

**THE CULTURE OF EKPHRASIS IN AMERICA'S AGE OF PRINT, 1830-1880**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

### The Culture of Ekphrasis in America's Age of Print, 1830-1880

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This dissertation examines the verbal representation of the visual arts in poetry, prose and nonfiction works throughout the expansion of nineteenth-century print publishing. The advancement of print technologies after the 1830s meant that engravings—in books, in magazines, and as freestanding prints—were increasingly accessible to middle-class consumers. In turn, genres of writing that worked to describe, critique and expound on these visual images also proliferated, in forms including travelogues, lyrics, verse drama, and art criticism. But the literary description of artwork did more than supplement imagery: it directly confronted developing ideas of authorship in the age of print. This dissertation highlights understudied ekphrastic works by popular nineteenth-century writers, arguing that this genre of art description provides unique insight into authorship and audience in an era of expanding literary production.

Each of the four chapters locates a specific scene in the cultural history of ekphrasis, using archival and print sources to show the central role that art description played in defining shifting literary relationships during this period. Precisely at the moment that the falling costs of image reproduction reduce the pragmatic function of art description, ekphrasis proliferated to reflect on the new modes of reading that these technologies allowed. Lydia Sigourney's ekphrastic lyrics, including "The Last Supper" (1834) and "Power's Statue of the Greek Slave" (1854), stress the close bonds between author and reader, and use imitation as a key term in the relation between artwork, author and audience. Sophia Hawthorne's travelogue *Notes in England and Italy* (1869) balances art and family description to maintain a distinction between Hawthorne's personal and authorial personae. Henry Longfellow's posthumously published *Michaelangelo: A Fragment* (1883) shows the author's eclectic (and publicly accessible) home art collection as a model for an inclusive literary mode. And Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny

Osgood's exchange of works around the Pygmalion myth trace Osgood's gradual retreat from familiar intimacy with her readers.

Through these principal works, this dissertation locates often-overlooked popular ekphrasis as essential to defining nineteenth-century relations between authors and audiences.

## Introduction

### Ekphrasis in an Age of Print

In Rome, people with fine sympathetic natures stand up and weep in front of the celebrated 'Beatrice Cenci the Day before her Execution.' It shows what a label can do. If they did not know the picture, they would inspect it unmoved, and say, 'Young girl with hay fever, young girl with her head in a bag'

-Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883 (314).

Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice Cenci, a simple, shadowed image of an adolescent girl looking back at the viewer over her shoulder, was one of the nineteenth-century's most popular subjects for ekphrasis, the literary description of a visual work of art.<sup>1</sup> It inspired, among many other responses, a play by Percy Shelley and pivotal narrative moments in novels by Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this sense, Mark Twain's dig at the sentimental labeling of the work also speaks to these ekphrastic representations, which by the 1880s had become cultural touchstones. Twain, in suggesting that the unmediated Cenci portrait is only improperly legible to the casual viewer, hits on the apprehension surrounding the growing presence of mute and ambiguous images in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, an apprehension to which ekphrasis as a genre was a partial response. The first part of the nineteenth century was,

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of the term ekphrasis (from *ek-phrassein*, "to speak out, tell") includes prose and verse responses to traditional art objects including painting, sculpture and prints (Scott 1).

as Henry James writes, “the age in which an image had, before anything else, to tell a story”— but as the inscrutably bleary-eyed Cenci portrait suggests, the image sometimes failed (2: 76). Textual labels in the form of ekphrasis as well as other art writing could correct the interpretive instability of the image by providing a narrative context, however out-of-proportion to the facts of the image.

In spite of the focus on the museum in much criticism of nineteenth and twentieth-century ekphrasis, the context for Twain’s sense of the image as reliant on text can be found most clearly in the American periodical, where the Cenci portrait and many others like it lived a parallel existence.<sup>2</sup> Print culture in the early part of the nineteenth century seemed to present the picture of text and image as naturally allied “sister arts”

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<sup>2</sup> The Cenci portrait was one of the most copied paintings of the nineteenth century, present, as Sophia Hawthorne writes, “in every picture dealer’s shop, in every size; besides being engraved”(212). See also Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (90-96) for “Beatrice” imagery in antebellum gift books. For critical work on 20<sup>th</sup>-century ekphrasis and the museum, see Barbara Fischer, *Museum Meditations: Reframing Ekphrasis in Contemporary American Poetry* (2006); Elizabeth Loizeaux, *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (2008); and Willard Spiegelman, *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry* (2005). All three of these recent works see the museum as the natural backdrop to twentieth-century ekphrasis, a context that they trace back to “the founding of public art museums, beginning in the late eighteenth century” (Loizeaux 4). James Heffernan explores the scope of this development more broadly in *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (1993); he locates the gallery as the context that distinguishes twentieth-century ekphrasis “from its predecessors”: this writing “springs from the museum, the shrine where all poets worship in a secular age”(138). In *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism* (2002), Catherine Paul fleshes out this context, tracing the influence of one museum or gallery in each of the canons of four British and American Modernists. But the conflation of the museum and ekphrasis is common even among writers who do not take the gallery as a primary focus. For instance Grant Scott, in his study of Keats, calls ekphrasis “the trope of museums and picture galleries par excellence” (xi). While public collections were in development by the antebellum period, their progress was halting and a rich comparative study as Paul’s would be extremely difficult to undertake for four antebellum writers. See for instance Neil Harris *The Artist in American Society* 90-122 on the development of American art academies.

perhaps more markedly than ever before. The story of print's rise— with the collaboration of the printed image— follows a familiar arc. Technological advances during the 1830s in papermaking, the cylinder press, and railroad distribution allowed for a growing and increasingly affordable print culture of periodicals, newspapers, and other volumes. The quarter-century from 1825 to 1850— what one newspaper called the “golden age of periodicals”— saw the publication of four to five thousand magazines, from specialist journals to generalist readers (Williams 32). The most widely-circulated of these periodicals owed much of their readership to their illustrations, and editors competed in boasting about the quantity, quality, and general renown of the images that they obtained.<sup>3</sup> Most Americans came into contact with artworks, not through the still-rare public collection, but in “the art gallery of the world” as a contemporary historian called these illustrated periodicals.<sup>4</sup> And with the burgeoning visual culture of these publications— prominent periodicals like *Graham's* and *Harper's* printed several engravings in each issue— came a demand for writers to interpret this work. Art commentary became a commonplace in magazines, and even pseudo-sciences such as physiognomy developed in part to aid readers in interpreting meaning in portraiture and poses.<sup>5</sup> Ekphrasis was one component of the “labeling” network that expanded as image came face-to-face with print.

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Godey of *Godey's Lady's Book* was among the most outspoken, claiming for instance that he “lays every good artist he can catch under contribution” and the magazine's engravings are “superior in effect to any thing ever given in this country or in Europe.” See “Visits to the Painters,” *Godey's Lady's Book* 20 (December 1844), 277. See also Lehuu 109 for the connection between images and profitability at *Godey's*.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 705. Quoted in Sue Rainey.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Kate Flint *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* 14-20.

The variety of this network does not typically enter into ekphrastic criticism, where the precise definition of the term itself is a contentious point. Definitions of ekphrasis are varied, and to some extent also circular and self-designated. John Hollander limits the genre to poetry—“Poems addressed to silent works of art”—but includes in his consideration works addressed to monuments, buildings, or imagined works of art (*The Romantics and Us* 130). Mack Smith draws on classical rhetoric in considering ekphrasis “a digressive description used as an appeal to narrative credibility”(5). And Heffernan offers the useful, but very broad idea that “Ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation”(3). Given this existing variety, it seems almost perverse to muddy the waters with further questions: can travelogues be ekphrastic? What about art reviews? What about reflections on a genre of artwork? A more appropriate question might be, why talk about ekphrasis at all in the context of antebellum writing? What pull does the term have when many antebellum authors did not see themselves as writing ekphrastics as such, and when much of the writing in this field is only quasi or para-ekphrastic following all but the most inclusive definitions? The continuing relevance of ekphrasis, that odd sub-genre that is both absurdly simple and densely theorized, lies in its traditional critical ties to gender and mimesis. Femininity and the copy are key terms in the expanding sphere of popular print, and ekphrasis can help us to work out how authors situated themselves in relation to both at a moment when ideas of authorship—as original or copied, masculine or feminine—were in fluid development.

The growth of the print market created new readerships along gender and class lines, and women’s leisure reading in particular saw a rapid expansion (Lehuu 11). From the beginning of the print revolution, women were associated with the luxury of

illustration; some contemporary writers referred to all “illustrated magazines,” even those with clearly mixed-gender audiences, as “feminine” or “lady-literature”(Patterson 93). Many of the nearly 100 women’s magazines, such as *Ladies’ Literary Cabinet* (1819), *Ladies’ Magazine* (1828), and *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (1830), that sprang up between 1784 and 1860, were illustrated. The market leader from the 30s through the 60s, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, was famous for its hand-colored fashion plates: its illustrations constituted the main expense of publication (Lehuu 102; 109). The highly ornamental gift book annuals of the 20s and 30s created the aesthetic mold for magazines such as *Godey’s* and the leading annuals spent from 50 to 60 percent of their budget on binding and illustration (McGill 29; Lehuu 96). A number of the literary works also worked directly to support the illustrations. It was typical for editors to commission stories or poems to provide a narrative context or explication for the engravings in a given work. Such low-prestige “textual illustrations,” as Hawthorne called them, were most often commissioned to women writers (McGill 30; Patterson 93).

At the same time, the story of antebellum print and image is not one of easy correspondences. If the growth in the depth and variety of textual culture rode at least in part on the back of pictures, the alliance was often a begrudging one. Images were often seen as objects of sensual appeal rather than intellectual or moral comprehension.<sup>6</sup> Emerson called illustrated books “the decline of art” and “the dramdrinking of the eye, & candy for food”(Emerson in *His Journals* 433). In the decades before the wide availability of printed images, American readers had become habituated to reading

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance Lehuu 4: “Reading matter became a feast for the eye as much as, and perhaps instead of, food for the mind. The materiality of texts, both verbal and visual, and the tactile pleasure they warranted contested the well-established authority of the printed word.”

detailed descriptions of artistic genres or styles that they had never— and perhaps would never— see (Harris 13; 47). The distinction between physical sight and the perception of the mind’s eye was one that Americans still made, often prioritizing the processes of the imagination over those of vision.<sup>7</sup> One critic dubbed illustrate books “a partial return to baby literature” in which “the eye is often appealed to instead of the understanding”(Holmes 170-71). Even George Graham admitted that he would welcome “a high-toned magazine with fifty thousand readers...and without the aid of pictures,” though he considered such a proposition a prospect for the future “as taste improves and extends”(“Our Portrait Gallery” 96).

The divide between print and image was also pragmatic. The steel engravings popular from the 20s through the 40s were printed separately from typeset text, and were many times more expensive to produce (Lehuu 107). And these pictures, even when anchored in textual contexts, often drifted discomfittingly from narrative meaning. Readers routinely tore or cut images from the journals in which they appeared, severing the context or explication which may have accompanied them (Lehuu 103). Many engravings were “tipped in” at the front of an issue, facilitating such separations (Patterson 89). Editors likewise reprinted the plates from other magazines, shifting their textual background (Patterson 80-1). And even where an original poem or story was expressly solicited to accompany an original engraving, as was often the case with gift books, subjectivity always threatened the goal of a ‘good’ interpretation. As an author wrote to the editor of *The Gift* concerning his textual “illustration” of an engraving by W.S. Mount, “I trust it will serve in some measure to illustrate your own idea of the

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance Kate Flint, esp. 40-93, for the image/imagination split within Victorian culture.

painting. It is, you are doubtless aware, one of the most difficult parts of authorship to write to a painting ...and the chances are ten to one for a failure on his part who attempts it.”<sup>8</sup>

In this first part of the nineteenth century, then, text and image are apparently allied even as they are in many ways fundamentally disconnected. Many textual works assume a reader’s familiarity with prominently reprinted artworks, but few are illustrated with the images that they describe. Other texts have unclear visual referents, either because they fail to name their subjects, or because the literary and visual responses to a particular artwork are widespread enough that the ekphrasis could be based on a secondary source. Such confusion of origin was commonplace: in the case of the Cenci portrait, for instance, inaccurate textual descriptions circulated as freely as bad visual copies. Neither Shelley nor Melville had seen the original painting in Rome by the time that they described the work in *The Cenci* and *Pierre*; both got the hair and the eye color of the sitter wrong.<sup>9</sup> If ekphrasis is a verbal “reproduction” of a visual work, as one critic describes it, then ekphrasis in the age of print is a copy continuously dislodged from its point of origin, a copy in a hall of mirrors (Spitzer 72). Textual mimesis could describe an original artwork in a museum, an (accurate or inaccurate) print of an original work in a

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<sup>8</sup> Grantz American Literary Duplicates Collection, Case 7, Box 31, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Quoted in Patterson 87. See Williams 28-32 for an analysis of this story in the context of ekphrasis and antebellum print culture.

<sup>9</sup> Both writers represent dark-haired, brown-eyed sitter as blonde and blue-eyed, a strikingly common misapprehension in nineteenth-century descriptions of the portrait. The writers may have relied on copies (many of which were inaccurate or monochromatic), as Louise Barnett suggests of Melville (173), or they may have based their descriptions on the faulty descriptions of earlier writers, as James Mathews suggests (32-34).

periodical, or another writer's (possibly second-hand) response to an artwork.<sup>10</sup> This disjunction between the singular text and the plurality of its (possible) sources argues for critical readings that pay attention to the historical contexts in which ekphrastic writing takes place and is disseminated. Antebellum ekphrastic responses, in aiming in a general sense to domesticate and verbalize images, render individual "originals"—when they are retrievable at all—somewhat beside the point.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation considers canonical and non-canonical texts through the lens of ekphrastic close readings and literary historicism. I examine the ekphrastic canons of four writers long associated genteel feminine audiences— Lydia Sigourney, Sophia Hawthorne, Fanny Osgood and Henry Longfellow— to draw out the contexts that informed their textual mimesis. Because of the entrenched association of the copy with femininity, ekphrasis was for these writers a means of exploring their writing's conformity to both of these categories. Often, it was also a means of considering the

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<sup>10</sup> The practice of basing ekphrastic works on other ekphrastic works was not unique to the antebellum period— for instance, John Hollander notes the relative frequency of such responses during the Early Modern period— but was encouraged by increasing access during this era to textual descriptions of artworks (Hollander 5).

<sup>11</sup> The question of whether images "matter" in ekphrasis—and to what extent they do— is an open one in ekphrastic criticism. John Hollander makes the distinction in his writing on ekphrasis between literary works based on known and extant works of art ("actual ekphrasis") and writing about fictional works of art ("notional ekphrasis")(4). Most other critics do not. As Jean Hagstrum writes, ekphrasis "is a way of seeing and a way of speaking that, in its long history, has created conventions and habits of its own that are sometimes quite unrelated to particular works of art"(xvi). Or W.J.T. Mitchell: "Even those forms of ekphrasis that occur in the presence of the described image disclose a tendency to alienate or displace the object, to make it disappear in favor of the textual image being produced by the ekphrasis" (157 n19). My own failure to make a strong distinction between the "notional" and the "actual" is much more pragmatic: the ekphrasis of the antebellum period, which abounds in responses to unnamed, unclear, or inaccurately described works entirely defies such categorizations.

redemption of these same frequently-maligned classes. In an age of increasingly broad access to ephemeral print, these writers' reconsiderations of the copy were a means of considering their own textual copies. Contemporary questions about the morality of narrative artworks, the mass intimacy of reproduced portraiture, and the potential for originality in artistic copies centrally motivate these visual descriptions. One of my main concerns in this dissertation is to highlight the working-out of these historical concerns through the formal qualities of texts. All of the writers in this project engage with contemporary ideas around the visual arts through the structure and style of their own writing, several of them self-consciously. The overlap of these concerns, or the act of, in Mary Loeffelholz's words, "bridg[ing] the gap between 'internal' formalism and 'external' historicism" can help to reconfigure current theories of ekphrasis (4). Much ekphrastic criticism depends on a binary understanding of the visual and textual, which either pits the media against each other in (theory-driven) model of competition, or compares them in an (often formalist) model of analogy. Ekphrastic historicism, in emphasizing the cultural history of the textual and visual copy alongside of the formal qualities of texts, can help to dissolve this critical separation.

### **Ekphrastic Theory and Its Others**

An understanding of the place of ekphrastic historicism requires an overview ekphrastic criticism, a field with ancient roots that has grown dramatically in the past few decades. Ekphrastic criticism can be broadly divided into two camps: the "paragonal," which emphasizes competition between the media, and the "*ut pictura poesis*" tradition, which instead emphasizes analogy. The *ut pictura poesis* is the eldest of the two modes,

and takes its name from Horace's expression in *Ars Poetica*, which translates "as is painting, so is poetry."<sup>12</sup> The modern standard-bearer of this tradition is Jean Hagstrum, whose *The Sister Arts* (1959) has provided a foundation for many comparative studies of the last few decades. In tracing the *ut pictura poesis* tradition from its Classical origins through to the eighteenth century, he argues for the "intimate relationship between pictorial visualization and total poetic structure"(xviii). Ekphrasis, in other words, can provide a means of thinking about literary pictorialism more generally, an analogy for a broader literary practice.

The paragonal stance, on the other hand, operates not through analogy, but through the construction of a competition that likewise attempts to stage ekphrasis' broader significance. This criticism has gained traction in the past few years through writers such as W.J.T. Mitchell and James Heffernan, and can be seen as responsible for broadening the claims of the genre and staking its relevance beyond, as Mitchell writes, "a minor and rather obscure literary genre"(152). The paragonal mode has roots going back to interarts tracts by writers including Leonardo da Vinci and G.E. Lessing, who stage the relation between text and image as a competition of representational ability, in which each medium depends on certain fixed characteristics. The basic division made famous by Lessing in "Laocoön"(1759) is that of the visual arts as spatial and the literary arts as temporal (Cheeke 22). Each medium also possesses a constellation of associated characteristics, not all of which neatly align: the visual arts in this comparative mode are also associated with silence, passivity, and most strikingly, femininity. Such gendering is

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<sup>12</sup> Cheeke 21. But the tradition of analogy between poetry and painting goes back even further: Plato in the Republic famously associates painters and poets as conspirators in falsity, and Aristotle links the two more positively in the Poetics (Hagstrum 3-9).

“a commonplace of the [ekphrastic] genre,” and has come to take a central place in the analyses of many critics (Mitchell 168).

But the gendering of the media—the male verbal subject speaking for the silent female object—as a defining characteristic of the ekphrastic encounter begs questions of the works examined within the paragonal canon. This criticism tends to mine a limited canon of ekphrasis, particularly writing by male Romantic or Modernist poets, which lends itself well to both the division of gender and the idea of artistic self-assertion in the paragone. Mitchell frames the literary mode as a confrontation with “otherness”—particularly sexual and racial difference— but centers his argument in familiar canon of poets including Keats, Shelley, and Williams. Heffernan, who makes the idea of a “gendered antagonism”(7) central to his study, mentions a female poet only once in a study that spans from antiquity to the twentieth century. Grant Scott, in his work on Keat’s ekphrasis notes that “For Keats, more than for the other Romantic poets, the competitive elements in ekphrasis emerge in terms of the battle of the sexes rather than as any conventional aesthetic battle” a state toward which his “wariness about contemporary female writers” contributed (xiii-xiv). Murray Krieger, whose 1967 essay on ekphrasis and later book-length study were influential to Mitchell’s work in particular, takes on the dynamics of the gendered encounter in his own writing, which he calls an “ekphrasis of *ekphrasis*” and in which he describes encountering ekphrasis as “a maddeningly elusive and endlessly tempting subject.”<sup>13</sup> Mitchell anticipates concerns about the limited scope of this criticism, labeling his framework in “Ekphrasis and the Other” as “a fragment or

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<sup>13</sup> Krieger xiv, 1. See Grant Scott, who compares Krieger’s response to ekphrasis to Keats’ encounter with “the unravished Grecian urn”(xiii). Krieger himself calls ekphrasis a “marriage.” In an odd echo of this idea, the illustrations to *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* are the work of his wife, Joan Krieger (22).

miniature” and admitting that the analysis “would look quite different of course, if my emphasis has been on ekphrastic poetry by women”(181).

For a sense of how a reading of ekphrasis can “look different,” we need only to turn to critics working within canons that challenge these particular boundaries of interpretation. In the past few years, a number of works that question some of the basic assumptions of the paragonal stance of interarts criticism have emerged. Gender in particular has been a point of contention; the idea of text as masculine and image as feminine, is, as one critic writes, “a paradigm which seems always open to question and often to parody”(Cheeke 6). The essays of *In the Frame: Women’s Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler* (2009) tend to take what the editors call a more “iconophilic” stance, basing their analyses more closely on the model of *ut picture poesis* (Hedley 26). Some essays represent the writers as consciously rewriting the gendered dynamic of earlier ekphrastic work; all the essays see the visual arts as a means of reflecting on “the resources of her own artistic medium”(35). In *Between Literature and Painting: Three Australian Women Writers* (2002) Roberta Buffi argues that the contemporary writers she examines resist the standard gendering of the Laocoön, in part by casting the works women artists in their ekphrastic reflections. And Susan Williams argues that her canon of antebellum prose ekphrasis expresses “less a desire to overcome a feminized ‘other’ than a nostalgic attempt to combine form and content, sign and referent,”(33) a means of stabilizing widely reproduced portraiture.

My project brings together aspects of much of this earlier work within the canon of antebellum American writing on art. If the key term in paragonal criticism is “difference” and the key term in *ut pictura poesis* is “analogy,” the guiding light in this

dissertation is the copy, a term that brings together both difference and sameness. The idea of the “sister arts” as following analogous goals and methods was alive and well in the early nineteenth-century: one need only turn to Samuel Morse’s lectures on painting and the other arts or Washington Allston’s ekphrastic poetry for evidence of this view.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, print, the very context that seemed to bring text and image together often had an unbalancing effect. The greater economic value of the image, and its tendency to become separated from its textual environment, inspired written responses that worked to anchor the meaning of the image and limit its interpretation. For the four antebellum writers that I address in this dissertation, the distinctions between text and image inspire their ekphrastic work, even as their writing also creates its own analogies between terms. These writers’ larger canons are all in some way associated with imitation or mimesis, and so ekphrasis, a quintessentially mimetic writing, is a particularly productive terrain for working out the potential for imitation in writing more broadly. At a point when copying and imitation were increasingly deprecated in their association with femininity, this canon provides a rare means of theorizing the copy in a positive and productive sense. The cultural conception of the copy— in education, the visual arts, and literature— is an essential backdrop to the ekphrasis of this period.

### **The Perfect and the Imperfect Copy**

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<sup>14</sup> See Samuel Morse, *Lectures on the Affinity of Painting and the Other Fine Arts*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983); and Washington Allston, *Lectures on Art and Poems*, ed. Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850). Morse considers both painting and poetry as “intellectual” arts (112). The principle for the arts that Allston outlines in *Lectures* can be applied to both his painting and poetry, including his ekphrastic poems.

The act of copying is a recurrent and distinctly feminized trope in antebellum culture, entering into both visual and literary practices, and seeming to reverse the paragonal construction of ekphrasis in which the male text “reproduces” the feminine image. In the antebellum period, women, not men, were most trained in and associated with the act of copying. These associations, while not unambiguously negative, did delimit the borders of women’s creativity during an era when ideas of authorship and originality were rapidly developing. The language beginning to circulate around authorship—including terms such as authenticity and fraudulence, plagiarism and originality—enmeshed the ostensibly neutral idea of mimetic reproduction within a charged context. The copy, then, opens up a rich network of meaning for the writers examined in this dissertation, all of whom are caught up in the reiterative properties of their writing. In fact, the thematic concerns with copying represent a sub-genre of antebellum writing that has been under-explored relative to literary historical genres such as sentimentality.

