, in Correspondence, 190, 192 (hereafter cited parenthetically).


8. Sundquist describes the complicated narrative voice of “Benito Cereno” in the following way: “The difficulty with judging Delano’s perceptions lies in the complex relationship between him and the narrative voice, which moves silently in and out of the captain’s point of view, engaging and promoting his suspicions, then retracting them in sudden dismissals. . . . It would be appropriate to speak of the narrative voice, which dictates to Babo as surely as Babo does to Benito Cereno, as itself a kind of ‘shadow,’ at once merged with but partially suspended above or outside his conscious point of view” (“Suspense and Tautology in ‘Benito Cereno,’” Glyph: Textual Studies 8 [1981]: 109).
9. Critics have long recognized the ways in which Melville’s invocation of slavery critiques sentimental fiction and reading. Most recently, Peter Coviello has illustrated how “‘Benito Cereno’ . . . pits gothic occlusion and opacity against sentimental modes of reading and response, and sentimental readers, the better to show how easily sentimentality consorts with a particularly American racism” (“The American in Charity,” 157). Like my own reading, Coviello’s approaches “Benito Cereno” as a response to Stowe’s “signature locations of knowingness” (171). But I do not share the critical assumption that Melville’s subversion of mass reading practices stemmed from a civic-minded belief that “a wise and healthy republic demands good readers” (175).

10. “Lecture on Slavery,” from Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson, eds., Ralph Waldo Emerson: Emerson’s Antislavery Writings (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 91. “Endless negation” posed a problem greater than flatness, of course; it became a formidable political obstacle. Stowe responded to accusations of exaggeration and misrepresentation with her now-famous The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, in which she provided documentation for her various portraits of life in the South. Such a defense, however, could never rise above the debate over whose picture of slavery was ultimately truthful. Soon after her “key” was published, in fact, Reverend E. J. Stearns published his Notes on Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1853), in essence a response to Stowe’s response, in which he sought to call further into question the accuracy of Stowe’s account. Some Northern apologists for slavery went south, including Nehemiah Adams, who propped himself up as a firsthand observer in his 1854 South-Side View of Slavery (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860).

11. As Len Gougeon tells us, Emerson’s lecture was greeted warmly by most New England abolitionists, who tended to see the 1855 lecture as a major step into political advocacy for an author who had previously been considered more interested in the “upper sphere” of American culture. See Gougeon, “Historical Background,” in Emerson’s Antislavery Writings, xliii–xliv.

12. See Thomas F. Gossett, Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), especially chapters 10 and 11. Many attacked Stowe for being too much of a “storyteller” and for her “fictional facts.”

13. Peter Dorsey argues that “attacks on Stowe’s novel caused her to formulate a realistic ethics of fiction” (“De-authorizing Slavery: Realism in Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Brown’s Clotel,” ESQ 41 [1995]: 258).


15. Stowe was regularly attacked for being too far from the reality of slavery. In his Notes on Uncle Tom’s Cabin, E. J. Stearns argues that the “personal observations” that Stowe points to in the Key are (at least in one case) letters handed to her by former slaves.


17. F. C. Adams, Uncle Tom at Home (Philadelphia: Willis Hazard, 1853), 123.

18. As Sheila Post-Lauria has convincingly argued in Correspondent Colorings: Melville in the Marketplace (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), writers in Putnam’s, where “Benito Cereno” was first published in the 1850s, consistently challenged the “truth of facts,” searching instead for a means of exploring those circumstances that lead to the creation of any totalizing narrative. Post-Lauria writes that Putnam’s “articles, essays, and stories analyzed and evaluated the variety of perspectives
that comprised a particular issue” (204).


20. See, as just a few examples, the work of Saidiya Hartman, Dwight McBride, Carla Peterson, and Paul Gilmore.


23. In discussing Frederick Douglass’s revisions to his 1845 narrative in the 1855 My Bondage and My Freedom, Eric Sundquist argues that the 1855 autobiography constituted “a sign of Douglass’s recognition that in the [1845] Narrative he stood ‘within the circle’—not of the total institution of slavery . . . but of Garrison’s radical antislavery and the defined self of the platform storyteller it provided” (To Wake the Nations, 92). Andrews reminds us, however, that “it may be . . . that Douglass learned from [William Wells] Brown the advantages of self-revision for a fugitive slave who aspired to a career as a writer” (“Introduction” to From Fugitive Slave to Free Man: The Autobiographies of William Wells Brown [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003], 3).


25. The panorama was Brown’s response to a visit he made (in Boston) to a panorama of the Mississippi River. “Amazed at the very mild manner in which the ‘Peculiar Institution’ of the Southern States was there represented,” Brown “succeeded in obtaining a series of sketches of beautiful and interesting American scenery, as well as of many touching incidents in the lives of Slaves” (A Description of William Wells Brown’s Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of an American Slave [London: Charles Gilpin, 1849?], 3).


28. “Life and Escape” actually first appeared a year earlier as an introduction to Brown’s series of travel sketches. Parenthetical citations here refer to the version that appears in William Wells Brown’s Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter.