A range of women’s writing practices in the antebellum period, whether professional or amateur, published or not, fall under the broad rubric of copying. Women’s education in what Claire Badaracco calls “that last generation of the women of pre-industrial American society” was dedicated in large part to both textual and visual copying: “‘reading’ was commonly understood to mean *elocution*, ‘composition’ was *making copies*, and ‘writing’ was primarily an exercise in journals and copy-books”(96, italics Badaracco). Leisure writing likewise often centered on reiterated text. Writers of commonplace books and journals frequently copied published poems and literary passages next to the their own text, weaving “found material into something new” (Kete

“Reception” 27). The published gift books that began to appear in the late 1820s were both modeled on these personal modes of album-keeping, and in turn served as models of taste and organization for this continuing practice (27). And professional women writers often took on the task of compiling passages wholesale from other works, to create educational compendiums for school or home education. In the context of this recreational and professional copy-work, critics have evaluated even those women writers— such as Emily Dickinson— who were once seen as cultural anomalies, through this influential practice.<sup>15</sup>

Artistic copying was another component of antebellum women’s education that became associated with femininity in a broader context. Many schools encouraged the practice to develop the eye, and though the majority of professional engravers and copyists in the nineteenth century were male, the act of visual copying was strongly associated with femininity. Most literary and artistic depictions of copyists, for instance, focused on women. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hilda in *The Marble Faun* and Henry James’s Noémie in *The American* are well-known American examples, but a fixation on the the female copyist was also a broader European phenomenon. It infiltrated mid-century accounts of the Louvre as well as French and English literature, pictures by George Du Maurier as well as Winslow Homer (Briefel 35-45). A central component of this association was the connection of women to the democratizing context of education

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<sup>15</sup> For women writers and the practice of “compiling”(141) composite volumes for publication, see Marion Rust, ““An Entire New Work?”: Abridgment and Plagiarism in Early U.S. Print Culture” (2011).

For discussion of Dickinson’s writing in relation to women’s hand-crafted books and copying practices, see Barton Levi St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul’s Society* (1984) 1-38; Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005); Alexandra Socarides, “Rethinking the Fascicles: Dickinson’s Writing, Copying, and Binding Practices” (2006).

rather than the (implicitly masculine) sphere of invention. As John Ruskin wrote to a young copyist of Turner: “I hope you will persevere in this work. Many women are now supporting themselves by frivolous and useless art; I trust you may have the happiness of obtaining livelihood in a more honorable way by aiding in true educational efforts, and placing within the reach of the general public some means of gaining better knowledge of the noblest art”(qtd. in Briefel 35-6). Feminine efforts at originality may have been “frivolous and useless,” but the task of copying performed a useful if only secondary educative function of disseminating the “noblest art” that women could not themselves produce.

Implicit in many accounts of female copyists, however, was the idea of the feminine copy as superficial, based in the body rather than the mind or spirit. Female copyists in nineteenth-century literature, Aviva Briefel argues, are marked by a “striking physical appearance”— often one that clearly deviates from bourgeois femininity— and the implication “that there is nothing behind her facade”(37; 52). Her copy-work is similarly coded: it may adequately reproduce external forms for general education, as Ruskin encouraged, but it lacked the deeper artistic sense that for instance allowed the good forgery to be mistaken for an original work.<sup>16</sup> It was not mimesis, but mimicry.

Similarly, women writers were often represented as capable— extraordinarily adept, even— at copying external forms, but lacking in the power of original intellectual reflection. Rufus Griswold, an editor and anthologist whose career to a large extent depended on the women writers whose work he promoted, was a prominent voice of this perspective. As he wrote in the introduction to *The Female Poets of America* (1849): “It

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<sup>16</sup> Briefel 35, 43. The forger is, on the other hand, both an “unexpectedly admired progeny of the nineteenth-century culture of art” and “exclusively male”(20; 32).

is less easy to be assured of the genuineness of literary ability in women than in men... The most exquisite susceptibility of the spirit, and the capacity to mirror in dazzling variety the effects which circumstances or surrounding minds work upon it, may be accompanied by no power to originate, nor even, in any proper sense, to reproduce”(8). In the context of the larger passage, Griswold implies that “reproduction” or mimesis, in its “proper sense” requires the work of the intellect, while emotion is the prime mover of women’s poetry. This reliance on sentiment means that feminine attempts to “mirror” others’ thoughts do not produce perfect copies, but rather mimicry, a sort of skewed reflection of a “dazzling variety.”

Considerations and reconsideration of the sentimental mode within modern criticism have likewise centered, in varying ways, on the idea of authenticity. Sentimentality’s place in the larger nineteenth-century literary canon is one that since the Douglas-Tompkins debate of the 70s and 80s has been characterized by the vocabulary of original and copy, genuine and fake. In Ann Douglas’s famously polemical argument, the terms by which she characterizes the genre— as “camp” and “fakery”— clearly stakes the battle as one between authenticity and its opposite (4-5; 12). Jane Tompkins reads this same canon through a reconstruction of its contemporary political and historical significance, explicitly reversing the value of the terms of Douglas’s argument without dismantling them: “My own embrace of the conventional led me to value everything that criticism taught me to despise: the stereotyped character, the sensational plot, the trite expression. As I began to see the power of the copy as opposed to the original, I searched not for the individual but for the type”(xvi). More recent critical evaluations have complicated characterizations of the genre, among other things by opening up its

exclusive connection to women writers, but the terms of copy and authenticity remain in the background of many such readings. Mary Louise Kete, for instance, argues that sentimentality has worked as a “utopian force,” one of the nineteenth century’s most persuasive means of forging “a cohesive group identity encompassing and defining the American middle class”(xviii; 9). But this focus on identity-formation often emphasizes the mode’s manipulative properties. Sigourney and Longfellow, for example, use “the rhetorical strategies of sentimentality to coerce their readers into joining with them in the articulation of a shared vision of America”(8). Sentimentality is the appearance of authentic emotion used as a “subtle and powerful tool” in a larger intellectual project (122). The mode has had a hard time escaping the sense of its own duplicity. Rather than relegate concerns over the copy and authenticity to backdrop status within the increasingly ambiguous and ambivalent sub-category (or moral philosophy, or hegemonic cultural discourse) of sentimentality, I bracket the genre-term in order to put the copy into relief as a literary concern in its own right.<sup>17</sup>

Recent critical work has begun to highlight the cultural importance of mimicry and the act of copying in antebellum writing. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw the traditional ‘craftsman’ model of creative work coming into contact with notions original and proprietary authorship.<sup>18</sup> But as critics such as Lara Langer Cohen and Eliza Richards remind us, this notion of originality was never as simple as a retrospective glance may suggest. Cohen sees the antebellum period’s predilection for critical puffery,

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<sup>17</sup> I paraphrase Joanne Dobson: “With the accelerating recovery of nineteenth-century women's writing, sentimentalism has been approached as a subliterature, as a moral philosophy, and as a hegemonic cultural discourse” (264). Since Dobson’s writing in 1997, the possible meaning and canons encompassed by the term have only grown.

<sup>18</sup> See Rust 142.

literary hoaxes, and rampant accusations of plagiarism as a part of a larger sense that the developing American literature itself could be nothing more than “fraudulence”(1). But, she posits, the culture of mass-produced print, rather than destroying the original, as in the Benjaminian construction, may have created the first sustained idea of it: “It is the conceivability of the derivative that is the prerequisite for imagining, and privileging the authentic”(16). And if originality is, as she writes, a “second-order phenomenon,” it is also, as a term, inherently unstable. Richards suggests a similar instability in her study of Poe and the poetesses of his literary circle; she notes that these writers “decline to enforce or accept a clear division between original and copy, genius and mimicry, poet and poetess” and “retain skepticism about the possibility of true mimesis,”(20) finding a productive ground in the space between these terms. The functions of “lyric mimicry”—“echo, quotation, paraphrase, repetition” — are, Richards argues, essential to reading the social, cultural and aesthetic work of the lyric during this time (25).

But if the impossibility of mimesis haunted antebellum poets and fiction writers, it would seem to twice plague those among them who wrote ekphrastic works. The impossibility of translating visual to textual is a truism of ekphrastic theory and cultural theory alike. (As Mitchell memorably puts it, “Words can ‘cite,’ but never ‘sight’ their objects”(152)). Ultimately, then, ekphrasis is always a form of “fakery,” a genre that “exists and thrives under the knowledge of failure”(Cheeke 2). If perfect mimesis of a text is only plagiarism and perfect mimesis of an image is only a forgery, then antebellum ekphrasis stakes itself on a double-failure. Twain’s prod at the Cenci portrait expresses such failure clearly. The portrait, over which so much nineteenth-century ink was spilled, intrigued viewers for its connection to both a Renaissance master, Guido Reni, and the

scandalous Roman narrative of the Cenci family, which entwined murder, incest and capital punishment. Since the end of the nineteenth century, though, both the work's artist and its subject have been widely discredited, shown to rest on little more than wishful thinking. The artwork is no longer included in authoritative accounts of Reni's work and its sitter remains mysterious, though less intriguingly so. The many ekphrastic accounts that revolve around the emotional salience of the Cenci narrative are in a very literal sense wrong, and contemporary viewers, who no longer flock to see the work as one of the central Roman shrines, are much more likely, in Twain's words, to "inspect it unmoved." But such was precisely the power of early nineteenth-century ekphrasis: at a point when few readers were attuned to interpreting images, it provided them with the emotional language to do so— or to believe that they could. That this ekphrastic language tells us less about antebellum imagery than about antebellum authorship is an argument for its significance rather than its failure.

### **Scenes of Ekphrasis**

There are many authors from this period, both well-and lesser-known, whose writing centers on issues of artistic description and mimesis. Melville authored a number of ekphrastic poems and passages; he responded to painting as well as sculpture, and in *Battle-Pieces* was one of the first nineteenth-century writers to offer sustained meditation on photographic reproductions (Hollander 67). His late-career lectures on Greek statuary show an understanding of the analogies between the literary and the plastic arts, and his preoccupation with the act of copying in a sculptural context suggests itself for a comparison to his literary work (Maloney 1-5). Margaret Fuller was a pioneering art

critic of both American and European work, whose contributions to ekphrasis in *Summer on the Lakes* (1843) and other works have been understudied. Christopher Cranch, a figure often seen as peripheral to Transcendentalist circles, was in fact central where conceptions of visuality were concerned. His literary relationship to Emerson, particularly in the context of his own painting and ideas of imitation, deserves more attention.

That said, the authors that I have chosen to work with in this dissertation do share common ground that argues for their consideration as a group. They were all popular and generally prolific writers known for their ekphrastic writing. As influential authors, their ekphrastic work reached a broad readership and participated prominently in public dialogues around the visual arts. And equally importantly, as popular authors, their descriptions of widely reproduced imagery obliquely reflects on their own widespread reproduction, and on their own relation to an audience. While aiming to avoid ahistorical constructions that would see in early nineteenth-century works a conscious self-reflexivity, I argue in this dissertation that art description is an ideal means of accessing changing relations between readers and texts. The authors in this project are constellations in a web rather than the beginning and end of the story, but their literary prominence means that they are sound models through which to think about reading practices.

My first chapter, “Lydia Sigourney’s Didactic Ekphrasis,” considers the ekphrastic poetry of one of the most popular writers of the period in light of contemporary ideals of education and the arts. Sigourney’s ekphrastic poetry, I argue, is directly indebted to the democratization of art instruction in the 1830s and 40s, which concretized the place of

the fine arts in middle class moral education. Drawing manuals emphasizing creative reproduction of imagery as a means of moral education inform these poems, which stress the speaker and the reader's emulation of the artistic image as a means of consuming its lessons. They emphasize the artwork as reproduction and variation rather than a static object to be described or overcome, finding in aesthetic transformation an allegory for the empowering effects of home education.

In my second chapter, I look to Sophia Peabody Hawthorne's travelogue *Notes in England and Italy* (1869) as a work that makes surprising claims for mimicry and ekphrasis alike in relation to women's writing. In the context of Hawthorne's work as an editor and painter-copyist, my analysis of *Notes* highlights her fixation on the visual and verbal copyists that populate the Italian landscape of the Hawthorne family's travels. Her discussion of these artist-copyists clearly challenges the notion of artistic originality as absolute aesthetic independence. At the same time, the travelogue is a public document of private memories, both preserving family history and presenting a veiled public façade. In the act of this veiling, the apparently derivative act of literary copying—recording detailed descriptions of artworks—becomes innovative, blurring the line between the faithful imitation and the literary original. Hawthorne's consideration of artworks and artists, as well as her editorial treatment of her own text, suggest a perspective through which both the visual and the verbal copy come to represent creativity.

Chapter Three, "Henry Longfellow, Michael Angelo, and the Middle-Class Curator" examines the poet's dramatic poem *Michael Angelo: A Fragment* in light of Longfellow's aesthetic ideals as an art collector. A writer who Margaret Fuller dubbed a "middle class" poet, Longfellow confronted accusations of plagiarism, effeminacy, and

simple mediocrity throughout his career. In *Michelangelo*—published posthumously, but begun early in his literary career—he found what he considered an analog for his own writing practice. Longfellow’s *Michelangelo* is an artist whose work, like the poet’s, implicitly questions the dichotomies of masculine and feminine, original and derivative, high and low. And like Longfellow’s own home art collection, the dramatized *Michael Angelo* is an eclectic space that brings together extremes of elite and popular, fine art and artisanship. In so doing, the epic poem imagines the instability associated with “middle class” artists as productive rather than problematic.

My fourth and final chapter, “Gaze On!: Osgood, Poe and the Visualization of Antebellum Authorship” examines the work of Fanny Osgood, a writer best known for her public literary exchange with Edgar Allan Poe in the 1840s. This exchange—echoing lines, formal structures, and broader thematic concerns of Poe’s poetry—is characterized by the literary imitativeness for which Osgood is known today. But I argue that this echo-game is only part of the story of her literary production, which was centrally concerned with the ability of the reproduced text and image to come to life for an antebellum reading public. Osgood represents this ‘coming to life’ through her poetic reinterpretations of the Pygmalion myth, a popular archetype for nineteenth-century writers. The myth tells of the story of the sculptor, Pygmalion; his statue, Galatea; and the love that, along with divine intervention, brings Galatea to life. The ties between love and sight are central to the narrative, but in Osgood’s hands, this emphasis on visuality becomes suspect—a sign of idolatry—and is trumped by the ephemerality of voice, song, and lyric. This stress on voice over image suggests that locating Osgood within a traditional narrative of print culture presents only a partial image of her performance-

based work. The innovations of these Pygmalion poems point toward the other media—including the late-career setting of her work to music—that can inform a fuller reading of this canon.

As a unit, these four chapters call up specific scenes in the cultural history of ekphrasis, and tell a small part of a complex and ongoing story. The fifty-year period that this dissertation takes on is one in which visual art in America existed predominantly in print. This period emerges from an era in which art prints were much less ubiquitous, and art descriptions as likely to be based on firsthand encounters with original artworks or personal relationships with artists. It ultimately leads into the age of the American museum, a period beginning at the end of the nineteenth century with the founding of numerous seminal public art collections including the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago. Ekphrastic work from this period and from the early twentieth century more often than not took its inspiration from such public collections.

Just as the historical shifts in these earlier and later periods clearly make their mark on the art description of the times, so is the ekphrasis of nineteenth-century print influenced by the circumstances of its composition. It is in the age of print that we see the most insistent juxtaposition of text and image, and this correspondence strengthens the long-standing analogy between the two media. During this time, an author's response to an image almost inevitably summons a reader's relation to their text. Though the early nineteenth century is the era in American ekphrastic writing that has received the scantest literary-historical attention, it is, as I hope to show, the one that can provide the most insight into significant shifts in the relation of authors to their audiences.

## Chapter One

### Lydia Sigourney's Didactic Ekphrasis

Drawing, the simplest of languages, is understood by all.

-Rembrandt Peale, *Graphics; a manual of drawing and writing, for the use of schools and families* (1835).

#### Introduction

That the antebellum public framed artistry in terms not of the static original art object, but a more flexible formulation of artistic poses, capable of being infinitely modulated, is nowhere more evident than in the vogue for a democratically fashioned approach to art instruction. At its height in the 30s and 40s, the approach left its mark in the form of inexpensive drawing manuals, passages of drawing instruction in popular periodicals, and sections of conduct books such as Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Young Ladies* (1833), wherein she praises drawing for its practical moral benefits:

A taste for Drawing heightens the admiration of Nature by enforcing a closer examination of her exquisite workmanship, from the hues of the wild flower, to the grandeur of the forest, and the glowing beauties of the extended landscape... Those who make such advances in Drawing and Painting, as to be able to sketch designs and groups from History, derive high intellectual pleasure, from this elegant attainment."(110-111).

This consideration of the arts as a means toward "intellectual pleasure" contributed, like many other writings of this period, to bringing the fine arts to a popular and often female audience. While many authors spoke of drawing from nature, one element that separated this period's thoughts on arts instruction from those of the late eighteenth century was precisely the assumption that readers would initiate or supplement their drawing practice

by copying engravings from books or periodicals or by looking at works from within the family sphere. In turn, the democratization of drawing practice was seen as a training ground for reading these same images; as the visual arts became increasingly accessible through reproduction and commercially accessible originals, they required a more visually savvy viewing public. Drawing, writers maintained, had the ultimate goal of training the eye to see the very type of image that the hand produced (Korsmeyer 509-520).

Sigourney's ekphrastic poetry emerges from this artistic environment, and like the drawing manuals of the same period, functions as a training ground for the interpretation of a fluid and dynamic visual culture. These poems see artworks not as distanced high cultural objects, but as scenes to be studied for desirable ends such as "intellectual pleasure" or "heighten[ing] the admiration of nature"; they see art as a conduit toward the same aims, both moral and intellectual, as a middle-class education. The images that they draw on are broadly accessible: either unnamed images that are clearly familiar types from print culture, or specific pieces that were widely reproduced. This ekphrasis and follows a new conception of art in the antebellum period, one that understands art not as a part of the elite "ornamental" education of the Republican era, nor as part of the high-cultural space of the late-century gallery, but as an essential part of an educational model that emphasizes emotional exchange and social networks. At precisely the time when technological reproduction of imagery seemed to render ekphrasis redundant, it became a newly valuable medium, one more about the act of viewing—how to approach images, what to draw from them, and what to avoid—than any particular aesthetic.

None of Sigourney's poems derive from a museum environment, a telling fact both for her own canon and for middle-class art culture at large. Sigourney was uniquely positioned to write an ekphrasis of the emergent gallery. Though she had little access to original art in her childhood, her friendship with her father's employer, and later this employer's grand-nephew, Daniel Wadsworth, granted her opportunities to experience a developing museum culture firsthand. Wadsworth was one of America's first wealthy patrons of the art, and it was at his home that Sigourney "first enjoyed the luxury of studying fine pictures" (*Letters of Life* 90). Wadsworth also secured Sigourney a teaching position in his hometown of Hartford and the publication of her first volume, *Moral Pieces in Prose and Verse* (1815) (*Letters of Life* 89; 202; 325). In the 1840s, Wadsworth was the benefactor behind the Wadsworth Athenaeum, one of America's first public art museums, built in Hartford, where Sigourney lived for most of her life.<sup>19</sup> Sigourney mentions the Athenaeum in her late-life autobiography as an institution with which her readers would be familiar, but it made remarkably little impact on her ekphrastic canon (90). The art collection included mostly American historical canvases, as well as Wadsworth's collection of works by Thomas Cole and Thomas Sully, bequeathed after his death in 1848. None of these works or artists appears in Sigourney's poetry, which drew primarily on genre scenes and well-known reproductions of European works. This absence testifies to the limited impact of public collections on Sigourney, and likely also

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<sup>19</sup> The other was the Trumbull Gallery at Yale University, which opened in 1832, displaying paintings by John Trumbull and Samuel Morse, among others. By 1843, the gallery was "a more or less dead institution." See Orosz 149-151.

on her broadly middle-class audience. In fact, the Athenaeum did little to foster public education and postured more as a “shrine of the muses” than a “palace for the people.”<sup>20</sup>

The more accessible sources of Sigourney’s ekphrasis suggest an entry into both her poetic canon as a whole and the foundations of antebellum ekphrasis. In looking at antebellum illustration and artwork, critics have tended to focus on the moral content of these images and the messages that they promoted to an increasingly visual-literate reading public.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Sigourney criticism has been heavily weighted toward the ethics and morals that the poetry does or does not advance.<sup>22</sup> Sigourney’s ekphrasis

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<sup>20</sup> Orosz 155. See Orosz 149-155 for an account of the founding of the Athenaeum.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance Lehuu 102-25.

<sup>22</sup> The sense of Sigourney’s writing as a dematerialized moral “phantom voice”(Wood) appears first in early criticism but lingers into more recent writing. Sigourney herself encouraged the conception in discussing her writing in *Letters of Life* as a disembodied activity, set apart from daily life, and marked by the visitation of a muse. Ann Wood, writing in 1972, argues that Sigourney created a poetic image of herself in which “she was an inhabitant of her own inner space and owed her inspiration solely to its resources.” More recent and nuanced work often maintains an idea of Sigourney that depends on its distance from physical life; in Eliza Richards’ nuanced study of mimicry in the poetess tradition, for instance, Sigourney embodies “the insatiable longing for a dead infant” (169) and “confronted the association of women’s writing with sexual indiscretion by specializing in the elegy and draining bodies of animation”(71). The sense of Sigourney as an elegist and proponent of abstracted moralities such as “duty, dedication and loyalty”(71) permeates this and other recent conceptions of the poetess.

Even in criticism which has resisted a focus on morality, a focus on content over form nearly always lingers. Nina Baym’s influential “Reinventing Lydia Sigourney” critiques what she sees as Wood’s simplistic “construal of Sigourney’s death poetry”(389) and focuses her attention instead to what she considers a more significant portion of the poetess’s canon, her history poems. Mary Loeffelholz shifts the focus once again, as she sees the poetess’s canon as shaped intimately by her early role as schoolteacher and the domestic tutelary complex. Paula Bennett similarly focuses on the political, locating Sigourney as a “difference feminist” who legitimated feminine involvement in the public sphere from a location of moral domestic authority. Dorothy Baker takes the converse approach and reads Sigourney’s domestically-situated poems—such as “To a Shred of Linen”—as legitimations of the feminine sphere, that work by imbuing this sphere with historical and mythical significance. In all of these accounts, the push to bring

provides an opportunity to investigate what the first of these readings have taken for granted—the changing place of visual art in Americans’ lives, and the effect that these shifts had in the public’s approach to art during this period—while providing a sense of Sigourney as a writer concerned with process and form, not merely didactic moralism. From her first volume of poetry in 1815 to her last in 1862, Sigourney wrote at least 13 poems easily identifiable as ekphrastic, not including the several more that focus on directions to an artist in the composition of an artwork (what John Hollander calls “imperative” ekphrasis), the verse meditations on art-objects interspersed in the travelogue *Pleasant Memories from Pleasant Lands*, or the poems to American monuments.<sup>23</sup> Sigourney’s ekphrastics all contain some reference to a “picture,” painting, or sculpture in their titles. All refer to a particular image that was widely reproduced, or a type of image to which readers had ready access, rather than the more remote scenes from the still-emergent American galleries or lesser-known European churches. These poems focus on genre scenes familiar from gift books and periodicals, the family portraits that hung on walls, and the widely-circulated engravings of “masterworks.”

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Sigourney’s writing into a larger world of poetic and political exchange maintains a focus on content over form

<sup>23</sup> Hollander 23-25. Sigourney’s ekphrastics are as follows: “Pompey’s Statue , at whose pedestal Julius Caesar fell, is still preserved in the Palazzo Spadae, in Rome”(1827), “On a Picture of Penitence”(1834), “The Last Supper. A picture by Leonardo da Vinci“(1834), “The Schoolmistress. Adapted to a Picture”(1834), The Consumptive Girl. From a picture”(1834), “Picture of a Sleeping Infant, Watched by a Dog”(1834), “Lady Jane Grey. On seeing a picture representing her engaged in the study of Plato”(1837), “Sabbath Evening in the Country. Suggested by a picture”(1837), “Child Left in a Storm. Adapted to a painting by Sully”(1837), “Statue of the Spinning Girl, at Chatsworth, the Seat of the Duke of Devonshire”(1841), “The Landing of the Pilgrims. A picture by G. Flagg“( 1848), “Powers’s Statue of the Greek Slave”(1854), To a Portrait”(1860).

This reliance on image “types” is arguably the most significant marker of Sigourney’s ekphrasis. It not only locates the poetry within an era when such forms would be recognizable to a wide range of readers, but connects this seemingly niche canon to broader sentimental aesthetics. Kerry Larson identifies Sigourney’s poetic mode precisely through her use of such types: by working from a “stable stock of recurring images and highly stereotyped scenarios,” she ensures the reader’s emotional and imaginative participation in the scene of her writing (84). For such “literary egalitarianism,” as Larson terms it, the burgeoning print sphere would have been an unmitigated blessing: it offered a seemingly endless supply of easily recognizable scenes (77). Sigourney’s ekphrasis, then, is not a not a tangential offshoot of a larger canon, but a possible metonym for it, a means of thinking about the form of spectatorship and participation that Sigourney demands of her readers.

This participation, despite the apparent informality of Sigourney’s verse and her own stress on its spontaneity, operates within a consistent set of rules. The dominant trait of this ekphrasis is a concern with the emotionalized subject of the artwork rather than the particular characteristics of the object. Shifting metaphors and the frequent failure to cite a particular artist or title of the “picture” in question complicate readers’ attempts to envision a concrete image. The very subjects that Sigourney chooses for her ekphrastic representation highlight emotion over form; without exception, Sigourney’s ekphrastic images are moments of suspension, moments of stillness between heightened activity or even violence, moments centered on a mode of sympathetic affect. And the poems, without exception, encourage readers to enter into this emotional space by echoing gestures or movements from the images described.

The forms of address work to heighten this emotive participation, as Sigourney's speakers move between direct address, apostrophe, and collective gestures. Sigourney's poetry in general often relies on a direct address to readers to bridge the gap between author and audience, and then a movement to a collective "we" or "us" to bridge to the gap between individual readers. Her ekphrastic poems also, by definition, rely on apostrophe, the moment when a poetic speaker turns away from the audience to address an absent or imaginary figure. (That these poems in general are not illustrated only heightens the "absence" of the images). Mary Louise Kete has called apostrophe "the essential rhetorical trope of sentimentalism," because in gesturing toward absence, apostrophe creates a link between the actual and the ideal (or as Kete puts it, "temporality and eternity") and so offers the possibility within the poem of a "nonviolated community"(17; 45; 47). Though this construction applies most obviously to elegiac verse, it has its place in ekphrasis. These poems cannot offer a link between the living and the dead, but they can draw a line for readers between their actual and ideal selves, with absent images standing in for models. And in culminating, as these poems often do, in a collective "we," they imagine this path as one that individual readers take together.

Sigourney's "Lady Jane Grey: On Seeing a Picture Representing Her Engaged in the Study of Plato"(1837) models many of these characteristics. Thrust into power through a politicized turn of events in 1554, Grey rules as queen for only a matter of days before being imprisoned and ultimately executed on her usurper's orders. In Sigourney's hands, as in most nineteenth-century accounts, Grey is a Protestant model of studiousness,

piety, and strength in adversity.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, as in all of Sigourney's ekphrastic poems, the moral lesson that the writing instills is complicated by its visual impetus. The poem moves through several scenes in Grey's life, but its central ekphrastic moment, in the second and third stanzas, is key to defining both her character and the poem's ideals of visual spectatorship:

Hark ! the hunting-bugle sounds,  
Thy father's park is gay,  
Stately nobles cheer the hounds,  
Soft hands the coursers sway,  
Haste to the sport, away ! away !  
Youth, and mirth, and love are there,  
Lingerest thou, fairest of the fair,  
In thy lone chamber to explore  
Ancient Plato's classic lore ?

Old Roger Ascham's gaze  
Is fix'd on thee with fond amaze ;  
Doubtless the sage doth marvel deep,  
That for philosophy divine  
A *lady* could decline  
The pleasure 'mid yon pageant-train to sweep,  
The glory o'er some five-barr'd gate to leap,  
And in the toil of reading Greek  
Which many a student flies,  
Find more entrancing rhetoric  
Than fashion's page supplies.

The painting here is not named, but depictions of this scene were familiar from histories of England and books of biographical sketches designed for children's education. This source aligns well with Sigourney's own use of the instructive scene: both the poem and

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<sup>24</sup> The perception of Grey as a Protestant martyr and innocent political pawn is one dependent to some extent on the circulation of apocryphal letters and testimonials from after Grey's death into the eighteenth century. Sigourney echoes this perspective in framing Grey's reign as engineered primarily by the Duke of Northumberland, her father-in-law. See John Guy, "The Story of Jane Grey," *Painting History* (London: National Gallery Company, 2010) 9-14.

a prose biography of Grey's life were later reprinted in Sigourney's juvenile readers.<sup>25</sup>

The appropriateness of the scene as an educative model is immediately apparent: it centers on the Tudor educator Robert Ascham's discovery of Grey absorbed in *Phaedo* while the rest of her family is out to hunt. Ascham apparently marveled at Grey's reading Plato "with as much delight as some gentlemen would read a merry tale in Boccaccio" (qtd. in Guy 9). In Sigourney's hands, the comparison becomes more relevant to her own cultural moment: the Grey who can in Plato "find more entrancing rhetoric / Than fashion's page supplies" is a figure whose victories speak directly to the would-be virtuous readers of Sigourney's audience. Grey's ability to resist the frivolities of the fashion magazine, or the allures of the "pageant train" make of her an instructive model, rather than a historically and experientially distant Protestant martyr.

The focus of this instructive pose is on a visual restraint that Sigourney's readers almost inevitably echo. Grey is both a textually-absorbed subject, and an object of Ascham's "gaze," both mesmerized and mesmerizing. She shows control over her own visual environment in resisting the visual entrancement of fashion plates, even as her own image is (unconsciously, of course) capable of inspiring a similar entrancement, or "fondly amaze." The reader's "gaze" is defined by the same restraint, as she in her own "lone chamber" takes in Sigourney's didactic text. The scene of the poem—characterized by few physical markers, and notable principally for the emotional intensity of Ascham's

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<sup>25</sup> For illustrated accounts of this moment in Grey's history, see for instance *The Juvenile Plutarch; Containing Accounts of the Lives of Celebrated Children and of the Infancy of Persons Who Have Been Illustrious for their Virtues or Talents* (Boston: Monroe and Francis, 1827), 35-42. Sigourney reproduced accounts of Jane Grey's life—and in particular her encounter with Robert Ascham—in *How to Be Happy. Written for the Children of Some Dear Friends*. (Hartford: D.F. Robinson & Co., 1833), 87-88; *The Boy's Reading-Book: In Prose and Poetry, For Schools* (New York: J. Orville Taylor, 1839), 50-51; *Letters to Young Ladies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846), 119.

“fond amaze”—models for this dutiful reader how they themselves should expect to be seen. The act of visual restraint does not deny the power of the image, but promises readers that they themselves can become the entrancing images.

The final stanza of the poem culminates in the speaker’s echoing of Grey’s restrained model of spectatorship. By this point in the poem, the reader has seen Grey through her imprisonment in the Tower of London and the execution of her husband, Guildford. This final scene focuses on Grey’s own execution. But Sigourney’s poem not only does not acknowledge an ekphrastic source for this moment—a significant omission considering that the most reprinted Jane Grey painting of the 1830s was Paul Delaroche’s *Execution of Jane Grey* (1834)—it resists any visual representation of scene at all (Bann and Whiteley 102-10):

Away! Away! I will not see the deed.  
Fresh drops of crimson stain the new-fall’n snow,  
The wintry winds wail fitfully and low;--  
But the meek victim is not there,  
Far from this troubled scene,  
High o’er the tyrant queen,  
She finds that crown which from her brow  
No envious hand may tear.

This alternate execution and coronation models the same visual restraint as Grey’s abstention from the hunt. In both cases, the viewer avoids the violent spectacle of one scene for the ideality of another, whether the philosophy of Plato or a spiritual coronation.

The emphasis here on emotional transference and ideal, generalized images correlates closely with the ekphrastic work of Felicia Hemans, a literary predecessor to

whom Sigourney is often compared.<sup>26</sup> Hemans offered a prolific ekphrastic model: as Frederick Burwick writes, “No poet in the romantic period turned more extensively to ekphrasis than did Felicia Hemans”(108). In fact, Hemans wrote 38 ekphrastics in the course of her career, more than the major Romantic poets combined (Scott 36). She, like Sigourney, did not see many of the original works that “suggested” her own poems, and her ekphrastic works show “a desire to meet the artwork with an immediate emotional response, rather than to dwell on its technical or illusionistic qualities” (37). This characteristic, as well as Hemans’s attraction to more “egalitarian” genres such as portraits, sketches, and monuments, undoubtedly left its mark on Sigourney’s ekphrastic writing.<sup>27</sup> Sigourney’s point of distinction, and her strongest connection to the emerging culture of popular prints and engravings, lies in the language of disciplinary intimacy.

Sigourney’s ekphrasis is deeply rooted in the concerns of early nineteenth-century education. Among these concerns is the educational philosophy— what Richard Brodhead calls “disciplinary intimacy”— that inspired much of Sigourney’s pedagogical writing. Influential among many educational thinkers of the 30s and 40s, the theory is based on the idea that children learn best through love of the instructor, rather than

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<sup>26</sup> Sigourney was called the “American Hemans” by contemporaries, a title that Edgar Allan Poe claimed she had gained “*solely by imitation*”( *Essays and Reviews* 875). Sigourney was aware, but apparently undisturbed by such accusations. In *Select Poems* (1841), she wrote the following note to what is today her most well-known poem, “Death of an Infant”: “This little poem has been inserted by mistake, in one of the American editions of the late Mrs. Hemans. Though this is accounted by the real author, as an honor, it is still proper to state, that it was originally composed at Hartford, in the winter of 1824, and comprised in a volume of poems, published in Boston, by S. G. Goodrich, Esq., in 1827”(30).

<sup>27</sup> Scott 36. That Sigourney was aware of Hemans’s ekphrastic work is certain; in her sketch of the poetess in *Examples from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1857) she mentions both Hemans’s early visits to art galleries in London and her ekphrastic volume *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816).

through the threat of corporal punishment or rigorous discipline; the teacher is a personified and sentimentalized authority modeled on, and in many cases enacted by, the mother. This teacher-parent plays a minimal outward role in regulating the child's actions, but becomes "an inwardly regulating moral consciousness"(Brodhead 72). The student internalizes the sentimentalized figure of authority in much the same way that the ideal reader of Sigourney's ekphrastic poems internalizes the central image.

The reflection of educational principles Sigourney's poems of image spectatorship is evidence of a profound shift in cultural conceptions of the visual arts. Sigourney's ekphrastic writing is indebted to a relatively new model of the visual arts in the antebellum period, one that saw imagery as having an important place within middle-class education. The conception of the arts and arts education for women in particular shifted from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, from an elitist "ornamental" practice that showed leisure time and improved the prospects of good marriage, to one of "industry" which evidenced desirable qualities such as patience, devotion, and the development of skill. These qualities, which moved artistic practice into the moral realm, were highlighted in women's conduct books and writings on women's education throughout the nineteenth century. In such texts, visual art was touted as "the mightiest means of moral culture," but most conduct books and drawing manuals were vague as to how, precisely, this "moral culture" was to be instilled (qtd. in Zlotnick 1). Sigourney's ekphrastic poems emphasize the process of reading an image over the final culminating moral, and thus provide a clearer primer on how images are to teach. By demonstrating a relation to the image that is, much like the mother-child relationship,

based in empathy, these poems show the extent to which viewing practices were intertwined with emotional bonds.

At the same time the nature of this emotion—divorced from a specific agent, produced in order to be reproduced—can also tell us something about the task of Sigourney’s poetry more generally. Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson argue that one reason for the continual disappearance and “(re)discovery” of nineteenth-century American and British Poetesses in the scholarship of the past many years is that the Poetess is “not the content of her own generic representation: not a speaker, not an ‘I,’ not a consciousness, not a subjectivity, not a voice, not a persona, not a self”(523). The Poetess, working within the conventions of women’s “sentimental” verse, emits emotion from a speaker who is not herself, but a lyrical type of Woman. My own reading of Sigourney’s ekphrasis attempts to locate this lyric absence within a mode that centers prominently on an absent subject. Most of these poems elide the lyric “I” altogether, and the voice of the Poetess serves only to emulate the gestures of an (unpictured) artwork, and to present this emulation as a model for further reproduction. Poetry here is not, as John Stuart Mill famously defines it, “feeling confessing itself to itself”; Sigourney’s ekphrasis functions as a means of reproducing a generalized emotion through the particular body of the reader. Insofar as this feeling is “personal,” it is the reader who provides this particularity. And as all ekphrasis is, in its simplest sense, a copy, an attempt at artistic emulation, Sigourney’s ekphrasis culminates in a copy of a copy, refined to a sentimental essence. This mode of image description is the product of artistic conventions that see production of the copy as an end in itself, a goal not only in poetry, but in the visual arts and education.

## Disciplinary Intimacy and Sigourney's Domestic Education

Before moving on to an analysis of Sigourney's poems in the next section, I will in this section set up some of the background that informed her ekphrastic choices, including the principles of her domestic education, and the part that images—increasingly familiar and familial—played in this moral instruction. Disciplinary intimacy and the value of emotional bonds in teaching infuse all of Sigourney's pedagogical writing. The model of disciplinary intimacy, though it may be applied to formal education, is based on the domestic bonds that precede such schooling. Witness for instance the quote that from Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers* (1838) that Brodhead uses to explain his understanding of disciplinary intimacy:

[The mother] should keep her hold on [the child's] affections, and encourage him to confide in her, without reserve, his intention and his hopes, his error and his enjoyments. Thus maintaining her pre-eminence in the sanctuary of his mind, her image will be as tutelary seraph, not seeming to bear rule, yet spreading perpetually the wings of purity and peace over its beloved shrine, and keeping guard for God. (qtd. in Brodhead 20).

Brodhead's understanding of disciplinary intimacy, based as it is in part on Sigourney's writing, is one that sees the maternal model as primary, instrumental to both the model of domestic and formal education. The mother here reproduces herself as an "image" in the child's mind, copying her didactic essence. The idea of the maternal as "tutelary seraph," placed in the in the "sanctuary" of her child's mind—an idea that, as Brodhead acknowledges, seems perhaps as ominous as the corporal punishment that it aimed to replace—echoes throughout Sigourney's discussion of her own childhood and domestic education. Her reflection on her parents and her early domestic education in her

autobiography is typical of these sentiments: “Their wishes I never gainsaid; indeed, the idea of having any will opposed to theirs, or separate from it, never entered my imagination” (*Letters of Life* 42).

That the parental bond should be the model for Sigourney’s educational principles is not surprising, given the home-centeredness of Sigourney’s own schooling and schooling in general during this period. Sigourney’s own formal education ended at thirteen; though she attended different schools intermittently after this point, the principle education of her teenage years was home-based. In her late-life biography she details the different elements of this education, which included both domestic tasks such as sewing and cleaning as well as more scholarly work such as Greek translation; she also stresses her mother’s instrumental role in encouraging her early education. In her writings on education, she recurrently supports this model of schooling, noting for instance in the chapter “Domestic Education” from *Letters to Mothers* that “I am not without hope of persuading mothers, to take charge of the entire education of their children, during the earlier years of life”(101). Many of her educational primers, like *The History of Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome* (1836) were written primarily for use in domestic education. And while domestic education, by the height of Sigourney’s career in the 1830s and 40s, was on the way out, replaced by boarding schools and the growing popularity of Horace Mann’s common school movement, it was not until the turn of the century that mandatory public education became wholly integrated into American life. (“Common School Movement”).

In Sigourney's home-based model of schooling, the social bonds that are strengthened through the routines of education are ends in and of themselves. This emphasis emerges clearly in a passage from *The History of Marcus Aurelius*:

Do you ever complain, my dear children, that it is hard to remember long lessons? There are four ways to make this easy. 1<sup>st</sup>. Read them slowly many times. 2d. Think of nothing else, while you are reading them. 3d. Close the book and repeat them to yourself. 4<sup>th</sup>. Read the more difficult parts again, and see if there is any thing in this lesson like what you have learned before, and talk about it with your parents or companions. (83).

The approach to rote learning here both ends and begins in an appeal to emotional bonds. From the first line addressing the students as "my dear children" to the last counseling students to "talk about [the lesson] with your parents or companions," Sigourney in this model prioritizes social bonds and their routines, what Mary Loeffelholz calls "the *habitus* of schooling"(48) over any positive or concrete knowledge. There is no sense in this four-step system of the broader application that this "memory" serves; memory, like the social exchanges that in the fourth step reinforce it, is a good in and of itself.<sup>28</sup>

These social exchanges are part of a larger move toward the abstraction of the lesson as a means of creating memory. The progression of Sigourney's steps traces a movement from knowledge contained in a physical text to knowledge as a part of an emotional network. The first two steps emphasize repetition and focus respectively, and are centered on the presence of the printed text in the learning process. The third and fourth steps, on the other hand, distance learning from the written text or reiterated lesson. The third step, the place where real memory is enacted ("repeat them to yourself"), depends entirely on the suppression of the physical text ("close the book"). This

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<sup>28</sup> For Sigourney's emphasis on "the *habitus* of schooling" over positive knowledge in girls' education, see Loeffelholz 45-64.

suppression continues into the fourth step, as readers are told to re-contextualize the text or lesson to fit it into their own lives, to tie it to “what you have learned before” and to “talk about it with your parents or companions.” This transformation from lifeless, reiterated text to living, experienced knowledge is one that depends intimately on the conception of the lesson as a fixed physical object that is can be abstracted and re-conceptualized as a part of each student’s individual experience.

This educational model is crucial to understanding the didactic function of Sigourney’s ekphrasis. Sigourney’s ekphrastic poems, though they often do culminate in the transmission of some concrete lesson, emphasize the means of arriving at this lesson—through a social exchange that owes much to disciplinary intimacy—over the final moral. If memory, for Sigourney, is exercised through the suppression and the re-interpretation of the physical text, a similar process is at work with regard to the visual image. Poems centering on a visual image withhold the images that they reference, metaphorically “closing the book,” and prompting readers to re-create these scenes intellectually. Many also encourage readers to imagine themselves as entering into these image-lessons and participating in the scenes that the speaker describes, connecting the image-settings to their own lives and what they have “learned before.” Like Sigourney herself, who could not in her youth imagine having a “will opposed” to that of her parents, the speakers of these poems ask readers to place themselves in the position of the images that they have imagined, and in the process of this placement to absorb their lessons. These lessons are at times profoundly ambiguous or apparently contradictory, but the process of emulating the forms of morality, rather than analyzing its content, is the ultimate end of these poems. That is because, for Sigourney, form and content are so

closely allied as to be indistinguishable. As she writes in describing the illustration of her later volumes, “the fine exterior of a book has the same bearing on its contents that graceful manners have upon character”: that is, they prove it (*Letters of Life* 366).

The passage of *Marcus Aurelius* also hints at Sigourney’s espousal of a model of education in which the student transforms knowledge into memory by visualization, a model that is in inherent contradiction to paragonal conceptions of the verbal and the visual as natural opposites. That we can think of the memory of text and the memory of image as dependent on the same processes relies on Sigourney’s own sense of the close relation between text and image. The text for Sigourney was a material form as well as an immaterial idea; it could exist as a reproduction (“repeat it to yourself”) in the student’s mind, before circulating more freely in conversation. Other writings show that Sigourney construes this mental reproduction visually, as in the following account of her own early education: “Having very early learned to read by myself the forms of words, and their syllabic construction, dwelt in memory like the minutiae of a picture, so that the usual amount of study made me fearlessly perfect in the daily orthographical lesson.”<sup>29</sup> The sense here of remembering words not for their meanings, but for their imagistic “forms”

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<sup>29</sup> *Letters of Life* 50. This construction of text as image was not uncommon in antebellum America; Sigourney was in company with several artists and drawing book authors, in connecting learning to write with learning to draw. Rembrandt Peale, for instance makes the connection throughout his book *Graphics: A Manual of Drawing and Writing for the Use of Schools and Families* (New York: J.P. Pealee, 1835), which includes lessons on both penmanship and drawing basic to complex forms. He outlines the connection in the introduction: “Writing is nothing else than drawing the forms of letters. Drawing is little more than writing the forms of objects. Every one that can learn to write is capable of learning to draw; and every one should know how to draw, that can find advantage in writing. The two may be taught together without increasing the task of the learner, provided the teacher understands the right method; which is, to habituate the hand to move in all directions, and the eye to judge whether the movements be correct”(6).

goes a long way toward showing why Sigourney's ekphrasis is in such direct opposition to the mode of the *paragone*; its function as a tool for moral education dictates that any tool that facilitates the goal of becoming "fearlessly perfect" is a valuable one to use, even if it blurs the cultural distinctions between media.

Rather than setting the verbal and the visual arts in opposition, Sigourney understands both as solitary untaught activities, not practices to be cultivated in formal training. Sigourney's conception of her own writing as both spontaneous and natural is well-documented. She took a similar attitude toward the visual arts. In *Letters of Life* she records having learned the ornamental arts, which included drawing, embroidery and other "fingerworks," in school, and later, in her first teaching assignment, being compelled to teach these "accomplishments" though considering them "too tedious to mention" (190). When she later opening her own school with the support of Daniel Wadsworth, she expresses only "delight" at having the freedom to avoid these "ornamental branches" (203). But she writes of drawing and painting at home as one of her primary activities in her earliest years, and the independence of these artistic attempts is the source for a large part of their appeal. As she paints pictures with a brush made out of her own hair and pigments pressed from berries, "the rapture enjoyed in my solitary chamber, as these untaught efforts accumulated, was indescribable" (55). The rules of color that she would learn after entering school "seemed rather an incumbrance," and she soon abandoned painting, at the precocious age of eight, for a "boldness of literary enterprise" (57).

This emphasis on informal arts education is, as Mary Loeffelholz writes, more “romantic” than earlier forms, but it is also more democratic.<sup>30</sup> It assumes, like Sigourney’s ekphrasis, an access to visual models and illustrations within the home. In her early accounts of drawing, the pictures that Sigourney records undertaking are landscapes, history scenes, and book illustrations, modeled on engravings or prints. She writes of “copy[ing] large and complicated patterns” from “the illustrations of my Hieroglyphic Bible” and Lawrence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) (*Letters of Life* 56; 54). Like the many art manuals from this period that did not distinguish between drawing from nature and drawing from other images, Sigourney’s own examples show the extent to which the movement of arts education from the elite spheres to the middle-class home is one that depended on the greater availability of imagery.

### **The Familiar and Familial Image**

The first, and by far the largest group of Sigourney’s ekphrastic poems do not clearly identify their visual objects by title or artist. These objects are nonetheless both familiar and familial, works of the kind which would form a part of the family sphere, and at the same time which in some way document this family sphere. In this ekphrasis we can see many of the tropes of Sigourney’s ekphrasis as a whole: its de-emphasis of physical description in favor of the fuller experiential relation to an image, the ease with which the poem’s speaker approaches the artwork, and the deferral of any real analysis of the poem’s final moral lesson.

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<sup>30</sup> See Larson 75-96 for a discussion of Sigourney’s literary egalitarianism (especially in the context of her elegiac verse), and Loeffelholz 38-39 for a discussion of Sigourney’s later-life romantic self-fashioning.

The first two of these works focus on the original painted portraits that in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century middle-class families procured from itinerant artists, artisans or limners.<sup>31</sup> The short story “Family Portraits” (1834) provides an introduction to the evasive nature of the material object in Sigourney’s ekphrastic work, and the effect that an image, even in its absence, has on an audience. The story follows the outlines of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century seduction genre: the cast of characters, which includes a French maid, a dashing officer, and an innocent schoolgirl could be lifted almost in its entirety from *Charlotte Temple* (1791). The narrative arc is similarly familiar, centering on a disastrous elopement, albeit with a Sigournean redemptive turn at the end (the protagonist is spared both pregnancy and death). But beneath the narrative of secrecy and youthful failures of judgment runs an argument about portraiture, and more generally, the hierarchy of artistic media. The argument that emerges in the course of the story understands the verbal and the visual as imperfect complements, aspects of a whole that come together to produce a fuller truth. Images in this story are not high-cultural objects for the poet to vie with, but familiar objects which the narrator feels comfortable both mocking and heeding. The means by which we as readers can also learn from these verbally-translated images is instrumental to the story’s function as a primer for ekphrasis.

The story begins with an epigram in the style of Sigourney’s own elegiac verse: “Blest be that art, which keeps the absent near,—/.../ And when Love yields its idol to the tomb, / Doth snatch a copy.—”<sup>32</sup> This reverential introduction is soon countered by the

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<sup>31</sup> See Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 6-8, 69-71; or Barbara Groseclose, *Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-27.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance the last lines of the first stanza of “Artist Sketching the Dead”: “Blessed gift is thine/ Oh Artist! thus to foil the grave, and keep / A copy of our jewels, when it steals / And locks them from us.”

narrative's actual portraiture. By the second paragraph, the sharp shift in tone toward this "art" sets off the epigram's irony; just as this introductory poem is only an imperfect copy of Sigourney's own elegy, so portraiture, we learn, is a very imprecise medium for self-preservation. The narrator discusses portraiture as one "modification" of the "Love of Fame" which aims to bequeath "our bodily form to posterity, in a style calculated to disgust, or alarm them"(85). She continues: "When I have gazed at Family Portraits, whose ugliness and quaintness of costume, scarcely the deepest reverence for their antiquity could tolerate, I have wondered at the ambition to be exhibited to one's unborn relatives, in a deformity which nature never gave"(85-6).