29. John Ernest argues that the excerpt-filled Clotel most resembles not Uncle Tom’s Cabin (as other critics have argued) but a contemporary antislavery journal. See Resistance and Reformation in Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature: Brown, Wilson, Jacobs, Delany, Douglass, and Harper (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 33.
30. Paul Gilmore locates parallels between black abolitionists such as Brown and the racial role-playing of antebellum minstrelsy. “Putting on the blackface of the minstrel show,” Gilmore writes, “Brown creates himself as a self-sufficient manipulator of the literary marketplace and its dependence on mass cultural images of blackness, thus authorizing himself as a black model of literary manhood” (Genuine Article, 41). One of the few critics to take into account Brown’s prefatory autobiography in his reading of the novel, Gilmore argues that “Life and Escape” both “authorizes Brown as a writer of fiction” and “places Brown in a position of literary authority . . . through his ability to put on multiple masks” (42). Gilmore convincingly points to the character of George from Clotel as an example of Brown “using . . . masquerade to create a representative black manhood” (63).


32. As John Ernest reminds us, and as the above reading of “Life and Escape” suggests, Brown sought to “reconfigure the terms of the cultural arguments about slavery, terms that implicitly either denied Brown’s own authority or limited his voice to that of a witness” (“Resistance and Reformation,” 47).

33. William Andrews argues that “during the 1850s, when black as well as white American literature underwent a renaissance . . . the voice of black narrative broke most profoundly with discursive conventions and white expectations in an attempt to find new ways of authorizing itself (“Novelization,” 24).

34. In an excellent essay linking the emergence of African American fiction in the early 1850s to the limitations imposed upon ex-slave writers by white abolitionism, Carla Peterson argues that “In writing slave autobiographies under the aegis of white abolitionism, black writers all too often found themselves producing conventionalized narratives that offered increasingly stereotyped images of the slave both as narrated and narrating I” (“Capitalism, Black [Under]Development, and the Production of the African American Novel in the 1850s,” in Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature, ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000], 178). As a response to such pressures, Peterson argues, black authors “hoped that novelization would enable them to avoid the self-commodification of the slave narrative by disguising those traces of the self they desired to keep hidden.” Peterson’s account of the “split between narrating and narrated personae” suggests that “fictional characterization encouraged these writers to dismantle essentialized notions of black subjectivity, conceptualize identity as socially constructed, and explore the multiple facets of African-American experience” (179).


36. Approaching the authorial performances of “Life and Escape” and Clotel as Brown’s attempt at evading the subject position prescribed for the former slave by abolitionism recasts the various excerpts that mark the idiosyncratic form of Clotel. If the narrative containment of slave experience guaranteed the former slave’s objectification and commodification, and if Brown’s refusal to inhabit a fixed first-person narratorial posture performed his own refusal to be so contained, the journalistic excerpts and fictional borrowings that appear throughout Clotel are the textual markers against which Brown defines his distance from the fixed subject positions shaped by abolitionist discourse.


38. Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press / New-
berry Library, 1984), 242 (hereafter cited parenthetically).
41. Streeby, American Sensations, 55, 113, 235.
42. Ibid., 245.
43. Maturin Murray Ballou, Miralda; or, the Justice of Taçon (Boston: W. V. Spencer, [1858?]), 8. It is worth pointing out that when Brown published a revised version of Clotel at the end of the decade, he decided to change its title to Miralda. Importantly, Brown was living and writing (probably working on the revisions that would lead to his own Miralda) in Boston at the time that Ballou’s play of the same name appeared there. Brown’s decision to rename his play (he would change the name back, with a revised spelling, to Clotelle in later versions) would seem to link his work’s obvious interest in the slipperiness of racial categorization to the slipperiness of Spanish identity during these years.

CODA

2. Amy Kaplan, The Social Construction of American Realism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 13. Kaplan’s work made possible the somewhat later argument of Nancy Glazener, who meticulously reveals how the editorial decisions and strategies of a periodical such as the Atlantic Monthly shaped the category of the literary and thus the very concept of what came to be known as “realism.” Understanding how realism was produced by late nineteenth-century print culture, and how realism itself produced cultural stratifications such as class distinctions, Glazener’s work illustrates how the elusive nature of reality as a subject of writing leads to a whole range of textual modes of truth-telling, each with its own set of assumptions about the relationship between writing and what Kaplan calls the “world ‘out there’” (Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910 [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997], 9).
4. For example, Morris Dickstein’s A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), his account of the relationship between “literature and the real world,” opens with a discussion of Whitman, Melville, and Henry James. But Dickstein’s Melville (whose cameo lasts for only two pages) is interested in reality only so far as he brings the “real world” into urban tales such as “Bartleby, the Scrivener” and “The Two Temples.”
6. Sharon M. Harris has suggested that at this moment the reader “is now required
to translate Doctor May’s telegraphic language. Since his language removes the details the reader has been forced to observe, Dr. May can no longer be viewed as presenting a version of ‘reality’” [Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 40].


8. Kaplan acknowledges the performative dimension of the realist project when she writes, “In this competition with other cultural practices, realism also becomes a strategy for defining the social position of the author. To call oneself a realist means to make a claim not only for the cognitive value of fiction but for one’s own cultural authority both to possess and to dispense access to the real” (ibid.).

9. To remind ourselves that the contextual status of reality is relevant to even the most counterrealist works of fiction, we need only turn to Erich Auerbach’s landmark study, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).