This rant is followed abruptly by a shift to the setting of the story, with only the brief reassurance that, "Why I have been led to this train of moralizing, the sequel of my sketch will unfold." The tale goes on to follow Mary, a beautiful fourteen-year old descendent of French Huguenot parents living in Boston in 1722, and her concealed loved affair with a dashing older man who we know only as Captain Patten. Mary, whose mother Louise died shortly after her own birth, is raised by her absent-minded father, Doctor Ranchon, and her intrigue-starved French "waiting-maid," Madelaine. It is in a conversation with Madelaine that the subject of portraits next comes up, as we learn that Mary's mother, who according to the maid, was "like Venus, in that picture in your uncle's chamber, where Paris...is choosing between three goddesses," never sat for a satisfactory portrait. She had her portrait taken, not by one of the "court painters from France," as Madelaine would have had it, but rather by one of the "jackasses of this country"(97). The results were predictably bad; the posture and expression were out-of-character, the figure "stiff...and with such an abominably silly expression," and the

colors harsh. Madelaine, according to her own account, later found Doctor Ranchon burning the picture (98).

But this picture is not the only one to which the story owes its name. After the chronicling of Mary's attempted elopement, and the revelation of Captain Patten as a fraud and coward, we learn that Mary eventually settles down with another Huguenot "worthy of her affections"(127). This pair, the narrator continues, "have for several years been looking down upon me from their ample frames, whenever I pass a particular part of the mansion." The reference to antiquated portraits on the walls of mansions recalls the diatribe on the first page of the story, but the narrator continues by saying that "Both portraits are in far better taste than is usual for those that bear the date of more than a century: the hands in particular, which are allowed to be some criterion of an artist's style, are elegantly finished." She then concludes that frequent inquiries from visitors on the origin of the portraits led her to "search our family records, and you have seen the result, in the foregoing sheets"(128). These records show a surprising history for the "grave lady" of the portrait, but the portraits themselves are evidence for the narrator's truthfulness; as she writes in the last line: "Should any person continue sceptical as to the truth of the facts herein related, he may see, should he travel in the land of steady habits, those same family portraits, and be told the name of the husband of Mary Ranchon"(129).

The role of portraiture in this story is as difficult to pin down as the precise referent for the title's "Family Portraits." On the one hand, a gibe at Colonial American portraiture seems evident both in the references to awkward poses and detailing characteristic of this era, and in the story's time frame. On the other hand, the more sophisticated "court painters of France," and by extension, the Old World, fare little

better, promoted as they are by the coquettishly immoral force of the maidservant, who in this tale represents Mary's near-downfall (97). Mary's mother may look like Venus in the classic painterly scene of Paris's judgment, but Venus is also the ensign that appears in the wax stamp of the letter from Mary's fraudulent lover. This progression pegs portraiture either as awkward misrepresentation or seductive vanity. The story's conclusion then complicates this damnation, as Mary's portrait becomes both the spur to the narrator's research, and the evidence for her truthfulness. Furthermore, though as "grave" as other colonial portraits, the narrator's appreciation of the skill represented in often-fumbled details such as the hands offers some optimism for the medium. Indeed, it seems that Mary's mother has more in common with the ancestors in the narrator's prelude who "may esteem themselves happy, should their effigies escape utter annihilation" than Mary herself, whose portrait hangs prominently displayed in this same narrator's home (86).

Mary's portrait, then, serves to represent both the greater hope for what American portraiture may become, and the function of the visual as a category. The family portrait in question is a middle ground between the primitive painting of America's colonial past that the narrator criticizes in the story's introduction and the overwrought artistry of Europe's monarchical past. As such it represents a hopeful future for the professionalization of American portraiture, a future that, by the time of Sigourney's writing, had arguably already come to pass.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the powers of images in the tale are strictly delineated from those of verbal expression. The portrait in this story serves as a spur to action for the narrator, prompting her to look into her family's written

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<sup>33</sup> See for instance Groseclose 35-59.

records for a history of its subject, but these written records, rather than the portrait itself, provide the substantive foundation for the tale. The portrait, in fact, with its prim attire and posture, actively contradicts the truth of the narrative; while a verbal account provides a full narrative context, the visual image at best provides inspiration and fragmentary truth.

This delineation of the powers of the verbal and the visual—a delineation that seems to favor the verbal as a mode of expression—is in turn complicated both by evidence in the two central documents of the narrative that the verbal can serve both to conceal and to reveal truth. The first document is a letter from Captain Patten to Mary, sealed with a “head of Venus,” and containing a “studied” expression of love and appeal for elopement—an appeal that is later found to be based on the ulterior motives of inheritance (105-6). This letter, intended to deceive, inspires a course of action that is fully undone only when another letter is uncovered. The second document is a letter from Patten’s wife found in his wallet as he fled the scene, and reveals not only that he is married and has children in Ireland, but that he is living in America under an assumed name and profession. Only in putting the two epistles together is a fully satisfactory portrait of Patten formed; as with visual images, written records are often only accounts of a partial truth.

Furthermore, the combination of the portrait of Mary Ranchon and her written records, rather than one or the other, serve as evidence for the truthfulness of the narrative as a whole. When the narrator concludes that any person who is “sceptical as to the truth of the facts herein related” can see both “those same family portraits” and “be told the name of the husband of Mary Ranchon” she harnesses both verbal and visual

representation to her defense (129). Just as it often takes more than a single verbal or visual record to tell a rounded truth, the narrator here relies on the visual image and its narrative “label” to create a whole that can, or should, serve as convincing evidence to readers. If a comparison between the media is at work, it is a comparison that ultimately comes to understand the verbal and the visual as complementary aspects of a whole, rather than competing forces.

The story, then, clearly does not follow the conventional competitive model of the *paragone* but functions as a primer for reading the absent visual images of a different kind of verbal ekphrasis. At the center of the story is Mary’s mother Louise, the narrative’s would-be didactic figure. Conversations between the waiting-maid and Mary often revolve largely around this absent figure and the destruction of her sole visual record, “that vile picture”(98). Given the absence of this image, and the absent-mindedness of her father, Mary is entirely reliant on Madelaine to reconstruct a verbal depiction of her mother. Just as Captain Patten’s epistles offer two different textual versions of his life, so Madelaine proffers two verbal accounts of Louise. Both have an influence on Mary and eventually guide her actions, and both function as guides to the goals and dangers of ekphrastic viewership.

The description that first has an effect on Mary’s actions is one of a beautiful girl who, “just your own age” of sixteen, escapes from a convent and elopes with the lover who will become Mary’s father (98). As Madelaine recounts, Louise escapes with the help of her brother and Madelaine, and shortly thereafter the group follows Doctor Ranchon to America. This account of Mary’s mother is not directly based on an image, but Madelaine’s persistent emphasis on Louise’s beauty recalls the parallel she makes

early in the story to “that picture [of Venus] in your uncle’s chamber”(97). In any case, this model is one that “touched a chord”(99) for Mary, as the waiting-maid clearly intended. As she chides, “If [your mother] had not shown her Beauchamp blood, and ran away at just that time, she would have been moped to death in a convent, just as you are likely to be in your own father’s house”(99). Mary briefly echoes Madelaine’s version of her mother in her own attempted elopement, also by carriage, and with the help of this same waiting-maid. Just as her mother’s elopement brought eventual death in the “dull, heavy air of Boston,”(97)—and the Judgment of Paris in her uncle’s picture brings about the Trojan War—one can surmise that Mary’s marriage to the treacherous Patten might have had a disastrous outcome had it succeeded.

In the end, the verbal model that has a much more profound effect on Mary’s life is that of the portrait that her father burned. This grave portrait, again mediated through Madelaine, figures Mary’s mother with “such an abominably silly expression, so entirely out of character” and holding a book, “looking vastly like a bible”(98). Mary’s own portrait, as described by the narrator, has some clear resonances; in the painting, Mary appears as “a lady dressed in a brown silk, with raven hair parted plainly upon her forehead, and holding in her hand a snuff-box, with an aspect rather grave than beautiful.” She also, we are told, “looks as if she might have read daily lectures against coquetry and elopement to her children”(128-9). The knowing tone that both Madelaine and the narrator take toward the propriety of these images both reveals their familiarity with this mode of portraiture and complicates the seemingly straightforward moral outcome of the tale. That the apparently “good” moral outcome of this final portrait—Mary’s husband “greatly enhanced her happiness by his love, and her respectability by his

wisdom”(129)—is one that can be lightly mocked obfuscates any clear-cut moral. This is not, in other words, a straightforwardly didactic narrative on the dangers of elopement. Rather, “Family Portraits” is a story that provides a model for the emulative function of ekphrasis. The similarity between the elopement and matron portraits, and Mary’s own choices is suggestive of the influence of the verbally-mediated ekphrastic image. Mary is in this story a model of the antebellum ekphrastic reader, a viewer whose visual experience of the art object is withheld. The visually absent images hold the power to become a models for emulation, self-perpetuating images that Mary reads by imitating. Her eventual mimicking of the “good” moral model is less the focus in this tale than the process of visual emulation itself. In the ekphrastic poems that follow, this model of image-reproduction echoes through the reader’s relation to Sigourney’s absent but influential images.

An early ekphrastic poem, “The Schoolmistress,” published for the first time along with four other ekphrastic poems in the 1834 edition of *Poems*, demonstrates this model of emulative ekphrasis in action. The ostensible focus of the poem is a portrait of a schoolteacher, but the writing produces few clear images; those it does produce are deferred under a network of metaphor. The image at the center of the poem is a generic one, and serves primarily to prompt the emotion—nostalgia—that is the poem’s real subject. The image in this model of ekphrasis is barely an image at all, but allows readers to see in the stock portrait of the schoolteacher a portrait from their own pasts, and to see in the memories of schooling memories of their own early educations.

The first lines provide a sense of this elusiveness:

How doth this picture's art relume  
Of childhood's scenes the buried bloom!

How from oblivion's sweeping stream  
Each floating flower and leaf redeem !

The picture here promises to unearth the “buried bloom” of faded memories, bringing distinctness (“Each floating flower and leaf”) where formally was only the “sweeping stream” of more generalized reminiscence. But even at this early point in the poem, the natural imagery in these first lines is ambiguous, lying somewhere between metaphor (memory as nature) and concrete imagery (memories of nature). The focus is not on the objects themselves, which are abstracted by metaphor, but on the verbs that promise to bring them to clarity.

Even as flowers and leaves float between metaphor and imagery, the scenes of childhood that the poem recovers are similarly indistinct, floating between stock imagery and the particular, individualized memory:

From neighbouring spire, the iron chime  
That told the school's allotted time,  
The lowly porch where woodbine crept,  
The floor with careful neatness swept,  
The hour-glass in its guarded nook,  
Which oft our busy fingers shook  
By stealth, if flowed too slow away  
The sands that held us from our play;  
The murmured task, the frequent tear,  
The timid laugh, prolonged and dear,  
These all on heart, and ear, and eye,  
Come thronging back, from years gone by.

The picture that this stanza paints is both relatively detailed, and largely generic: a one-room country schoolhouse with a church nearby, an emblem of antebellum schooling that populates many of Sigourney's most famous works.<sup>34</sup> The memory is communal rather

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<sup>34</sup> See for instance Loeffelholz on “Connecticut River”(1828) 49-62.

than individual; “our busy fingers” shake the hourglass, and regimented time keeps “us from our play.” Other actions—“The murmured task, the frequent tear, / The timid laugh, prolonged and dear”—are separated from their actors so that they belong to the schoolhouse as a collective rather than a single pupil or teacher. This sense of the collective confirms Loeffelholz’s idea that in Sigourney’s writing “the social relations of schooling have a life of their own, partly autonomous of any particular scholarly matter”(48). Or we could even say, in the context of this poem, autonomous of any particular students. The standardization of the schoolhouse’s “social relations” invites Sigourney’s readers to imagine themselves as actors, to engage their own hearts, and ears and eyes, rather than relying on those of the speaker.

This sense of shared emotion becomes important to the poem’s primary ekphrastic moment, which centers on a portrait that is more general type than particularized individual. If the progression of the poem so far—from natural metaphor to generalized memory, to actual image—would seem to imply that this stanza’s image should gain specificity, this is a promise that the poem ultimately does not deliver:

And there thou art! in peaceful age  
With brow as thoughtful, mild and sage,  
As when upon thy pupil's heart  
Thy lessons breathed—yes there thou art!  
And in thy hand that sacred book  
Whereon it was our pride to look,  
Whose truths around thy hoary head,  
A never-fading halo shed,  
Whose glorious hopes in holy trust  
Still blossom o'er thy mouldering dust.

The focus on the schoolmistress’s expression, her “brow as thoughtful, mild and sage,” recalls a similar attention to Mary’s mother’s “abominably silly expression” in “Family

Portraits.” The aim in both cases is to forefront not distinguishing characteristics, but an emotional attitude. The expansive power of this emotion is such in the case of “The Schoolmistress” that it stretches seamlessly from her youth as a schoolteacher, to her old age at the time of the portrait, and even into death, the “glorious hopes” that “blossom o’er thy mouldering dust.” That emotion, in this case a pious sagacity, can exist unchanged through time, and even without the confines of a mortal container, is another permutation of the “timid laugh” without agent in the last stanza. That this stanza is ostensibly of a particular portrait does nothing to change the emphasis on free-floating emotion over actor or form. In fact, this stanza shows a further transfer of emotion; the teacher enacts a literal inspiration as she “upon thy pupil’s heart / Thy lessons breathed.” Just as the schoolroom is any antebellum reader’s schoolroom, so too is this schoolmistress a standard Sigourneyan instructor.

By the end of the poem, the collective memory that this passage creates further broadens. While in the previous stanzas “we” and “our” refer either to the particular schoolchildren who share the speaker’s experience, or to readers who share a similar type of experience, in the final stanzas of the poem, the pronouns open up more generally to all readers, as the imagery shifts to the trope of time’s passing. This passing is represented by natural imagery, imagery that has in turn shifted in significance from the first stanza. Where at the beginning of the poem, “flower and leaf” stood in for the individual memory rescued from the “sweeping stream” of oblivion, in these final stanzas, the stream represents the forward movement of individual people through time. These last stanzas, in destabilizing even this familiar term, effectively unsettle the poem as a whole:

Even thus it is, where'er we range,  
Throughout this world of care and change,  
Though Fancy every prospect gild,  
Or Fortune write each wish fulfill'd,  
Still, pausing 'mid our varied track,  
To childhood's realm we turn us back,  
And wider as the hand of time  
Removes us from that sunny clime,  
And nearer as our footsteps urge  
To weary life's extremest verge,  
With fonder smile, with brighter beam,  
Its far-receding landscapes gleam,  
And closer to the withered breast,  
Its renovated charms are prest.

And thus the stream, as on it flows,  
'Neath summer-suns, or wintry snows,  
Through vale, or maze, or desert led,  
Untiring tells its pebbly bed,  
How passing sweet the buds that *first*  
Upon its infant marge were nurst,  
How rich the violet's breath perfumed,  
That near its cradle-fountain bloomed,  
And deems no skies were e'er so fair  
As kindled o'er its birth-place there.

In the first stanza, the speaker imagines the movement through time as that through a landscape, a trite metaphor that becomes complex—or unclear—on closer examination. “We” here are the travelers that move through the landscape that is “this world,” pushed forward by the forward movement of time. But Sigourney frustrates any attempt to physically image this scene as she further construes time as “the hand of time,” a metaphor that fits in only awkwardly in the landscape. Another association is also at work in the first line, as the phrase “Even thus it is” gestures back to the emotional expansiveness of the schoolmistress in the previous lines. Through all of these comparisons, emotion permeates the landscape without any connection to a single agent: “Fancy” gilds “every prospect” and “landscapes” glow “with fonder smile, with brighter

beam,” though in both cases it is unclear whether the feeling belongs to the traveler or the scene itself. The metaphor of life as a movement through a landscape is awkwardly mixed, is itself a metaphor for the schoolmistress’s emotional permeability, and consists of emotions whose containers are undefined. The effect of these ambiguities is an apparently imagistic stanza whose images are only defined by the sentiments that suffuse them.

In the final stanza, the already cobbled image of life’s progression as that of a traveler through a landscape shifts again slightly. Here, the image of the poem’s first line—“oblivion’s sweeping stream”—reappears, this time figured differently, as the “untiring” forward-progress of individuals through time. This shift both of meaning and of image is disorienting, as is the shift from referring to the travelers in the previous stanza (“we”) to the stream (“it”). Thus even the simplest, and most central of metaphors—the stream—loses its grounding by the end of the poem. Metaphor in this poem evades tying itself to precise meaning, just as images avoid the specificity that would make of them concrete and individualized scenes. This imprecision is a failing that Sigourney’s critics have traditionally bemoaned, but it serves the aim, where ekphrasis is concerned, of enacting the type of modeling that Mary demonstrates in “Family Portraits.” Just as Mary is able to see herself in the unfocused images of her mother that Madelaine provides, so too are “we”—by the end of the poem, a “we” that encapsulates any reader—able to find our own memories in the nostalgia-infused image of the schoolmistress.

“Picture of a Sleeping Infant Watched by a Dog” (1834), published in the same volume as “The Schoolmistress,” similarly frames many of the issues that are central to

Sigourney's ekphrastic canon. The scene is based on a sentimentalized genre painting of the kind printed en masse in popular periodicals such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and gift books, and increasingly commercialized by American genre painters such as Lilly Martin Spencer. Sigourney's ekphrastic presentation of the image assumes familiarity with such images, calling into question the divisions of the *paragone* as it plays with the boundaries between nature and culture, seeing object and passive subject, reader and image. In this poem as in the last, the generality of Sigourney's descriptive markers, and the deferral of any precise imagery beneath a network of figurative language, facilitates the audience's entrance into the space of the image. The poem's central accomplishment is not the slight moral that it propagates, but the individualized reproduction of its own image in the minds of readers.

The poem begins by painting a picture of an anonymous genre scene, an idyllic natural setting structured around a sleeping infant:

Sweet are thy slumbers, baby. Gentle gales  
Do lift the curtaining foliage o'er thy head,  
And nested birds sing lullaby ; and flowers  
That form the living broidery of thy couch  
Shed fresh perfume.

The scene is both anonymous and entirely generic; its central markers—wind, leaves, birds, baby, flowers—do little to distinguish it from countless other genre scenes of this period. The picture, then, is notable not for any particularized visual feature, but for the metaphor of the natural as domestic that underlies it and that echoes through Sigourney's writing on parenting. No curtains here protect the infant, but "curtaining foliage"; the infant does not sleep in a crib, but a flowerbed, decorated with "living broidery." The living environment takes on domestic responsibilities, the wind airing out the curtain

above the sleeping baby, the birds lulling it to sleep. This idea of the parental role extending into the natural environment likewise recurs in Sigourney's writing on childhood and mothering; in *Letters to Mothers*, for instance, Sigourney reverses the metaphor of nature as mother, counseling new mothers to "guard your own health, and serenity of spirit, for the child is still a part of yourself, as the blossom of the plant, from whose root it gains sustenance"(31). Figuring nature as mother, and mother as nature, Sigourney reveals an understanding of the larger world that is shaped by the principles of domestic care. The painted scene is immediately "familiar," a common type that illustrates both family in the larger world and the larger world as family.

The underlying metaphor of domestic space also functions to distance the physical image: the image is not of particularized leaves and flowers, but of leaves that seem like curtains, flowers that seem like a crib. This deferral of the concrete continues into the next stanza, as another natural proxy for domesticity emerges:

He, too, whose guardian eye  
Pondereth thy features with such true delight,  
And faithful semblance of parental care,  
Counting his master's darling as his own,  
Should aught upon thy helpless rest intrude,  
Would show a lion's wrath.

Just as the natural scene in the first stanza is a stand-in for a domestic scene, so here the dog of the poem's title is figured only as a "semblance of parental care." The last line adds another layer of metaphor in the "lion's wrath" that the dog "would show." The dog, never named as such, is instead both mother and lion; by again choosing metaphor over concrete description, Sigourney continues to favor feeling—and its replication—over form.

Furthermore, in moving the description of the image into hypothetical territory—the “wrath” the dog “would show”—the speaker deemphasizes the “picture” as a fixed visual space, and instead stresses its imaginative possibilities. This emphasis continues into the next stanza, when the speaker projects the image further into a future space:

And when she comes,  
Thy peasant-mother, from her weary toil,  
Thy shout will cheer her, and thy little arms  
Entwine her sunburnt neck, with joy as full  
As infancy can feel.

In this temporal extension of the sphere of the image, the heightened feeling of the two previous stanzas culminates in an emotional exchange of the kind that Sigourney’s writing on parenting idealizes. The infant comforts the mother, rather than the other way around; his “shout will cheer her,” and he, not she, dissipates the threatening weight of the larger world. This reciprocal relationship between the mother and the child corresponds to Sigourney’s understanding of the education of children as a constant exchange of discipline and affection. In *Letters to Mothers*, an early letter devoted to “Influence of Children Upon their Parents” begins, “We speak of educating our children. Do we know that our children also educate us?”(19). Children are capable of teaching their parents responsibility, unselfishness, and piety; parents are rewarded for their labors with the children that they deserve. As Sigourney warns, “While the minds of children are in their most waxen state, let parents then be most assiduous to impress on them such a likeness, as they should be willing themselves to bear”(21).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Brodhead also notes that disciplinary intimacy more generally is based on the idea of a return: “As it enfolds the child in its love, this mode of authority knowingly aims to awaken a reciprocal strength of love, and to fix that love back on itself” (20).

This reciprocity is, we see in the two final stanzas, a model for the reader's relation to an ekphrastic image:

They who recline  
In luxury's proud cradle, lulled with strains  
Of warbling lute, and watched by hireling eyes,  
And wrapped in golden tissue, share, perchance,  
No sleep so sweet as thine.

Is it not thus  
With us, the larger children? Gorgeous robes,  
And all the proud appliances of wealth,  
Touch not the heart's content; but he is blest,  
Though clad in humble garb, who peaceful greets  
The smile of nature, with a soul of love.

This last stanza gestures out to the collective audience; we “larger children” find ourselves implicated in this comparison between the “proud appliances of wealth” and the “smile of nature.” Previously only passive spectators as the infant was a passive object, in this stanza readers play an active part in the image, giving back to a more particularized sense of what the scene entails. Both of these shifts transgress the divisions of the *paragone*, the conception of the viewer as strictly “an active, speaking, seeing subject” and the visual as strictly a “passive, seen, and (usually) silent object” (Mitchell 15). In Sigourney's poem, viewer and object alternately fulfill both roles, working together in a reciprocal relation that instead owes much of its sense to contemporary conceptions of parenting.<sup>36</sup>

This stanza also enforces nature as a privileged point of access to the networks of emotion that the poem documents. As this last phrase of the poem—“The smile of nature,

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<sup>36</sup> This conception of the cyclical nature of nurturing children extended well beyond Sigourney's canon, taking a central place in the argument for increased women's education, and appearing in many sentimental tales of prodigal sons and daughters. See for instance Glenda Riley 458-459.

with a soul of love”— implies, the comparison at work is not just that of wealth and simplicity, but that of nature and culture. The “warbling lute,” and the “golden tissue” emphasize the inorganic; the “hireling eyes” have a similar effect, as the artificial bonds of income are their main descriptor rather than the natural bonds of love or choice.<sup>37</sup>

Readers are asked to imagine themselves in the infant’s natural setting, a setting that has the ability to “touch the heart’s content” and to grant access to the poem’s network of feeling. The “appliances of wealth,” on the other hand, are detached from this network, and from the aim—to have “a soul of love”—that the poem would instill.

The presentation of the poem’s central painting against these “appliances of wealth” is striking considering that even widely distributed prints were often marketed as luxury objects, their expense loudly proclaimed by publishers. The absorption of the “picture” of the title into the natural setting that it depicts is facilitated by Sigourney’s own self-presentation. The preface to the 1834 edition of *Poems*, in which “Picture of a Sleeping Infant” was first printed, extends this sense of natural expression to Sigourney’s own verse:

Some of the poems contained in the present collection were written at an early age. Others interspersed themselves, at later periods, amid domestic occupations, or maternal cares. The greater part were suggested by passing occasions, and partake of the nature of extemporaneous productions. All reveal, by their brevity, the narrow intervals of time which were devoted to their composition.

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<sup>37</sup> Here again Sigourney’s ideals of domestic education surface. *Letters to Mothers*, which devotes much of its attention to convincing mothers to take a direct role in their children’s upbringing, warns mothers of infants: “trust not your treasure too much to the charge of hirelings... When necessarily engaged in other employments, let it hear your cheering, protecting, tone. Keep it ever within the sensible atmosphere of maternal tenderness”(32). Other warnings follow about the pernicious influence of “the conversation of domestics, or other uneducated persons” on children (44).

They have sprung up like wild flowers in the dells, or among the clefts of the rock; wherever the path of life has chanced to lead. The hand that gathered and now presents them, borrows for their motto the sweetly eloquent words of Coleridge: "I expect from them neither profit nor general fame; and I consider myself amply repaid without either. Poetry has been to me its own exceeding great reward. It possesses power to soothe affliction,—to multiply and refine enjoyment,—to endear solitude, and to give the habit of discovering the good and the beautiful in all that meets or surrounds us." (v-vi).

Sigourney made appeals to the spontaneous and anti-commercial nature of her poetry throughout her career, but in presenting her own writing as natural, domestic and entirely divorced from "profit" in the preface to this volume, which included "Picture of an Infant" and four other ekphrastic poems, Sigourney frames her poetic translation of "pictures" in these same terms. That the poem's lesson—that natural domestic love is preferable to cultured wealth—could conflict with the ekphrastic medium of the work is an issue that Sigourney facilely brushes past in defining the medium as natural, and in opening this natural space to readers. A similar deferral is at work in the next poems, where ekphrastic emulation overrides possible moral difficulties.

### **The Reproduced Image**

A small sub-category of Sigourney's ekphrastic poems are based not on anonymous "pictures," but on images specifically named by title and artist. These poems generally focus on works that were widely reproduced and would have been accessible to audiences through relatively inexpensive engravings. Like the poems based on generalized descriptions of common types of works, these poems work from a broad conception of what a piece looks like, and prioritize the act of viewing over both the specific image and the moral issues this image elicits. The titles and artists that feature

prominently in these poems work not to bring to mind distinct physical characteristics, but to highlight emotional associations. In effect, the apparently more particularized poems of Sigourney's canon are no more concrete than her ekphrastic types, though they at times draw from a richer web of cultural associations.

“The Last Supper: A Picture by Leonardo Da Vinci”(1834), Sigourney's most anthologized ekphrastic poem, was first published in the same edition of *Poems* as “The Schoolmistress” and “Picture of an Infant.” The picture that the poem refers to, da Vinci's 1498 oil painting, was one of the most famous Italian Renaissance works of the antebellum period, associated with the growing opportunities for travel among the American middle class. However, most of Sigourney's readers, and indeed Sigourney herself, had never seen da Vinci's painting in person, and were only familiar with the work through its engraved reproductions, many of which were only loosely based on the original.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, those readers who had seen the original painting in the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, had seen a mural that after centuries of neglect, decay, outright destruction, and perhaps most devastatingly, heavy-handed conservation, could barely be called a painting. Not only was da Vinci's work nearly indistinguishable

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, Sigourney never saw the painting. On her later 1840-41 trip to Europe, she spent time in England and France, but skipped Italy. Nonetheless, she had almost certainly come across engravings of the work. The popularity of *Last Supper* prints was such that Goethe, in his 1819 treatise on the painting, offhandedly asks readers to “take before him [Raffaello] Morghen's print, it will enable him to understand our remarks, both in the whole, and in detail” See *Observations on Leonardo da Vinci's Famous Picture of the Last Supper*, Trans. G.H. Noehden (London: Bulmer and Nicol, 1821), 6-7. Morghen's engraving, first printed in 1800, was the most respected copies of the early nineteenth century, and formed the basis for many subsequent engravings. It was often seen as authoritative because based on a study of the original, but later restoration of da Vinci's work showed it to be a poor copy of the original.

underneath the layers of later re-painting, but the outlines of the work as a whole, even after the later conservation work, were faded, cracking, and in parts, entirely missing. To title a poem after da Vinci's painting at this point, then, was to refer to cultural and emotional associations more than to a particular art-object or composition. (Manthorne 59-60).

The contexts of the poem's publication and re-publication confirm the difficulty of locating an imagistic "original." When "The Last Supper" was first published, it was printed, like the rest of Sigourney's ekphrastic poems, without an imagistic referent. The precise source for Sigourney's poem is unclear, though both Currier & Ives of New York and the Kellogg firm of Sigourney's own Hartford produced several lithographs of *The Last Supper* (Finlay 2). In addition, around the time of Sigourney's first printing of the poem, life-sized reenactments of the painting were exhibited in Boston and verbal "Discourses" by several different authors describing were in circulation. In fact, Sigourney's own poem was reprinted in 1844 in a pamphlet accompanying one such discourse, a description of the painting by Gio Gherardo de Rossi translated from Italian. Two years later, in 1846, the poem was again reprinted in Rufus Griswold's collection, *Scenes in the Life of the Savior: By the Poets and Painters*. This book collects work by writers including Felicia Hemans, Henry Longfellow and Frances Osgood alongside of eight engravings. Sigourney's own poem is accompanied by a print of the Benjamin West painting of the scene, which presents a much less linear grouping than the Da Vinci

fresco. The subtitle to Sigourney's poem acknowledging the da Vinci picture as its source, is, for good reason, removed in this printing.<sup>39</sup>

But even if we take the original da Vinci's painting— or something close to it— as Sigourney's source, this is a work whose primary content is not action but emotion, a work that highlights the moment Christ tells his disciples of their future betrayal. Early nineteenth-century viewers valued da Vinci's painting for its dramatic emotional portrayal of the familiar scene, and its ability to transparently demonstrate the character of each of the disciples through his immediate reaction; as one observer claimed, the painting "requires nothing but a human sympathy for its appreciation"(qtd. in Manthorne 61). That the painting, then, as physical object, had all but disintegrated by the early nineteenth century is entirely in line with the role that it played in both contemporary attitudes and in Sigourney's poem. The focus in this writing is neither on the moral lesson that it propounds or the image that it describes, but on the speaker's access to the work's emotive shifts, and her step-by-step guidance of readers through a reading of the image. I reprint the poem in full:

Behold that countenance, where grief and love  
Blend with ineffable benignity,  
And deep, unuttered majesty divine.

Whose is that eye which seems to read the heart,  
And yet to have shed the tear of mortal woe?—  
Redeemer! is it thine.—And is this feast,  
Thy last on earth?—Why do the chosen few,  
Admitted to thy parting banquet, stand  
As men transfixed with horror?—

Ah! I hear

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<sup>39</sup> See *Christ's Last Supper* and Lydia Sigourney, "The Last Supper." These works are courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society's American Ephemera Collection in Worcester, MA.

The appalling answer, from those lips divine,  
One of you shall betray me."—

One of these?—

Who by thy hand was nurtured, heard thy prayers,  
Received thy teachings, as the thirsty plant  
Turns to the rain of summer?—One of these!—  
Therefore, with deep and deadly paleness droops  
The loved disciple, as if life's warm spring  
Chilled to the ice of death, at such strange shock  
Of unimagined guilt.—See, his whole soul  
Concentered in his eye, the man who walked  
The waves with Jesus, all impetuous prompts  
The horror-struck inquiry,— "Is it I?  
Lord!—Is it I?" while earnest pressing near,  
His brother's lip, in ardent echo seems  
Doubting the fearful thought.—With brow upraised,  
Andrew absolves his soul of charge so foul;  
And springing eager from the table's foot,  
Bartholomew bends forward, full of hope,  
That by his ear, the Master's awful words  
Had been misconstrued.—To the side of Christ,  
James in the warmth of cherished friendship clings,  
Yet trembles as the traitor's image steals  
Into his throbbing heart:—while he, whose hand  
In sceptic doubt was soon to probe the wounds  
Of Him he loved, points upward to invoke  
The avenging God.—Philip, with startled gaze,  
Stands in his crystal singleness of soul,  
Attesting innocence—while Matthew's voice,  
Repeating fervently the Master's words,  
Rouses to agony the listening group,  
Who, half incredulous with terror, seem  
To shudder at his accents.

All the twelve

With strong emotion strive, save one false breast  
By Mammon seared, which brooding o'er its gain,  
Weighs thirty pieces with the Saviour's blood.  
Son of perdition!—dost thou freely breathe  
In such pure atmosphere?—And canst thou hide,  
'Neath the cold calmness of that settled brow,  
The burden of a deed whose very name  
Thus strikes thy brethren pale?—

But can it be

That the strange power of this soul-harrowing scene  
Is the slight pencil's witchery?—I would speak  
Of him who pour'd such bold conception forth  
O'er the dead canvas.—But I dare not muse,  
Now, of a mortal's praise.—Subdued I stand  
In thy sole, sorrowing presence, Son of God!—  
I feel the breathing of those holy men,  
From whom thy gospel, as on angel's wing,  
Went out through all the earth.—I see how deep  
Sin in the soul may lurk, and fain would kneel  
Low at thy blessed feet, and trembling ask—  
"Lord!—is it I?"

For who may tell, what dregs  
Do slumber in his breast.—Thou, who didst taste  
Of man's infirmities, yet bar his sins  
From thine unspotted soul, forsake us not  
In our temptations; but so guide our feet,  
That our Last Supper in this world may lead  
To that immortal banquet by thy side,  
Where there is no betrayer.

The sense of the speaker as a mediator between painting and audience is explicit from the first lines of the poem, though the object of address shifts throughout the poem. In the first line, the speaker stands between reader and image, guiding readers to “Behold that countenance.” By the second stanza, this straightforward mediation is complicated as the speaker addresses the painting itself, and the figure of Christ (“Redeemer! Is it thine”). In the long third stanza, the address to Christ alternates from the second person (“thy hand,” “thy teachings”) to the third person (“Jesus,” “the Master,” “Christ”). In the fourth stanza, the speaker addresses Judas, and then by the end of the poem moves back to Christ. These frequent shifts create occasional confusion in determining address; the first question of the fifth stanza, for instance—“But can it be/ That the strange power of this soul-harrowing scene / Is the slight pencil’s witchery?”—is posed to no one in particular.

These ambiguities ultimately work to collapse the divide between the image and the readers, as the speaker inhabits the verbal space of both.

Further dissolving these boundaries is the description of the figures, which relies largely on emotive postures. In the initial description of Christ, for instance, this figure is not named, but introduced by the command to “Behold that countenance, where grief and love / Blend with ineffable benignity, / And deep, unuttered majesty divine.” The emotional abstractions of “grief and love,” “ineffable benignity,” and “unuttered majesty divine” frame the anonymous figure, creating an image that is physically decontextualized but emotionally rich. The description of the twelve disciples, all of whom “with strong emotion strive” is similarly driven. The description of Peter is representative: “See, his whole soul / Concentrated in his eye.” Each of the disciples transparently reveals his thoughts and his distinct personality through his expression. “The loved disciple,” the child-like John, is “Chilled to the ice of death, at such strange shock / Of unimagined guilt” while Doubting Thomas, known for his later gesturing toward Christ’s wound, “points upward to invoke / The avenging God.” In each case gesture serves only to underline the intensity of an emotional response.

In stressing feeling, the speaker describes an image that is experienced more than seen. In the second stanza she sees the disciples as “transfixed with horror,” implying a continuum of emotion before and after this moment. In the fourth stanza, she is able to “hear” from “those lips divine” the accusation of treachery. Later in the poem this access becomes even more apparent, as in the penultimate stanza, the speaker notes that “Subdued I stand / In thy sole, sorrowing presence, Son of God –.” The “presence” of the figures in the painting is literal, as the speaker “feel[s] the breathing of those holy men,”

and “see[s] how deep / Sin in the soul may lurk.” Her final gesture, to “kneel / Low at thy blessed feet, and trembling ask— / Lord!—is it I” presents the same ekphrastic emulation that we see culminating in “Picture of an Infant” and “Family Portraits.” As the speaker fits herself into the poses of the figures of the painting, she models the culminating moment in the reading of an artwork.

This focus on emotive gesture is only once suspended, in the sixth stanza, when in a move uncharacteristic of Sigourney’s ekphrasis, the speaker’s confronts the material form of the artwork. She questions whether the “strange power” of the scene is due to the individual artist’s powers, his “slight pencil’s witchery”—though her misidentification of the medium of the work even in this line as “dead canvas” discounts her familiarity with the original work. The desire to “speak/ Of him who pour’d such bold conception forth” is, in any case, short-lived, drowned out by a sense that “a mortal’s praise” is misplaced in an work with a sacred subject. This train of thought is abruptly derailed by the speaker’s ekphrastic emulation—“Subdued I stand / In thy sole, sorrowing presence”—which brushes the idea of particular aesthetic characteristics or choices aside, moving on instead to the overwhelming “presence” of the figures in the painting. That the speaker’s absorption into the space of the image, and her echoing of the disciples’ words is the gesture that sets these formal concerns aside is revelatory of the function that ekphrastic emulation ultimately serves. In this stanza, it allows the speaker to “see” and to “feel” the image more closely, and in the process to efface the moral problem of worshipping at a “mortal’s” work.

We see this same movement to confront a moral problem, and then to brush it aside in favor of ekphrastic emulation in the poem’s final stanza. Here, the speaker

confronts the central moral problem of the painting, Judas's treachery. The first line of the stanza, "For who may tell, what dregs / Do slumber in his breast," introduces Judas's sin only to dismiss any further consideration of the issue in turning back to Christ: "Thou, who didst taste / Of man's infirmities...". The poem ends in another moment of emulation as the speaker asks Christ to guide us so "That our Last Supper in this world may lead/ to that immortal banquet by thy side, / Where there is no betrayer." These lines open the scene of the Last Supper out to the collective audience; it becomes "our Last Supper," as we, like the speaker in the previous stanza, imagine an idealized imitation of the poses in the painting.<sup>40</sup>

Both the speaker's kneeling pose, and "immortal banquet" version of the Last Supper work by attempting to counteract but not to analyze Judas's sin. The idealized Last Supper in the last stanza simply excises Judas. In the pose of the previous stanza, it is the thought of "how deep / Sin in the soul may lurk" that prompts the speaker to kneel and utter the words ("Is it I") that Judas does not speak. In this sense the speaker becomes a proxy for the thirteenth disciple, a more pious stand-in for the "betrayer." Ekphrastic emulation in this poem, then, works as a means of pushing past its central moral problems, but not of solving them; the re-imagination of images evades the problem of sin without in any way explaining it. This diffusive function of ekphrasis emulation is one that we have seen more subtly played out in the previous works, as in "Family Portraits," for instance, where both "good" and "bad" moral poses are dealt the same light

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<sup>40</sup> Sigourney imagines precisely such a idealized and communal Last Supper setting in her poem, "On Meeting Students at the Communion Table," published in the *Girl's Reading Book* (New York: Turner Hughes and Hayden, 1843), 193. In this poem, Sigourney envisions a reunion with her former students around "a Savior's board," conflating the rites of schooling with the rites of religion. See Loeffelholz 47.

description, and in “Picture of an Infant,” where the reader’s modeling of the baby’s pose evades the real moral question of painting’s “luxury.”

At the same time, the speaker’s direct first-person narration in these stanzas is striking in the context of Sigourney’s canon, where the more inclusive “we” tends to eclipse the lyric “I.” The insistence of the first person in this poem, though, functions ultimately not as the subjective assertion of a single speaker, but the echoing of diverse speakers culminating in a collective group. The repetition of the phrase “Is it I?” throughout the poem—first by the disciples, then by the poem’s speaker, then, implicitly, by readers—creates a chorus of voices that the final stanza’s introduction of a collective “we” (“forsake us not/ In our temptations”) reinforces. The punning on “eye” in the second and third stanzas in the context of Christ (“Whose is that eye which seems to read the heart”) and the disciple John (“See his whole soul/ Concentrated in his eye”) also serves to tie consciousness of self, and even scrutiny of self (“Is it I?”) to vision. Seeing outwardly is, in this poem as in Sigourney’s ekphrastic canon as a whole, a means toward internal inspection by speaker and readers alike.

Moving to a more contemporary context changes few of these basic characteristics. “Powers’s Greek Slave”(1860), a shorter ekphrastic poem centering on Hiram Powers’ sensationally popular life-sized marble nude, maintains the distanced abstraction that is the hallmark of Sigourney’s ekphrasis overall. Like the other poems we have seen so far, Sigourney’s work evades moral prescriptivism—or one could say, moral clarity—in its emphasis on emotional transfer and spectatorship. And in spite of its subject’s contemporaneity, the poem reads more as a guide to art viewership than a study of a particular artwork, much less the most popular, and one of the most controversial

sculptures of the period. The poem focuses on the act of reading an image to the extent it entirely elides the issues that made the statue famous, including the situation of African slaves in America and questions about the propriety of full nudity in sculpture. Even the statue's relation to Greek independence, a cause in which Sigourney was actively involved during the 30s and 40s, shows little real presence in this poem (Haight 30-32). The poem is clearly not, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetic meditation on the same artwork, a political statement (Hollander 161-162).

The absence of obvious social issues from the poem, though, does not imply Sigourney's disengagement from the writings and responses surrounding the statue. In fact, the poem in many ways reflects the contemporary treatment of the work and the artist's own desire to see his work textually mediated through reading prior to—or instead of—a gallery visit. Sigourney's poem participates in the broad outpouring of ekphrastic poems on the statue that appeared in newspapers, periodicals or other publications in the years after it toured the U.S. in 1847-48. This popular ekphrastic canon is only an extension of the mediation that Powers himself saw as necessary to the statue's proper reception by the American public, who, the artist feared, might see only nudity where Neoclassical ideality was intended. These fears were not unfounded: Horace Greenough had been mocked for his bare-chested depiction of Washington only a few years before, and Powers had felt the sting of propriety when a prospective buyer of his *Eve Tempted* (1842) backed out when accused of "indiscretion" in attempting to bring a nude sculpture to "quiet, old fashioned, utilitarian" Albany, New York (qtd. in Kasson 165). The subject of *The Greek Slave* threatened to meet with the same response: it was an undraped nude of a young Greek woman—albeit in a modest Classical *Venus*

*pudica* stance—who had been captured by the Turks during the Greek Revolution and would be sold into sexual slavery. The widespread acclaim of the statue is, more than anything, a testament to Powers’s careful verbal construction of the work. In interviews about the statue, he stressed the anonymous figure’s narrative, constructing a history for the slave that focused on the intensity of her emotional state and was intended to guide audiences to “best experience the uplifting effects of the pure abstract form.”<sup>41</sup> Further contributing to this effect were the pamphlets that the artist’s friend Miner Kellogg published to accompany the statue’s 1847-48 American tour, which Kellogg managed. The pamphlets brought together laudatory poems and reviews published in various newspapers and magazines, alongside essays of support by clergymen emphasizing the statue’s propriety and spiritual force.

This textual abstraction of the work makes it an ideal candidate for Sigourney’s meditation. Like the poetess’s untitled objects of ekphrasis, *The Greek Slave* is a constructed in advance as an emotional experience rather than a physical structure. And like these other works, the original source for Sigourney’s poem is unclear: the outpouring of poems and prose descriptions of the work in both local and national publications suggests that Sigourney’s inspiration was (at least in part) textual, while the possible visual sources were nearly as varied. The December 1857 issue of *The*

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<sup>41</sup>Kasson 168. For instance: “The slave has been taken from one of the Greek islands by the Turks, in the time of the Greek Revolution; the history of which is familiar to all. Her father and mother, and perhaps all of her kindred, have been destroyed by her foes, and she alone preserved as a treasure to valuable to be thrown away. She is now among barbarian strangers, under the pressure of a full recollection of the calamitous events which have brought her to her present state; and she stands exposed to the gaze of the people she abhors and awaits her fate with intense anxiety, tempered by the support of her reliance upon the goodness of God. Gather all these afflictions together, and add them to the fortitude and resignation of a Christian, and no room will be left for shame”(qtd in Kasson 168).

*Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, for instance, centers on an announcement that the journal has bought a copy of the statue to give away to a subscriber in its annual award competition, and in anticipation of this event, prints several poetic and prose responses to the statue in addition to some full-page engravings of the work. This same issue includes a biography of Sigourney extending over two pages, a portrait of the poetess, and her 10-stanza quasi-ekphrastic poem “Greenwood Cemetery.” It is likely, then, that Sigourney saw this issue of the journal leading up to the composition of her own poem, but even within this context, there are several possible sources of influence.<sup>42</sup> Where Sigourney’s relatively late poem sets itself apart from existing treatments of the work is in presenting the act of spectatorship as one that, rather than distancing viewers from the Ideal work, brings them closer to it. “Powers’s Greek Slave” both engages contemporary treatments, and stresses the interchangeability of the spectator and the artwork that is a central factor of Sigourney’s ekphrastic canon.

Contemporary dialogues around the work and emotional exchange both come into play from the poem’s first line: “Be silent! Breathe not! Lest ye break the trance.”

Entrancement was a common means of describing audiences of the statue, who writers

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<sup>42</sup> This issue of the journal also strikingly highlights the tension between materiality and ideality in descriptions of the statue. While the poems in the issue focus on the Ideal beauty of the figure, some of the prose pieces enter into the relative crassness of the contemporary art world. The *Art Journal*’s reprinting of letters exchanged between the artist and the statue’s auctioneers, for instance, highlights the uncomfortable tendency for the sale of the work to mimic the very process that it is meant to resist. The auctioneer’s account of the sale, which “not less than four or five thousand persons” attended, and the final bidding price of six thousand dollars to the Cosmopolitan Art Association effectively counteracts the hyper-spiritualized accounts of the work in the poems of the same issue. The *Art Journal* itself frames these letters with an eerie personification: “Verily ‘the Greek’ is having a varied fortune! She is now reposing quietly in the midst of noble companion-works, but only for a while; some subscriber to the Association will bear her off”(40).

typically depicted as silenced and awe-struck. As a review from the 1847 *New York Courier and Enquirer* notes: “It is extremely interesting to watch the effect which the statue has upon all who come before it. Its presence is a magic circle within whose precincts all are held spell-bound and almost speechless”(qtd. in Kellogg 26).<sup>43</sup> Such a “spell-bound” state often also applies to viewer descriptions of the statue itself. Most contemporary reviewers note the statue’s attitude of introspection: “the intense concentration of the brows, the resolution of the lips, and the sad abstraction of the features generally”(qtd. in Kellogg 27). H.T. Tuckerman’s poem on the work even comments on the “rich and dreamy languor [that] holds thee in a grateful trance”(qtd in Kellogg 21). The “trance” of Sigourney’s first line can then refer to both audience and artwork. Emotion, even at this early point in the poem, is a free-floating entity.

The rest of the first stanza focuses on the statue’s trance-like absorption in abstracted memory, and the speaker’s access to this emotion:

She thinketh of her Attic home; the leaves  
Of its green olives stir within her soul,

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<sup>43</sup> qtd. in Kellogg 26. The hushing also recalls Sigourney’s idea that a restraint of one sense intensifies the experience of another; absolute silence is for Sigourney a signifier of deep artistic appreciation. This sense is clearly evident in the handful of poems that Sigourney published through the 1830s to the 1850s dealing with students suffering from, to use her term, the “afflictions” of deafness, muteness, and blindness. These poems create an interesting distinction between those suffering the absence of a single sense, and those who bear “affliction’s thrice-wreathed chain” of deafness, muteness and blindness. Sigourney generally depicts the loss of a single sense in a positive light, as a limitation which can sharpen other sensations and even focus the mind, while she shows a triple-loss as emotionally and spiritually limiting. “Marriage of the Deaf and Dumb,” for instance, Sigourney presents deafness sharpening the fitting solemnness of marriage, and forcing guests to avoid the frivolous entertainments that often cheapen the rite. The first line of this poem strikingly echoes the first line of “Power’s Statue of a Greek Slave”: “No word! No sound! But yet a solemn rite / Proceedeth through the festive lighted hall.” Here, as in “Greek Slave,” the absence of sound only intensifies the visual and contemplative aspects of the scene.

And Love is sweeping o'er its deepest chords  
So mournfully. Ah! Who can weigh the wo  
Or wealth of memory in that breast sublime!

The memories that the speaker can retrieve from the statue's "soul" are intangible feelings rather than fully-formed images. The concept of "Love...sweeping o'er its deepest chords / So mournfully" is wholly abstract: the referent of "its" is unclear and "chords" has several seemingly applicable definitions. (Fittingly, one of these definitions is "a feeling or emotion," as in the phrase "touched a chord" that Sigourney likewise uses in "Family Portraits"). The last line of the stanza—"Who can weigh the wo / Or wealth of memory in that breast sublime!"—underlines the unquantifiable nature of the thought that the speaker accesses, set in implicit contrast to the more tangible elements of that slave's presentation, the physical details that Sigourney's description carefully avoids.

This sense of the statue's emotional weight contributed significantly to its popularity. Viewers generally understood that the figure inspiring the statue was destined for the Turkish harems that drew exoticist fascination. In choosing to depict a moment of contemplative repose between the violence of her past capture and the degradation of her future, Powers allowed viewers to experience the emotional power of the scene without any—or too much—indelicacy: "[Powers'] Greek slave pauses on the threshold of a momentous change in her life; her future in the harem is the great unstated drama that gives the sculpture its poignancy"(Kasson 171). Unlike many of the other artistic depictions of the harem in the early nineteenth century, the violence and sensuality of Powers' scene remains implicit. This subtlety ties the statue to Sigourney's general predilection for moments of moral introspection posed between moments of action, which we see develop in the poem's next stanza:

Yet errs he not who calleth thee a slave,  
Thou Christian maiden?  
Gyves are on thy wrists;  
But in thy soul a might of sanctity  
That foils the oppressor, making to itself  
A hiding-place from the sore ills of time.

The “sanctity” of the figure’s soul in the fourth line is embedded between the “gyves” on her wrists in the third line and the “oppressor” in the fifth line. Because “to foil,” has the secondary connotations of dishonoring or deflowering, this fifth line gestures toward the slave’s future, while the “gyves” of the third point back to the moment of her capture. The “sanctity” of her soul, signified in Powers’s statue by a cross dangling from her wrist, is the meditative stance that links and undoes the violence of both the past and the future. This emphasis on Christian contemplation reverses the power dynamic of slave and captor, finding in interiority the “hiding place” that reality does not provide.

In the final lines of the poem, Sigourney similarly flips the positions of viewer and art-object:

What is the chain to thee, who hast the power  
To bind in admiration all who gaze  
Upon thine eloquent brow and matchless form?  
We are ourselves thy slaves, most Beautiful!

With this final assertion, the transformation that began in the poem’s first line with the order to “Be silent!” is complete. As speechless viewers, we are reduced to the power of a “gaze” while the art-object, with her “eloquent brow,” has gained the power of expression. Her physical chains become meaningless in light of her spiritual powers, while our actual freedoms become immaterial in light of the bonds of our helpless “admiration.” That the statue is able to “bind” us by her beauty signals that our own

transformation into art-object is complete. Not only are we chained in the act of gazing, but we are silent and breathless, aestheticized slaves like the simple art-object we thought we were encountering. This transformation once again encapsulates Sigourney's most basic principle of art spectatorship, that an audience can read a work only by embodying it.

This viewing model had particular resonances with female antebellum audiences. The connection between women's bodies and the marble nudes of Classical statuary was commonly made during this period, fueled in part by prescriptive literature and women's magazines which used classical figures as models of fashion, hairstyle, and correct posture. Images of the Venus de Medici as the natural, straight-spined woman became a commonplace in the anti-corseting movement to which Sigourney and many others contributed. The connection could cause self-consciousness for the female viewer of statuary, who had only recently been permitted into galleries of sculpture (Winterer 157-8). It also, however, permitted women to take on the novel position of natural connoisseurs. Clara Cushman, for instance, in her review of *The Greek Slave*, calls it "a work which only [women] can truly appreciate" (qtd. in Kellogg 29). In her article on the statue, Joy Kasson notes a similar phenomenon in regard to one of the engravings that appeared in the December 1857 issue of *The Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, showing the statue in the Dusseldorf gallery: "Unlike other depictions of art spectatorship published at the same time, this engraving shows women actively looking at the sculpture, appearing to explain and interpret it to their male companions, who look not at the sculpture but at them. The sculpture appears larger than life, and its proximity enlivens the women who surround it" (183). The women in the engraving, in other words, take on precisely the

didactic roles that works such as Sigourney's ekphrasis primes them for—even as they themselves become elements in an artistic image.

This image of didactic poses transported into the gallery aligns perfectly with Sigourney's own model of viewership. Sigourney's ekphrasis, which stresses emotion and gesture over a particularized object, and places emphasis on the disembodied "eye" of spectatorship over the individual perception of the speaker's "I," makes art available to anyone willing to enter into its imaginative space. This entrance, though, requires that readers consider the sight of the image as a direct encounter, a movement that was at the time of Sigourney's writing both nostalgic and forward-looking. On the one hand, it drew on a model of schooling, based in home education, that was becoming increasingly outmoded. On the other, it foresaw a means of transferring the emotional bonds of pupil and teacher to a depersonalized print sphere. And in so doing, it found also found application in the museum culture that, as the massive success of *The Greek Slave's* U.S. tour indicated, would have an increasing part in the American art world. In this sense, then, even as Sigourney's ekphrasis did not reflect the gallery culture of her own time, it could anticipate a moment later in the century when this sphere too would align with the inclusive spirit of her own sentimentalized art objects.

## Chapter Two

### “Folded Up In A Veil”: Sophia Hawthorne’s Familial Ekphrasis and the Antebellum Travelogue

#### Introduction

A few pages from the end of her travelogue *Notes in England and Italy* (1868), on a final return to Rome in the homeward leg of her journey, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne muses about the ways that her mid-life travels in Italy have altered her youthful, idealized image of the city and its history. In her early imagination, spurred on by schoolroom lessons of imperial domination, “A Roman never ate, or rather I did not think of his eating. I supposed he lived on glory, a kind of whip syllabub which I now know could not make sinews... My eyes were holden, so that I could not see the sin or the shame; or a prism was over them, through which the Empire flashed with the seven colors which light paints rainbows”(543). Her later residence in Rome, and her travel through England, France and Italy from 1853 to 1860 “destroyed my fancies,” complementing the vision of militaristic glory with a dark vision of cruelty and destruction, masking the natural and artistic beauties of the city in the constant threat of malarial death. But despite this disillusionment, Hawthorne remained entranced, and Rome maintained the larger part of its allure. On her final carriage-ride through the city with her family, she considers this contradictory attraction: “What, then, is this Rome that *will* hold sway over mankind, whether or no, in past and present time? I have an idea, but it is folded up in a veil, and I cannot take this moment to answer my question” (544).

This evasive suggestion does not provide any concrete insight into Rome's power, but does offer an apt metaphor for the function of Hawthorne's own text. The language of Hawthorne's earlier sightlessness suggests the coming of a quasi-religious revelation, but her almost cavalier dismissal of her idea ("I cannot take this moment...") frustrates these expectations.<sup>44</sup> The journal concludes inconclusively several pages later. What the reader is left with is the image of the veil in which naked insight is "folded up," an image that strikingly echoes Sophia's own earlier discussion of her writing in describing a central artwork of the text, Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*. In this passage, after noting that the painting "surpasses entirely all the copies in oil and all engravings" Sophia makes a similar complaint of her own ekphrastic attempts: "This work transcends any power I possess of conveying it to the mind of another. My words seem poor rags, with which I endeavor to clothe the idea—heaps of rags—the more I try, the larger the heaps"(354-55). Rather than revealing, the writing obscures, producing a creative but undefined space between the viewer and the art object: a veil, albeit a ragged one. This veiled intermediary is additionally charged, at the late point of Sophia's writing, with a strong association to her husband's literary production. But the veiling of *Notes* is characterized by its own terms rather than Nathaniel's, even as the text introduces familial context in order to establish these specifications.

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Note: I refer to the Hawthornes throughout this chapter by their first names to avoid confusion.

<sup>44</sup> When a couple on the road to Emmaus three days after Christ's crucifixion encounter this figure, they do not recognize him because "their eyes were holden." When he later blesses their bread "their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished from their sight"(King James Version, Luke 24.13-32).

The middle ground between two terms is in *Notes* its own form of demure revelation. Unlike in Nathaniel's canon, where the veil between figures is a choice or an imposition that separates the public world and the private self, the veil in Sophia's travelogue complicates the gendered categories of original/copy and public/private that formed an important part of the antebellum vocabulary of artistry. Sophia's simultaneous reliance on and resistance to these binaries in *Notes* brings about the gradual development of an alternative model of creativity that is by the nature of its terms invested in questions of gender. As Claire Badaracco writes, Sophia was part of "that last generation of the women of pre-industrial American society...where girls were educated in front parlors, 'reading' was commonly understood to mean *elocution*, 'composition' was *making copies*, and 'writing' was primarily an exercise in journals and copy-books"(96, italics Badaracco). Antebellum women writers—from Frances Osgood to Lydia Sigourney to Fanny Fern—were strongly associated with such mimicry and mimesis. Visual copyists were likewise feminized and women's association with the private sphere of the family was a platitude of the era's discourse.<sup>45</sup> By complicating these associations with copying and private space in *Notes*, Sophia carves out a space for herself as an artist that is not either/or but both/and. Its excessiveness is—like Rome itself—alluring, mysterious, and at times simply baffling. If Italy, in Sophia's inconclusive conclusion, does preserve its mysteries, that is because "the answer" lies not in the unidealized, unveiled Roman who is subject to our gaze, but rather in the more subtle folds of the veil itself.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of mimesis and women's writing, see for instance Eliza Richards, especially 1-28; Lara Langer Cohen 130-161. For the gendering of the copyist in the nineteenth century see Aviva Briefel, especially 19-53.

<sup>46</sup> This reading follows and expands on Annamaria Formichella Elsdon's point at the end of her essay "Watery Angels" that "the veil itself, rather than what it covers, is

In this chapter, I focus particularly on the convergence of public/private spaces and original/copied artworks in *Notes*' ekphrastic descriptions. A painter and copyist who had exhibited work at the Boston Athenaeum and trained with some of the most prominent painters of her day, Sophia devoted a large portion of her travel writing to detailed descriptions of individual artworks.<sup>47</sup> These descriptions openly question the nature of artistic originality, and often contrast the original works described to the works of copyists who have reproduced the compositions. At the same time, Sophia's famous last name and the implied presence of her family members give these descriptions a heightened charge of biographical revelation. *Notes* explicitly takes as its central aim the presentation of the "Great Masters in Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting" to a broader public, but the public documentation of a notoriously private family's life was at least partially responsible for the wide readership that the book was able to obtain (*Notes* 3). Sophia, like many nineteenth-century women, had from her youth written hundreds of pages of journal writing that was circulated among an audience of family and friends but not formally published. This writing takes part in what Noelle Baker calls "a 'third sphere' of public discourse, a social realm that mediates 'private' and 'public' spheres" (24). But as I will argue in this paper, a sort of "third sphere" is also distinguishable in published work such as *Notes*. By alluding to private events through a public commentary, Sophia creates a document that is both a familial and an artistic record, both a private and public document. Sophia's ekphrastic descriptions— and the excisions and emendations that

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the answer. By leaving the veil unlifted, Sophia points toward the representation—the veil in which she envelops her Italian experience in order to share it with readers – rather than the experience"(142-43).

<sup>47</sup> For Sophia's exhibition of *Landscape* in 1834, see Marshall 264-70. For Sophia's lessons with Francis Graeter, Thomas Doughty, and Chester Harding in 1829-30 see 205-11.

these descriptions underwent as she prepared the journal for publication— reveal not just a concern for the divisions between copy and original, but a preoccupation with the often needling or idiosyncratic distinctions between ‘public’ and ‘private material. The resulting document works fragmentary glimpses of private life into publicly accessible art descriptions, disturbing the boundary between artistic copy and original. In so doing, it claims for ekphrasis a space that is both derivative and strikingly original, publicly anodized and privately allusive.

The significance of Sophia’s re-evaluation of originality lies both in its reframing of her own text, and in its reframing of the derivative traits commonly associated with women’s writing. Critics often see Sophia’s writing as a reflection of Nathaniel’s persona and concerns, a perspective that the pair’s closely entwined domestic and intellectual lives seem to support.<sup>48</sup> This conception has not been to Sophia’s favor in modern criticism, though it may have served her well in the past. As T. Walker Herbert suggests, “Sophia Hawthorne is the most vilified wife in American literary history, after having been in her own time the most admired”(37). Sophia, hailed as the maternal ideal of America’s most celebrated writer during her own lifetime, has been more difficult to redeem as a figure of independent interest than other writers or artists less closely bound by their familial associations. But it is precisely these familial associations and her reaction to them in *Notes* that highlight the originality of her own writing. In looking at *Notes* in relation to the manuscript journal on which it is based, it becomes clear that for

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<sup>48</sup> This critical perspective began with Julian Hawthorne’s consideration of Sophia as having “lived for her husband” and that continues even into Nina Baym’s assertion that “had given up whatever public ambition she might have had in exchange for drawing her life’s meaning from Hawthorne’s life.” See Hall 137-138 for an overview of this work.

Sophia, editing—the activity for which she has been most maligned in relation to Nathaniel’s work— allows her to transform a direct non-fictional account into an original, aestheticized production.<sup>49</sup> Sophia’s editorial attentions are not merely expressive of an over-developed propriety, but express at least equally a sense of the unique contribution of her own text. In this chapter I argue that even as the travelogue conforms to many of the conventions of travel writing, and even as it grapples with some of the same issues as Nathaniel’s writing on art, the conclusions that it reaches on these issues offer new possibilities for the position of the copyist, literary or visual. In the course of mapping out the specific points of Sophia’s ideas on derivation and originality, ekphrasis, apparently the most derivative form of feminine writing, also takes on a new field of possibility.

### **Women’s Travel Writing and Its Baggage**

Critics have analyzed the place of private and public spaces in women’s writing, and in women’s travel writing more specifically, in ways that strikingly echo Sophia’s own concerns about the role of the female author. Most notably, Richard Brodhead conceptualizes the opposing demands of the public and private spheres for mid-nineteenth century American authors through the symbol of the Veiled Lady. This popular antebellum performer was both “a creature of physical invisibility,” completely hidden by her veil, and one of “pure exhibitionism”(51), whose work on stage brought her continuously before the public to answer its questions with apparent clairvoyance. Similarly, the rise of mass print brought female writers into the public sphere in

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<sup>49</sup> See for instance Stewart, “Introduction” ix-xxi on Sophia’s revisions in Hawthorne’s *The English Notebooks*. Marta Werner and Nicholas Lawrence present a more sympathetic treatment of Sophia’s editing practices in their analysis of her work on the common journal.

unprecedented ways, even as it broadcast an understanding of the women's sphere as "dephysicalized and deactivated domestic privacy"(53). The Veiled Lady is for Brodhead a symbol for the best-selling authors and entertainers of mid-century, public figures like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Susan Warner whose books both propagated and were enabled by a vision of the home as a private space of leisure. These celebrity figures and their works represented to their readership "a public embodiment of a fascinating private life"(63), an unprecedentedly accessible vision of individual subjectivity.

Brodhead's starting point for analysis is Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, a novel that furnished antebellum readers with their most famous literary Veiled Lady in the character of Priscilla. Critics have seen biographical resonances between Priscilla and Sophia; Sophia certainly confronted the contradictory demands of a public existence both before and after her marriage.<sup>50</sup> But unlike Nathaniel's representation of this figure, who as Brodhead writes, is talentless, "a victim of her display" exploited by handlers, Sophia makes her own (albeit conflicted) decisions about the extent of her public appearance (55). In her youth, she saw her older sister Elizabeth Palmer Peabody struggle to support the family through careers in teaching, writing, and publishing, all the while remaining in the shadow of the figures her writing promoted. Sophia, afflicted throughout her lifetime with debilitating migraines that had been exacerbated by childhood mercury "cures," was to a large extent freed from these financial demands (Marshall 73-4). But given the literary circles in which her family moved, and her position as the wife of a celebrated author, publicity was never far removed. When her sister Elizabeth read among her wide circle of friends journal entries

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<sup>50</sup> See for instance Sandra Whipple Spanier 59.

that Sophia sent home from Cuba, Sophia chided her and reported feeling “as if the nation were feeling my pulse”(280). The letters, which were eventually bound by the family into a three-volume, 785-page “Cuba Journal,” were never published, though Elizabeth had encouraged Sophia to edit them for the *American Monthly* (280-81). When Nathaniel and Sophia first met, he borrowed the volumes for more than a month, copying passages into his own notebooks, and on their return pronouncing Sophia “the Queen of Journalizers”(362). He nonetheless supported her reticence toward publication later in their relationship, praising her in 1856 for having “never prostituted thyself to the public” by appearing in print, and opining that authorship “seem[s] to me to deprive women of all delicacy”(Hall 139). When Nathaniel’s editor James Fields approached Sophia in 1859 about publishing her English and Italian letters and journals, she continued to insist that Nathaniel alone was “the Belleslettres portion of my being”(138). But published or not, Sophia was an undeniably public literary figure, and after her husband’s death in 1864, did print sections from these travel notebooks in addition to Nathaniel’s American and European journals. Two passages from her British letters first appeared in the September and October 1869 *Putnam’s Magazine*, and then the full *Notes* was released by the same publishing house later that year.

*Notes* is particularly salient from the perspective of Sophia’s conflicted public persona, because if women writers found their public and private selves conflated, the travelogue exaggerated this conflation. A travel narrative not only purports to publicize the autobiographical experience of an author, it does so in the very public context of the cities, monuments, and museums of international destinations. Whatever the limited public roles of their authors, these works are primarily studies of public space. The

numbers of women's travelogues dramatically increased in the course of the nineteenth century, becoming, by the 1850s a genre in development. Before the 1820s, women's travel outside of the U.S. was for the most part what Mary Schriber characterizes as "accidental"(2), undertaken to accompany male family members, who most frequently traveled for work rather than leisure. The invention of steam-powered ships in the 1820s encouraged women's leisure travel, even independent of male escorts; the luxurious 'steam palaces' of the 1860s furthered this trend. Women's writing remained "accidental" in style even as the travel that occasioned it became increasingly purposeful. Only 27 women's travelogues were published before the Civil War, in contrast to the 168 that appeared after the War. The books of this earlier period are characterized by informality; they are "letters written by homemakers for private consumption, and later cobbled into travel books" rather than the professional newspaper or magazine correspondences that emerged later in the century (3). The very informality of this work, though, highlights the intimacy of its writers with their original curtailed audiences, and heightens the voyeurism of more general readers in consuming private letters and journals. As if to mitigate this exposure, authors often prefaced these travelogues with modest protestations of their reluctance to publish, and placed responsibility on friends and family members for engineering the move (4).

In this same vein, many women's travelogues from this era negotiate public space through the lens of domesticity. Travel writing was often a means of reflecting back on the "home"—both the private domestic circle and native country—from the luxury of distance. In this sense, many of these works challenge the strict binaries between public and domestic, inserting reflections on home into descriptions of their destinations, and

reflecting on the differences between foreign and native perceptions of private space. These reflections could be either liberating or limiting.<sup>51</sup> In some cases, even as women traveled abroad, their accounts of these travels were shaped by the home and conceptions of their “proper province”(Caesar 58). Sarah Haight describes her domestic camp in the Egyptian desert, while Harriet Beecher Stowe dwells on the “bed room, dining room, sitting room” of Robert the Bruce’s caves (Robertson 219). This domesticization of public spaces comes in direct contrast to the frequent sexualization of travel and foreign lands in the travelogues of male writers. If Italy, for instance, was allegorized by male travelers on the Grand Tour as both “frivolously beautiful” and “feminized,” the object of sexual conquest, for female writers, the land’s domestication became a means of ensuring readers of the traveler’s protection from sexual threat (*Roman Fever* 5).

Sophia’s *Notes*, from its first pages, participates in many of these generic conventions, though it not entirely clear to what extent this participation is purely formal. The preface, for instance, begins with a stock protestation of unwillingness to publish that ties the author’s voice firmly in the private sphere and suggests the extenuating circumstances of her publication:

I think it necessary to say that these “Notes,” written twelve years ago, were never meant for publication; but solely for my own reflection, and for a means of recalling to my friends what had especially interested me abroad. Many of these friends have repeatedly urged me to print them, from a too partial estimate of their

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<sup>51</sup> Schriber sees women’s travel writing, through Nina Baym, as a means of breaking down “whatever imaginative and intellectual boundaries their culture may have been trying to maintain between domestic and public worlds”(8) and argues that “from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, writing home from abroad meant writing—and rewriting—‘home’”(9). Susan Robertson similarly reads women’s travel writing as “a negotiation” struck “between new freedoms and traditional ideas and practices of feminine comportment, between the road and home”(218).

value; and I have steadily resisted the suggestion, until now, when I reluctantly yield. (3).

Sophia's descriptive writing was much admired among her inner circle; Nathaniel wrote to William Ticknor during the family's time abroad that "Mrs. Hawthorne altogether excels me as a writer of travels" (Hall 138). But there is evidence that it was Nathaniel, rather than Sophia, who most strongly "resisted" the publication of *Notes*. When Fields proposed the publication in 1859, Sophia asserted dramatically that "nothing less than the immediate danger of starvation for my husband and children would induce me to put myself between a pair of book covers"(Hall 138). A contemporaneous letter to Elizabeth, however, points to Nathaniel as the source of resistance. In discussing Fields' proposal, Sophia writes dutifully of her decision "not to argue the matter any further with Mr. Hawthorne" and to "postpone all my own possibilities in the way of art"(Hall 139). This deferral provides an answer to the open question of the preface: why, after twelve years, did Sophia "reluctantly yield"? Critics have traditionally pointed to the financial straits of the years after Nathaniel's death for an answer, and Sophia's ambiguity in the preface may have intended to hint in this direction. But the letter to Elizabeth suggests that personal artistic fulfillment, deferred during Nathaniel's lifetime, was at least equally at stake.<sup>52</sup>

Certainly, the way that Sophia represented private and public life in *Notes* was carefully considered and curated. For Sophia, the experience of an art object enfolded within it the familial and personal trappings that influenced her perception of the work.

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the Hawthornes' financial straits and Sophia's publication, see for instance Mary Schriber 122-23; Thomas Woodson 733-734. For an extended analysis of Sophia's aesthetic commitment to *Notes*, including an examination of the family's financial situation in the late 1860s, see Julie Hall 140-41.

This influence is clear from the Italian journals on which the Roman and Florentine sections of *Notes* are based. These journals record images of the children alongside of sketches from great works, and descriptions of the children likewise accompany passages of ekphrasis (*Journal* Vol. 1-5). In the published edition of *Notes*, these private interruptions are curtailed, to the extent that Edwin Miller could complain that “her descriptions constitute a rather prosaic and impersonal travelogue... When Sophia was writing about the home, she was at her best”(202). A close examination of the descriptions in *Notes*, though, reveals that Sophia is precisely “writing about the home,” if only indirectly. The volume is dedicated to “Elizabeth P. Peabody” from “her sister, S.H.,” and the name that appears on the title page is simply “Mrs. Hawthorne.” More explicit familial references get swallowed up in the descriptions of images themselves, haunting artworks in ways that point at the private significance of public works. The last lines of the preface draw these connections out: “If [these *Notes*] will aid any one in the least to enjoy, as I have enjoyed, the illustrious works of the Great Masters in Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, I shall be well repaid for the pain it has cost me to appear before the public”(3). The focus of the text is on the “Great Masters,” but it is Sophia herself who feels exposed. Family makes only a secondary appearance in *Notes*, but it is to family that the work is dedicated and doubtless in part because of these connections that the travelogue went through 8 editions in the 14 years following its publication.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, that artworks are the primary means by which this

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<sup>53</sup> See Hall 137. The extent to which familial associations were responsible for the success of Sophia’s book is of course difficult to track precisely. Sophia’s contemporaries, though, were direct about the work’s connections. As a review of the second edition in 1870 begins, “That the magic of Hawthorne’s name would attract many readers to this volume, and that some passages would acquire especial interest through him, might be

private space gets worked out suggests that ekphrasis's seemingly narrow and mimetic function couches much broader goals.

### **The Art of the Travelogue**

Ekphrastic descriptions were a major component of antebellum travelogues, so much so that Catherine Maria Sedgwick could write in the preface to her 1841 travel narrative that "I was aware that our stayers-at-home had already something too much of churches, statues, and pictures, and yet that they cannot well imagine how much they make up the existence of tourists in the Old World" (viii). Sedgwick's terming as "familiar things" the "churches, statues, and pictures" that by the 40s an elite minority of Americans had seen firsthand speaks both to the strong market presence of the travelogue and to the almost stock ekphrastic representation of these objects.

In spite of this predominance, though, and in spite of the extensive critical treatment of the travel writing phenomenon, ekphrasis as a component of early American travelogue has received little extended theoretical treatment. Critics have tended to see ekphrasis, following Sedgwick's terms, as a more or less transparent (and often somewhat boring) description of objects. This description, by nature of its transparency, does not demand the theorization of more complex issues such as nationalism or gender.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the accounts of ekphrasis that exist outside of the travelogue,

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expected; but the individual and intrinsic merit of the book will be a real surprise to those who learn, for the first time, of the intellectual companionship he must have found in his wife" ("Current Literature" 294).

<sup>54</sup> Alfred Bendixen and Terry Caesar both see nationalism as the unifying preoccupation of American travelers from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Mary Schriber and Susan Robertson, in their work on 19<sup>th</sup> century American women's travelogues, see domesticity and relations to the home as the primary concern.

however well they may apply to the Romantic and Modernist works that are their principle focus, map awkwardly onto women's travel writing. Ekphrasis, as theorized by critics such as W.J.T. Mitchell and James Heffernan, is a gendered competition between the representative powers of the (masculine) text and the (feminine) art object. This formulation is unlikely to elucidate the situation of women writers, or writers who see in visual work an object to be translated for a broader public. As Mitchell writes of his own framework, "All this would look quite different...if my emphasis had been on ekphrastic poetry by women"(181).

Sophia's art-centered travelogue can help us to formulate the nature of this difference. An unassuming description in *Notes*, tagged almost offhandedly at the end of a day of sightseeing in Florence, provides a framework for considering ekphrasis specifically tailored to the text. "In the University halls," Sophia writes, "we saw a very singular work. I supposed it to be an engraving of Raphael's Belle Jardinière [sic], but the custode told us that it was all composed of almost microscopically small words, written with a pen"(328). A word-painting that is both a copy of Raphael's original and "a very singular work," the pen drawing is an original conception in its own right. As an image comprised of words, it provides an elegant metaphor for the originary ekphrasis that Sophia undertakes in *Notes*. The journal entry ends abruptly on this last line, and Sophia does not describe what the "small words" that make up the Raphael copy spell out. But this withholding too is fitting: like her own ekphrastic text, which conceals beneath its surface the intricacies of family life, and which gives up only the larger outline of her descriptive copy, the image of Raphael's *Belle Jardinière* presents its external form to

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casual viewers and hints only “microscopically” at the run of its internal text. This curated interweaving of public and private is precisely what defines the work as “singular.”

Sophia’s consideration of the copy in *Notes* builds gradually to a theory of ekphrasis: her analysis of the aims and ideals of the copy reveals much about the goals of her own art description. On the one hand, there is a strong preservationist streak to the work, apparent in the prefatory aim to “aid any one in the least to enjoy, as I have enjoyed, the illustrious works of the Great Masters”(3). Similarly, Sophia’s frequent commentary on the poor preservation of Old Master works and her recurrent allusions to the work of visual copyists suggests that one goal of her artistic descriptions is simply to maintain a record of these delicate works. While her judgment of painted copies of original works is often harsh, in cases where the copies are faithful, Sophia embraces their utility in the task of artistic dissemination. As she writes of one frescoed room in Perugia: “A young artist was sitting there, copying the groups and single figures with a lead pencil, in an extraordinary manner, and with the utmost fidelity. He, and others as accomplished and faithful, should be commissioned to save in imperishable lines the vanishing masterpieces of fresco-painting”(320). The fragility of fresco in particular, and primitiveness of nineteenth-century preservation techniques in general, makes the good copy the most reliable means of salvaging painted works that often appears to be disappearing before viewers’ eyes.<sup>55</sup> For these “faithful” artists commissioned to

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<sup>55</sup> Sophia occasionally comments in *Notes* on botched attempts at artistic preservation, as in this description of a Raphael self-portrait: “It is said that Raphael’s eyes in this picture were once blue and the hair fair, and that the cleaners have retouched them and made them dark...Picture cleaners are often the destruction instead of the

undertake this preservation, dedication to the task must be such that personal volition is consumed by channeling the spirit of the original work. The good copyist in Sophia's text "should be informed with the feeling and the secret of the soul that wrought the wonder, or they only hide the masterpiece they pretend to repeat"(260).

Given Sophia's work as an artist and copyist, it seems particularly congruous to think of her written text as taking on the same preservationist function as good visual copies. This parallel, however, is complicated by Sophia's struggles with the terms original and copy, both in her own artistic production and within the text of *Notes*. In Sophia's life, the seeds for her pilgrimage to Italy were planted 30 years before, when the then-unmarried aspiring artist completed a copy of a landscape painting by Washington Allston. Declaring it the first time she had "felt *satisfied* with a copy" Sophia described the process of this painting as not simply a reproduction of forms, but as a "bodying forth the poet's dream—*Creation!*"(Marshall 228). The work made the 26 year-old Sophia a minor celebrity in Boston, and eventually brought even Allston himself to her home studio. The wise old man of American painting praised the copy and laid out for Sophia his advice for a young artist's education, which took as its model his youthful apprenticeship in England and Italy, and included both drawing from nature and from masterworks. But for Allston, steeped in a Neoclassical tradition that valued history painting as the highest form of the medium, the advice to copy other works was only the means to the end of creating "original" compositions (229-231). Sophia generally shared in this idea. Most of the works she produced in her lifetime were copies, but she held the creation of "original" work— images that she had seen neither in nature or in other

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restorers of works of art"(375). For more on nineteenth-century art restoration and its critics see Briefel 84-114.

works— up as an aesthetic ideal. When Sophia for instance painted eight small landscapes for an 1833 Salem fundraiser, she wrote to her sisters proudly that “Four of them I created!!!!!!” — meaning that she had improvised the compositions, rather than copying them from existing works (Marshall 265). At the same time, her exclamation that the Allston copy embodied “the poet’s dream—*Creation!*” implies a distinction between copy and original significantly more conflicted than Allston’s. Rather than seeing the copy as simply a stage in the progression toward mature artistic work, Sophia appreciated gradations of quality within the category, and understood the copy as capable of expressing a form of originality.

This conflict is readily apparent in *Notes*. Copyists haunt Sophia’s museum setting as they do the settings of many nineteenth-century museum accounts, but in her hands the shadowy figures shift constantly.<sup>56</sup> Some fail utterly at their task, as one copyist imitating Michelangelo’s *Three Fates* “badly,” creating a copy that “will deceive somebody” who has not seen the original work (369). Others Sophia damns with faint praise, as one copyist emulating Guido’s *Archangel* in the Church of the Capuchins who “has entirely missed the face and the sway of the attitude, but had succeeded pretty well with the right foot and limb”(258). Some, as we have seen, copy “with the utmost fidelity,” and so “should be commissioned to save in imperishable lines the vanishing masterpieces”(320). But most compellingly, some artists outperform the originals that they set out to imitate, and in so doing, create a work that transcends its descriptive qualities. Sophia encounters several such artists, including one at a large Nativity scene by Gherardo della Notte whose copy “had the depth of an abyss in it, and the dazzle of

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<sup>56</sup> For background on the copyist in nineteenth-century literature, see Aviva Briefel 1-53.

light from the Holy Child was truly spiritual, far finer in effect than that of the original picture”(479). All of these varied assessments of copyists present more than an overview of the potential of visual mimesis: they suggest the range of aesthetic failure or success for Sophia’s own text.

Sophia holds her own prose in the travelogue to the same standards that she applies to the visual copyist. The analogy between the visual and the textual copy is, in her manuscript journals, very literal: her descriptions of images are often accompanied by, and explicitly refer to, sketches that also copy some detail of the artwork.<sup>57</sup> That these textual descriptions find themselves in some of the same conflicts that Sophia lays out for the visual copy, then, is not surprising. *Notes* is, in its most basic sense, conservationist, recording descriptions of works that often seemed on the verge of disappearance; as Annamaria Eldsen suggests, “the written word of Sophia’s text may be her attempt to transcend time’s destructive power and offer to a reading public ‘lines’ that will not fade.”(*Roman Fever* 87). As part of the task of conservation, these descriptions are

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<sup>57</sup> In fact, Sophia at times attempts to maintain this connection between text and image in the published text, which does not reproduce any of her sketches. In a March 25, 1858 entry in the first volume of the Roman manuscript journal, she writes of two sculptures: “Marc Anthony has a strong head and face with a great force of will in it—Lepidus is very weak— with small features, a profile tending thus – ” After the “thus,” on the edge of the sheet is a pen drawing about the size of a nickel, showing a man with curly hair’s profile, a triangle superimposed on his profiled features to emphasize his weak chin and forehead. This gesturing “thus,” as well as the accompanying image is edited out of the published *Notes*, but later in the same passage, Sophia approximates some of the imagistic properties of her original text. Considering the relation between three sculptures, Sophia writes in the manuscript that Lepidus “stands opposite the powerful Marc Antony—in the transept of the Braccio Nuovo—in the Vatican, and Augustus in the center of the curve—the triumvirate—There they are—perfectly lifelike.” Between the final “are” and “perfectly” is a gap of about two inches lengthwise, in which Sophia has drawn a semi-circle with “Lepidus” penned in on the left end, “M.A.” on the right, and “Augustus” in the apex. This layout figures in the print publication with a careful spacing of text (276).

voided of their obvious personal apparatus, much as “faithful” visual copies channel the works that they emulate at the expense of individualist expression. But Sophia’s writing also aspires to something like the “*Creation*” that she saw in her Allston copy, a personal intervention that distinguishes the copy from its source. For Sophia, this intervention lies, somewhat ironically, in the very familial details that she explicitly voids from her larger textual descriptions.

The tie between the most successful visual copies in *Notes* and in Sophia’s writing is fruitful for considering the larger ambitions of the travelogue. If the best copies can be “far finer in effect than the original picture,” it is by making some slight moderation to their source. Looking at the alterations of Sophia’s text, both her deviations from a ‘straight’ ekphrastic description and the changes she made from manuscript to print volume provide a sense of the means to her own originality. Such an examination reveals the extent to which the private life of *Notes* seeps into its ekphrastic passages, and Sophia’s adept manipulation and incorporation of family life—a life that the Hawthornes had explicitly sought to curtail from the public eye— into the space of her ekphrastic description. By highlighting with ellipses and other markers her decisions about what to excise or alter in the published volume, she signals her acute awareness of both the public/private and original/copy divides. *Notes* is a record of the “works of the Great Masters” for the general public, but it is equally a record of family life couched and made consumable for a larger audience, a “record for my children’s sake, hereafter,” as Sophia confesses near the end of the travelogue (346-7). Ekphrasis is for Sophia a means of confronting both public and private spaces, copied and original works, and staking out a place for herself as a writer and artist that is inclusive of both ends of this spectrum. By

inhabiting through *Notes* an aesthetic middle ground, Sophia directly challenges the notion that aesthetic questions must be phrased in these divisive terms. The figure in *Notes* who first highlights this attempt to exist between categories is defined by some of the same contradictions as Sophia's text. A family friend who was also a prominent public figure, and a proponent for Sophia's creative work who also had strongly gendered opinions about artistic originality, Ralph Waldo Emerson is key to introducing the terms of analysis for Sophia's ekphrasis.

### **Mr. E's "Reflective" Muse**

Ralph Waldo Emerson appears in four thematically significant passages in *Notes*, the only person not actively participating in the travels to receive such attention. The reiterated references to "Mr. E." or "E." as he is referred to in the published text, emphasize his personal significance for Sophia, while his public persona renders these references legible to Sophia's readers. The references work actively to develop an understanding of copying and originality, terms that were both subtexts to Sophia and Emerson's relationship and touchstones in his writing. As a recurrent figure in *Notes*, Emerson helps to define the "singular" potential of the copy in Sophia's own text.

Emerson first entered the Peabody family circle in 1822, when the recent college graduate gave Greek lessons to Elizabeth, who was then teaching in Boston (Marshall 125-26). Elizabeth's relationship to Emerson is well-documented. After the first awkward introduction as pupil, she became close to Emerson and his second wife Lydian through her work with Bronson Alcott's school in the mid-1830s (*Letters* I: 449). Emerson eventually considered her his equal in Greek as well as an important intellectual ally, and

she was a frequent summer visitor to the Emersons' home in Concord. On such visits she helped to organize his lectures and advised him on publishing, a world with which she had greater familiarity (Marshall 334-35). At her short-lived bookstore in Boston, she hosted the final meeting of the Transcendental Club, and distributed and eventually published copies of *The Dial* (Marshall 396; 425-27). While the aims of Elizabeth's work were more social and reformist than Emerson's—she saw in his championing of the individual the threat of “egotheism” among the “weak brother and sister Transcendentalist[s]”— they were cut from the same intellectual cloth and held a deep mutual respect for each others' ideals (Gura 216).

Sophia's relationship to Emerson is less well-documented, but was much more than merely an extension of her older sister's friendship. She maintained an independent correspondence with Emerson into her late life and was his neighbor in Concord on two separate occasions: in 1842, when Emerson rented the Old Manse to the newlywed Hawthornes, and from 1860 until Nathaniel's death in 1864, when the family returned from Europe and lived in the Wayside (Marshall 428; Wineapple 333-37). Though Emerson was conservative in his views of female artists, writing that creative genius “dangerously narrows the career of a woman” and that “[o]nly the most extraordinary genius can make the career of an artist secure and agreeable to her” he was adamantly supportive of Sophia's endeavors, including her attempts to move into crafting original compositions (Marshall 211). He admired her skill at copying, writing for instance of a copy of the Washington Allston painting *Lorenzo and Jessica* that it was “admirable, and of a Chinese exactness of imitation,” but he encouraged her even more in creating independent compositions (544). In 1836 he wrote, “I learn with great pleasure that you

are attempting an original picture on a great subject. Of this I hope soon to hear much more. I shall heartily rejoice in your success. You must postpone everything to it, but your health”(1 Dec 1836). Two years later, he reiterated the encouragement: “I can never quarrel with your state of mind concerning original attempts in your own art. I admire it rather”(20 Jan 1838). Sophia sent drawings to him in the 30s, and in 1840 sculpted a Roman-style portrait medallion of Emerson’s beloved brother Charles, who had died a few years earlier. Emerson was deeply impressed by the “striking likeness” which Sophia had produced from memory, and had eight copies in plaster cast for family members calling it in a letter to Sophia “the gift of a Muse” and praising her “genius”(18 May 1840; Marshall 408).

It is not surprising that Emerson’s consideration of Sophia’s work centered on the idea of copy and original; Emerson’s own literary reception often pivoted on these same terms. A scathing 1847 review of Emerson’s *Poems* in the *Southern Quarterly Review* begins by calling him “an American Carlyle, in the same way that we have the American Walter Scott in Cooper, and the American Dickens in Neal... It is a grave mistake, however, to take pride in such resemblances, as if any portion of the merit of the originator of any style of writing, belonged to his copyists. What in him may be proof of genius, in them is sure proof of the lack of it. (“*Poems*” 493) Other readers came to nearly opposed perspectives. The same month that *The Southern Review* article appeared, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* published an admiring article on Emerson that takes a very different perspective on the philosopher’s relation to originality. The *Blackwood’s* article was a significant coup for Emerson, and was cited in several articles and reviews of his work in the years after its publication. (As even an irreverent critic in the *Southern*

*Literary Messenger* acknowledged five years later: “Mr. Emerson has attained to the honour of a laudatory review in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, an honour to which very few American writers have attained”[“History” 247]). The author here praises Emerson precisely in terms of originality, stating that if he were called to elect an American writer whose works “displayed the undoubted marks of original genius” he would select Emerson; the author is “quite sure that no French or German critic could read the speculations of Emerson without tracing in them the spirit of the nation to which this writer belongs”(“Emerson” 644). This assessment, read alongside the contemporary assessment of Emerson as a “copyist” of Carlyle speaks to the complexities of a writer who both wears his transatlantic debts on his sleeve and proclaims that Americans “have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe”(68). Long before the publication of “Quotation and Originality” in 1859, “an essay which made an eloquent and lengthy case for the acknowledgement—even the acclamation—of cultural unoriginality,” Emerson’s perspective on artistic originality caused controversy—or at least confusion (Macfarlane 11).

Sophia’s references to Emerson in *Notes* center on the writer’s seemingly contradictory views, as well as her own conflicted considerations of artistic originality. The allusions provide Sophia with an intellectual backdrop to considering the nature of the copy and the potential power of ‘copied’ descriptions in her own text. At the same time, the point is just as much in Emerson’s presence as it is in his perspective. The power of Sophia’s own aesthetic copies lies precisely in the personal references to well-known figures that Sophia works, almost imperceptibly, into the larger text. Emerson,

and Sophia's personal access to Emerson, is part of the currency that grants *Notes* its value as 'original.'

Sophia's first reference to "Mr. E." in *Notes* alludes clearly to his published writings in order to discuss the distinction between copies and the originals on which they are based. By equating the copy with "Mr. E's" (somewhat caricatured) reputation as an isolationist, Sophia aligns travel, and implicitly her own travel writing, with originality. Following a description of Raphael's Staffa Madonna, Sophia contrasts the original to Cephas Thompson's well-respected copy, which she had recently seen in Rome:

Mr. Thompson's copy is good, but what can be said of Raphael's creation? How could wise and great Mr. E say such a preposterous thing as it was just as well *not* to travel as to travel! And that each man has Europe in him, or something to that effect? No, indeed; it would be better is every man could look upon these wonders of genius, and grow thereby. Besides, after Mr. E had been to Europe himself, how could he tell? Would he willingly have foregone all he saw in Italy? It was mere transcendental nonsense—such a remark."<sup>58</sup>

Moving seamlessly from a discussion of the painting and its copies into a discussion of the gains of travel, Sophia clearly equates travel and the experience of originals. Emerson, as a strawman in this passage, allows her to affirm her own (and her text's) dedication to the original work. At the same time, Emerson appears from the first as a figure of both public and private significance. The reference to Emerson's famous statement in "Self-Reliance" that "[t]he soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home" could leave readers

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<sup>58</sup> *Notes* 326. The text in the manuscript journal is even slightly more severe: "How could wise and great Mr. Emerson ever say such a stupid thing as that it was just as well not to travel as to travel, and that each man has Europe in him, or something to that effect? Oh no—it would be better if every man could look upon these wonders of genius, and grow thereby. Besides, after Mr. Emerson had been to Europe himself, and seen every thing, how could he tell? Would he willingly have foregone all he saw in Italy? It was a mere transcendental speech, I fancy" (*Journal* Vol. 2).

with few doubts about the identity of the subject (186). But the irreverent tone and even the seemingly stiff title—"Mr. Emerson" was the name by which Emerson's wife Lydian addressed him—affirm Sophia's familial intimacy. "Mr. E." is simultaneously a public and private currency, just as Sophia's descriptive writing here is aligned both with the copy and with originality.

Later, Emerson figures as an owner of copies and a participant in Sophia's own descriptive copying. Both of these references allow Sophia to showcase her own distance from the merely reiterative copy and to locate the source of her ekphrastic originality. Sophia notes after describing a bad copy of Michelangelo's *Three Fates* that "Mr. E. has a copy, but I cannot recall it vividly enough to compare it to Michaelangelo's"(369). Though the statement seems a restraint of judgment, it is, in the context of Hawthorne's larger discussion of art, quite the opposite, as original works of art are often remarkable precisely for the impression that they leave in their absence.<sup>59</sup> Once again, Emerson is pitted with the copy in order to imply the larger ambitions of Sophia's own text. These ambitions become clearer in the next reference to this figure. In describing a self-portrait of Raphael, Sophia writes that he had "cheek and chin 'clean as Apollo's' (as Mr.E. said of his brother Charles's)"(390). Here as in the last statement, the emphasis is on Sophia's private access to a figure whose public persona has already been established in the first reference. Her familiarity with Emerson's possessions and personal statements grants Sophia's readers a sense of sharing in this access, a sense that ultimately helps to build the "singular" contribution of Sophia's own document in the market of travelogues. In this last reference, by building a Emerson's personal quote into one of her own ekphrastic

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<sup>59</sup> As she writes of Michaelangelo's "faithful portrait bust": "I know his face now perfectly well"(403).

descriptions, she emphasizes that the artistic descriptions owe their originality to this same access.

Emerson, then, represents this duality: he is a writer who both espouses imitation, and is hailed as the first truly American voice of the nineteenth century. He claims a task similar to Sophia's own endeavor in *Notes*, to harness imitation as a conduit toward originality. While the first three references stake out Sophia's claims about originality and imitation against Emerson's own, the final passage uses Emerson's ideas about the reiterative nature of history as the foundation for a creative view of copying. This final scene—ambiguous, imaginative, and dense with wordplay—reads in striking contrast to the first three more candid references. And in a very literal sense, the passage is not about Emerson at all: the manuscript journals reveal that this “E.,” unlike the others, refers to Sophia's sister Elizabeth. But the passage is markedly Emersonian, referring allusively to the writer's work to establish the creative potential of copying. The setting is the historical battlefield on Lake Trasimene, in which the Hannibal's Cathaginian army defeated the Roman forces during the Second Punic War. The landscape, in Sophia's description, has been transformed through time to a peaceful, hilly setting that still carries resonances of the massacre:

We were served with a generous dinner, of which the poetical part was of course fish from the classic lake, which we ate reflectingly. I felt as if I were a person in an ancient history of Rome. Hannibal's elephants were close at hand. The tent of Flaminius was pitched near by—alas for him! Memories of war, defeat conquest, alternated with the deep peace of the present moment, with the vines and olives and fig-trees, the flocks and herds—the undisturbed grain waving, the birds singing roundelays, the smooth waves lapsing to drown the distant tumult of war; so real and profound the peace, so more and more ghostly and vanishing the battle. While I dreamed over the purple twilight, the moon rose opposite our windows. First a heap of clouds took fiery hues, like the reflection of a burning city, though rather more pink than red; and then the gold rim of the moon marked a clear arc of a circle over the mountain. When it rose a little higher, a column of silver

struck down from its full orb into the depths of the lake, and soon the whole atmosphere was flooded with white radiance. A still vaster peace rose with the moon to possess the earth. I will write to E. as the muse of history, before I sleep. (331-332).

This passage, which marks the abrupt end to the entry titled “Lake Thrasymene” in *Notes*, is remarkable for its use of visual reflection as a metaphor for the intermixing of the past and the present. From the first sentence, when the family eats a fish that has been brought up to land “from the classic lake,” the levels of experience—water and land, past and present—begin to intermix. Hawthorne’s pun on “reflectingly” prompts the next statement: “I felt as if I were a person in an ancient history of Rome.” The landscape’s memories of war, and the present state of peace, are given the backdrop of another reflection, that of the rising moon “into the depths of the lake.” The “white radiance” makes its stamp on the sky, the lake, the mountain. And then Hawthorne’s cryptic last sentence: “I will write to E. as the muse of history, before I sleep.” Though the manuscripts reveal Sophia’s sister as the source for this initial, the ambiguous “E.” of the publication seems to reflect both Emerson and Elizabeth, a doubling that is in line with the rest of the passage. The muse of history, as she appears in Emerson’s “History,” would be at home in this fusion of past and present; what she recalls, and what Hawthorne seems to be alluding to here, is Emerson’s idea that “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn, and Egypt, Greece, Rome, Gaul, Britain, America, lie folded already in the first man”(105). At the same time, the passage seems appropriately addressed to Elizabeth, who was not only Sophia’s primary correspondent but had also been the guiding force in Sophia’s early education, Punic Wars and all.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See for instance Marshall 128-129; 135 for Elizabeth’s encouragement of Sophia’s Classical education. That the muse of history’s name, Clio, stems from the

Though this passage does not directly address issues of artistic originality, these ideas are nonetheless caught up in the language of text and its associations. If the family eats “reflectingly,” they are also as reflections of people “in an ancient history of Rome.” The copy that they create is far from perfect, mingling present with past rather than simply preserving the latter. The tent of Flaminius is “pitched near by,” but rather than dwell on this image, Sophia shifts to a hybrid mental space and the sense that “Memories of war, defeat conquest, alternated with the deep peace of the present moment.” Neither past nor present are unaffected one by the other; the bright hues of the sunset are “like the reflection of a burning city,” but Sophia concedes they are “rather more pink than red.” This is a moment “like” the past, but never quite identical to it, a copy that ends up producing difference in the culminating “still vaster peace” that replaces the original war. The allusion to Emerson’s “History” works to strengthen this connection between history and artistic originality. Though the essay’s foundation lies in stressing the importance of past events to the present moment, it culminates in the assertion that “Genius borrows nobly,” and that “originality” can only exist in the interpretation and reformulation of past thought. Sophia’s layered perspective of the battlefield enacts precisely this reformulation.

A subtle alteration from the manuscript journal to the published text also confirms the imagistic emphasis of this section. In *Notes*, the final line expresses Sophia’s aim to write her letter “before I sleep,” but in the manuscript, this last line reads, “before I retire from this marvelously beautiful picture”(Journal Vol. 2). This initial wording—

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Greek verb “to broadcast” or “to make famous” adds another dimension to this sisterly reference. Elizabeth’s tireless promotion of other artists’ work made many careers, including Nathaniel’s. To send a letter to Elizabeth, Sophia knew from her experience with the “Cuba Journal,” was a form of pre-publication.

clunkiness aside— affirms Sophia’s consideration of the landscape in painterly terms, and reframes her extended description as ekphrasis. Like the rest of Sophia’s ekphrastic passages, this is one in which Sophia’s own family—Una sketching, Julian gathering shells, Rose picking flowers—is implicated.

### **Sophia’s Familial Ekphrasis**

After Nathaniel’s death, publisher James Fields encouraged Sophia to write her husband’s biography. Sophia’s response reveals her perception of the family’s relation to the public: “I can neither write a book, nor would I, if able, so entirely set in opposition to my husband’s express wish and opinion as to do so... The veil he drew around him no one should lift” (*Ordinary Mysteries* 317). She went on to edit and publish his notebooks, specifically, she wrote in the 1870 preface to *Passages from the English Note-books*, to assuage such demands from the public (vii). But her formulation of Nathaniel as veiled— a formulation that she used on several other occasions— is telling.<sup>61</sup> Nathaniel is, like his own characters Priscilla or the Reverend Hooper, both in the public eye and apart from it. In *Notes* Sophia again picks up on the trope of the veil, and we find the biography of the Hawthorne family that she resisted crafting outright. In Sophia’s hands, the “churches, statues, and pictures” that Catherine Sedgwick in 1841 had termed as “familiar,” become etymologically so, reflecting family in ways that transform mimesis into original description. The aestheticized family descriptions that result are a manner of exploring

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, in writing to Annie Fields’ on Nathaniel’s death in May 1864: “In the most retired privacy it was the same as in the presence of men. The sacred veil of his eyelids he scarcely lifted to himself. Such an unviolated sanctuary as was his nature, I his inmost wife never conceived nor knew” (“Editing Hawthorne’s Notebooks” 299).

the veil rather than purporting to lift it, all the while creating a work that everywhere betrays the marks of its ‘originality.’

In the Sophia Hawthorne Papers in the Berg collection, a small pocket diary from 1859 presents the record of daily events from January, when the Hawthornes were in Rome, to the next fall, by which time they had traveled back to London. The commercial planner, its dates and holidays printed in French, allows only half of a small (approximately 5 by 3 inch) page for each day’s entry. Within these curtailed rectangles, Sophia records in terse prose the prosaic familial occurrences of each date. As such, the diary functions as a parallel universe to the published *Notes*, which expostulates expansively on artworks, people and places seen, but often neglects to mention how exactly these spaces are traversed, and in the company of whom. The diary’s brief records—written in tiny script, frequently up to the border allocated to each date—provide immediate insight into the day-to-day concerns of a mother, in opposition to the more high-flown preoccupations of the artist in *Notes*. Entries are numbingly similar, typically comprising a line or two about the weather, some note about each family member’s health, and a brief line about the social and cultural events in which the family participated. A representative entry from the 26<sup>th</sup> of January demonstrates the dominance of personal and physical concerns to these daily accounts: “Splendid day. Una not well, so that I wrote to Mrs. Story that she could not drive. But at two she wanted to walk, and Papa took her to the Forum. Miss Shepard came from her chamber at noon. My shoulder was very bad and my cough. I feel brisée. I read Frederic the Great” (*Diary*). The most common accounts of bodily suffering center on herself and on Una, who during this year recovered slowly from a violent bout of malaria, but Sophia also recounts the ills of the

nurse Ada Shepard, and the youngest child, Rose. Weather and health are in a constantly fluctuating and equally unpredictable balance, the results of which determine the daily landscape of the family's life.

None of this attention to daily mundanities appears in the published edition of *Notes*. Nonetheless, this work goes to pains to signal its reliance on an earlier, unpublished document, seeming to underline the distinction between private and public revelations, original and copied works. But the inconsistency of Sophia's editorial marks implies that she is more invested in pointing out this distinction than in upholding it. For instance, some excisions from the journals and letters on which *Notes* is based are marked with ellipses or a series of asterisks in the published text, but many other excised passages are not. An examination of the journals reveals that most of the differences between the print and the manuscript texts —flagged or not— are minor, consisting most often of extended descriptions of friends or family whose inclusion in the published document Sophia likely saw as too personal (*Journal* Vol. 1-5). Sophia's inconsistent marking of these minor differences demonstrates not an ingrained respect for the line between original and copy, but a desire to make this line visible. As she was editing Nathaniel's journals in 1866, Sophia wrote to James Fields that "what I cannot copy at all is still sweeter than the rest. The stars in their courses do not cover such treasures in Space—as do the dots I substitute for words sometimes" ("Editing Hawthorne's Notebooks" 308). The primary function of such "dots" in *Notes* is to signal the existence of this "sweeter" space. At the same time, as Marta Werner and Nicholas Lawrence have argued in the context of Nathaniel's edited journals, these ellipses "point to aporias in the text that are themselves figures for her understanding of the soul." Ellipses, like veils,

reveal an understanding of selfhood in which “the self, an occulted mystery, is readable only through signs of absence”(“This is His” 15). Sophia’s editorial gestures, insofar as they are guides to readers, are self-conscious markers of the terms—private/public, original/copy— at stake in consuming the work.<sup>62</sup>

These terms are readily apparent in Sophia’s presentation of family. Hawthorne family members populate the pages of *Notes* only fleetingly; they appear as single initials (or in the case of Nathaniel as “Papa” or “Mr. H.”) making occasional commentary on aesthetic objects, but for the most part following as silent companions on Sophia’s artistic pilgrimages.<sup>63</sup> Though each of the family members plays only a small supporting role in the travelogue as a whole, they strain constantly in couched forms at the borders of the text. Embedded references to Nathaniel are particularly prevalent. Some passages point specifically to “papa’s” celebrity and the types of access that this celebrity grants the family and by extension Sophia’s readership. In Lincolnshire, for instance, Nathaniel gives an antique bookseller his card, after which this man insists on guiding the Hawthornes through his formidable personal collection of relics and art objects that includes several drawings by Raphael, Rembrandt and Cellini. The opening of this private collection and the recognition of Nathaniel’s standing are entwined, as an exchange between Sophia and the bookseller’s wife hints: “I asked Mrs.P whether she

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<sup>62</sup> The published text’s occasional and inconsistent use of footnotes to correct or add statements has a similar effect as ellipses in signaling the existence of an ‘original’ manuscript. See for instance Mary Schriber 111-112 for Sophia’s use of footnotes and bracketing in *Notes*.

<sup>63</sup> The focus, even in the original journals, on art objects, likely made the excision of family circumstances in the published volume relatively simple. Other personal writings were more difficult to adjust. In June 1869, for instance, Sophia reviewed her “Cuba Journal” writings as possible candidates for publication but concluded that it would not be possible: “There is so much about people in them” (Hall 141).

were as much interested as her husband in these [art objects], and she said she was not, but preferred to read. And then she remarked, pointing to a brilliant red-bird in a missal that I was turning over: ‘That bird is almost as red as the Scarlet Letter!’ She said this in a private, confidential little way, and made no other allusion to the authorship”(61). While Sophia’s text never openly broadcasts its privileged space, it doesn’t need to; her allusions in a “private confidential little way” are, like those of the bookseller’s wife, more than clear enough. These allusions complicate the idea that the travelogue is a purely public document of generally accessible spaces, and in highlighting these private collections, makes its own claims for what it can provide of “original” content for its readers. At the same time, the use of visual cues in this passage provides an analogy for Sophia’s own transformative ekphrasis. Just as the bookseller’s wife gestures from the “brilliant red-bird,” to the “Scarlett Letter,” to its author, Sophia uses the visual description of *Notes* to point toward family, enmeshing her own familial “originals” into the space of the ekphrastic copy.

Sophia’s descriptions of Nathaniel are similarly invested in remaining at the level of the object, if not explicitly the art object. Nathaniel is rarely given voice in the course of *Notes*, but his appearance is often the subject of commentary. In one passage describing diners at a Scottish boarding house, Sophia compare their aesthetic merits much as she might compare a series of adjacent paintings: “The table was exactly full, and I saw hardly one comely person. Two young gentlemen in gray, and a young clergyman at the top of the table, were good-looking, but only one individual in the room was eminently handsome”(185). This “one individual” is almost certainly Nathaniel, to whom Sophia turns next in conversation. The passing reference seems almost gratuitous,

but serves to rally readers together around the famous—and famously beautiful—figure who likely inspired much of the text’s readership, at the same time as it establishes a knowing connection between Sophia and these same readers. At the same time Nathaniel’s representation as alternately “handsome,” or on another occasion “an Artist of the Beautiful” readies the ground for the even more explicit aesthetization of other family members (185; 337).

The Hawthorne children, like Nathaniel, appear much more predominately in the manuscript journals than in the publicized text. In many cases, this presence takes the form simply of a specification of appearance, as in this entry from March 25, 1858 describing the family’s visit to the Villa Ludovico in Rome: “Upon entering the gate, avenues and enchanting vistas opened on every side, but we went first to the Casino of Sculpture. [We were six— my husband, Una, Miss Shepherd, Julian, and Bud]”(*Journal* Vol. 1). Sophia’s brackets mark the text that is edited from the published document. Because of such excisions, the plural first-person pronoun that remains in the first line of the text echoes vaguely throughout *Notes*, a general ‘we’ that rarely specifies its precise participants. The children take much more specified form in the original manuscripts. In the first Roman manuscript journal, a full-page pencil drawing of a young girl in a knee-length dress figures on the cover page of the book, subtitled “Rose in Rome/ Palazzo Lazarani/ Percean Hill.” On the other side of the page, the faint outline of a pencil drawing of a young boy, perhaps Julian, remains, the vestiges of a concerted erasure (Vol. 1). Another entry is interrupted by the name “Rose,” written in a slightly unsteady and juvenile hand. Sophia’s parenthetical comment follows: “(Mademoiselle Bouton de Rose

just requested to insert her name, and here it is for all who are interested in her little autograph)” (*Journal* 5:67).

These remnants of family life are effaced from *Notes*, replaced by artworks that betray some tangential evidence of the children’s lives. The recurrent descriptions of Madonna and Child that populate *Notes* can be seen as reflections on Sophia’s own maternity, but such works also betray more specific descriptions of individual family members.<sup>64</sup> Sophia’s children are, in fact, only described in relation to the aesthetic objects that the travelogue takes as its central focus. For instance, we have a general outline of Julian’s size from his fitting of an antique vest: “Lord Burleigh must have been slender, for J could not button it round his waist”(58). Una similarly is described in relation to painting. On a visit to the gallery of the Sciarra Palace, Sophia describes Titian’s *Bella Donna* in terms that work to image Una: “A folded mass of auburn hair crowns the head, and falls behind the throat. As U. stood near I perceived what artists have meant when they called U.'s hair ‘ Titian hair,’ for it was precisely like the *Bella Donna's*”(263). Una resembles the painting, rather than vice versa. The primacy of ekphrasis is clear: when Sophia goes on with her description after the reference to Una (“The eyes are dark and rather small, and their expression and that of the perfect mouth are not amiable”) we assume that she has moved back to a discussion of the Titian painting, though the subject is never specified. Moments such as this allow for Sophia’s “originality,” enabling her to revel in both the artwork and her own creation.

Rose is similarly aestheticized. In the published text, she appears only as “R.,” but in the manuscripts, her name is the subject of Sophia’s concentrated maternal whimsy:

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<sup>64</sup> See for instance Schriber 108; Hall 144 for reflections of Sophia’s maternity.

she is alternately Rose, Rosebud, Bud, Baby, and Bouton de Rose. The variations on “rosebud” suggest that she was the inspiration for Sophia’s representation of her children as rose “portraits” when describing a meadow scene in England: “We gathered here from a wild eglantine three roses—one a shut-bud, but showing the lovely pink petals—another not quite half opened, and a third just ready to unfold, but curved over the stamens. We named them after three children we know, and they are the prettiest of portraits”(184). This nickname also recalls Sophia’s extended description of Guido’s Beatrice Cenci portrait, particularly its fixation on the “rose-bud lips, sweet and tender,” that betray “no cry, nor power to utter a word”(213). The silence of the painted innocent neatly echoes the speechless artistry of Sophia’s own children: described only through works of art, their speech is curtailed in the text to the snippets of childish commentary on the works that are at the center of Sophia’s travelogue.

These transformations demonstrate the extent to which ekphrasis for Sophia moves beyond rote description and into “familiar things.” Ekphrasis is not merely the reiteration of well-worn territory, as Catherine Sedgwick implies, but the creative transformation of the public art object into a space that likewise can function as a private family record in the “hereafter”(347). Through these moments of transformation, it becomes apparent that *Notes*’ preoccupation with copy and original is tied up precisely in the creative power of ekphrasis. The domestic backdrop of *Notes*’s ekphrastic moments forms the subtext for thinking about how the textual and visual copy in Sophia’s travelogue can take on the characteristics of originality. The use of ekphrasis as a means of covering the presence of family also seems an acknowledgement of Sophia’s earlier

injunction to James Fields that the “veil” not be lifted from Nathaniel. This insistence is, in other words, both a creative and a protective act.

## **Conclusion**

In a section from the Roman journals, Sophia comments that “over every rare and famous masterpiece in the churches these Romans hang a veil, so as to get a paul for removing it; though I should like to think it were to preserve the painting from dust and light, which might fade the colors”(203). Sophia presents two possible understandings of the veil here: the one (cynical) view that it exists only to bring profit to those who have placed it there, the other (more hopeful) possibility that it is placed to protect from the damage of exposure. (She does add, in relation to the Domenichino fresco in question, that the priest who unveils it “seemed neither to expect or await a fee— honor be to him ever!”).

Her own travelogue could be read according to these same terms of exploitation and protection. In some senses, *Notes* shows Sophia both keeping the veil intact and getting a paul for removing it. The popularity of her travelogue depended heavily on its thinly veiled familial subtext, but its publication did little to offer any novel revelation. The barrier that Sophia cast over her private space, then, acted to compel a readership and to protect the members of an inner circle. Here again, Sophia manages to have it both ways. The most significant aspect of this binary, though is not her text’s tenuous existence in the space between exploitation and protection, but the role that she as an author has in creating this space. In the passage describing the Domenichino fresco, Sophia summons the unveiling priest by “pulling at the curtain” herself (203). While

*Notes* continuously insists on its author's inability to unveil the people, places and objects of her Roman encounters, this tugging at the edges suggests an awareness of her role in initiating revelation. Unlike Nathaniel's passively unveiled Priscilla, Sophia is the agent, however hesitant, of the act of unveiling.

The difference that Sophia's perspective makes for conceptions of her own writing and women's writing more generally is subtle but important. Sophia saw her own undertaking as both derivative and potentially original, both copy and singular, both public and private. This undefined place in the literary landscape could be—and continues to be—troubling. One contemporary review of the travelogue praises Sophia for covering “with originality”(295) many of the topics that Nathaniel himself had documented, but is clearly uncomfortable with the execution of this innovation in Sophia's descriptions of art, taking to task the “poetical” embroidery surrounding Guido's Beatrice Cenci: “To see in the Cenci's ‘white, smooth brow, without cloud or furrow of pain,’ the hovering of ‘a wild, endless despair,’ is to much more than is evidently visible on the canvas, or than is certainly apparent in the description”(295). Sophia's ekphrasis moves out of the bounds of the literal description that a reader anticipates from a travel narrative, into the more nebulous realm of the “poetical.” *Notes*, which relies on strict dichotomies at the same time that it thrives in the spaces between them, invites such confusion. But so too does ekphrasis more generally, which exists by its very nature in the undefined middle ground between the perfect copy and the freestanding work, never entirely able to attain either extreme. Ekphrasis is, in this sense, the ideal medium for an ambivalent author. That it should be such a popular one at

precisely the time when publication summoned ever more ordinary civilians—many of them women travelers—is no coincidence.

## Chapter Three

### Longfellow, *Michael Angelo*, and the “Middle-Class” Curator

Longfellow is artificial and imitative. He borrows incessantly, and mixes what he borrows, so that it does not appear to the best advantage. He is very faulty in using broken or mixed metaphors. The ethical part of his writing has a hollow, secondhand sound. He has, however, elegance, a love of the beautiful, and a fancy for what is large and manly, if not a full sympathy with it.

– Margaret Fuller, “American Literature: Its Position in the Present Time, and Prospects for the Future” (1846).

#### Introduction

Fuller’s short analysis of Longfellow in the epigraph above is striking for its ability to define the terms that dominate both contemporary and modern criticism of the poet. Her judgment of Longfellow as “artificial and imitative” resounds with Whitman’s categorization of the poet as an “adopter and adapter”(Traubel 549). Poe, in the reviews that make up his half of the infamously overblown “Longfellow War”<sup>65</sup> takes the idea of

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<sup>65</sup> The “Longfellow War” or “little war,” was a controversy that raged in periodicals in 1845, initiated by Poe’s January review of Longfellow’s *The Waif* in the *Evening Mirror*, which implied plagiarism in its detection of a “moral *taint*” in the volume. Responses by Longfellow, Poe and others followed on both sides of the plagiarism question through a number of different periodicals. Some allege that the media storm was constructed by Poe, then the editor at *Graham’s Magazine*, for the sole cause of increasing magazine sales. The “war” continues to be at the center of critical interest in Longfellow with critics including Virginia Jackson, Kent Ljunquist, Meredith McGill, Edward Piacentino, and Burton Pollin weighing in on the issue. This interest—going well beyond the exchanges status as literary scandal—reflects the “war’s” broader relevance to issues such as the perception of plagiarism in print culture, and historical and contemporary lyric reading. Virginia Jackson argues, for instance, that the exchange might be read “not only as a negotiation of the terms of Poe’s own authorship, but also as an apprehension of the future of lyric reading,” with Longfellow as a stand-in for the academic modes of poetic classification that govern much of contemporary reading practices (“Poe, Longfellow” 24).

aesthetic imitation one step further, accusing the poet of “the most barbarous class of literary robbery”(“Voices of the Night” 103). Fuller’s judgment of Longfellow’s problematic “mixing” (both in his blending of sources and his incongruous metaphors) also resonates with Poe’s assessment that Longfellow’s use of imagery “wavers disagreeably between two ideas which would have been merged by the skillful artist in one”(101). Recurring incongruities such as these are the source for Poe’s resounding judgment that “[Longfellow] has no combining or binding force. He has absolutely nothing of unity”(100). Fuller’s backhanded blow to Longfellow’s “manliness,” and the faint praise of “elegance” meanwhile, echoes Whitman’s understanding of the writer as the “universal poet of women and young people.” and Poe’s encapsulation of his reading public as “negrophilic old ladies of the north”(“Specimen Days” 194; *Essays and Reviews* 762).

Of course, these are among the harshest assessments of Longfellow’s contemporary readers, but the basic focal points of their critique—imitation, disunity, and femininity—echo through even more favorable modern Longfellow criticism. The Longfellow Wars and the question of the poet’s influences occupy critics as diverse as Virginia Jackson, Christoph Irmscher, and Mary Louise Kete. That the pendulum has swung to a different understanding of the value of “imitation” is evidenced by Jackson’s elucidation of Longfellow’s literary sources, Irmscher’s re-evaluation of Longfellow’s sense of his own “originality” and Kete’s framing of Longfellow as a “sentimental collaborator.” “Unity,” meanwhile, a term that has largely fallen out of the vocabulary of post-New Critical readers, lives on as a useful term in critical reactions to Longfellow’s “broken” canon. In the introduction to the 1988 Penguin edition of Longfellow’s *Selected*

*Poems*, for instance, Lawrence Buell's observation that the "would-be masterwork" *Christus* shows "unevenness and disunity" is uncontroversial (xxv). Similarly, Fuller's jab at Longfellow's masculinity has an afterlife in the work of Irmischer and Eric Haralson, who see Longfellow less as a writer lacking in manly "force" than as, in Haralson's words, a progressive advocate of "a cross gendered sensibility" and a "sentimental' masculinity"(329).

Longfellow's writing on visual art, particularly his posthumously published dramatic poem, *Michael Angelo: A Fragment* (1883), provides a unique opportunity to examine these terms as they interact within the body of the poet's work itself. Within Longfellow's canon, the visual arts and material objects have long been considered as metaphors for the poet's understanding of his own literary work.<sup>66</sup> Fittingly, readings of *Michael Angelo* have focused on the work as biographical or anti-biographical, as either "a spiritual autobiography"("Mr. Longfellow and the Artists" 830) or "a study of everything Longfellow was *not*"(Irmischer 142). Michelangelo is for Longfellow an important figure of self-conscious artistic evaluation because the same terms that circulate positively around that artist in the nineteenth century—masculinity, grandeur, originality—circulate in their negative form around Longfellow, carrying insinuations of femininity, brokenness, and derivation. The biographical readings of the play all seem to latch onto this truth: that Michelangelo becomes a proving ground for Longfellow, a means of sorting out and analyzing these terms late in his career. But as I argue, this

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<sup>66</sup> One writer went so far, shortly after Longfellow's death, as to consider an influence in artistic matters one of Longfellow's central contributions: "It is not too much to say that he was the most potent individual force for culture in America, and the rapid spread of taste and enthusiasm for art which may be noted in the people near the end of his long and honorable career may be referred more distinctly to his influence than to that of any other American"("Mr. Longfellow and the Artists" 826)

organizing process does not work either to frame Longfellow's canon with a Michelangelesque grandeur, or to set in contrast their respective artistic modes. Longfellow's Michelangelo is, unlike the Michelangelo of many writers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, not a figure of exclusions but of inclusions, embodying the contradictions that circulate around the terms of gender, artistic unity and originality. As such, Michelangelo may indeed provide a late-career perspective on Longfellow's work, but it is a view that complicates rather than simplifies.

Longfellow's Michelangelo becomes, in the course of the play, a site where the writer can theorize his own definition of artistry. This definition, though, falls far from the textbook readings of either Michelangelo or Longfellow, which emphasize the extremities of both artists: Longfellow as plagiarist, as populist, as sentimentalist; Michelangelo as emblem of aesthetic originality, as genre-defining high artist, as crass sensualist. These typical definitions are mirror images of one another, and in *Michael Angelo*, Longfellow brings both extremes to the character of the Renaissance artist, who gains nuance in the process. The aesthetic theory that emerges from the contradictions of this protagonist controverts any easy distinction between high art and craft, and questions the critical apparatus that presumes to draw such distinctions. This figure makes a virtue of notions such as the fragmented, the unfinished, the derivative, and the transient. As such, Longfellow's Michelangelo is a patron-saint of what I call, following Fuller, the "middle class."

This "middle class" has an implicit connection to economic categories, but is much more firmly grounded in an aesthetic midpoint. Margaret Fuller, in an 1845 review of *Poems*, calls Longfellow "a middle class" poet, a label that was certainly not intended

as complimentary, but rather aimed to reflect the poet's middleground position between the high-cultural elite and the disposable pulp writing of the lowbrow (152). This label can also serve more neutrally to point out the borderlands that Longfellow occupies: between masculine and feminine norms, between original invention and outright plagiarism, between the genteel and the proto-modern. To see Longfellow as "middle class" is both to understand his democratic appeal and to recognize the fragmentary, underdefined and overdetermined nature of this state. In a telling comment, Fuller writes in this same review that "Mr. Longfellow presents us not with a new product in which all the old varieties are melted into a fresh form, but rather with a tastefully arranged Museum, between whose glass cases are interspersed neatly potted rose trees, geraniums and hyacinths"(158). This remark posits the poet's writing as not fully cohesive, its multiple parts not "melted" but "arranged" in the artificial environment of a greenhouse-museum. As such, the artistic result is not a new product whose independent components are largely submerged for the greater good of the whole, but rather a space whose larger external form is less significant than its distinct internal components. Longfellow here lacks not just unity, but artistic originality, the force that allows borrowed elements to take an entirely new form. At the same time, the concept of Longfellow as museum-curator opens up his literature for consideration through a nineteenth-century culture newly driven by collecting and by the burgeoning space of the museum gallery.

This imagination of Longfellow's museum drives my reading both of quasi-ekphrastic works like *Michael Angelo* and the poet's larger canon. The story of the visual arts in nineteenth-century America—and especially of the middle class's experience of the visual arts—cannot be told apart from the space of the museum. Early in the century,

this museum consisted largely of the European galleries and exhibition spaces that upper and upper-middle class travelers entered on the Grand Tour, and transmitted into text through travelogues and letters home. After the first quarter of the nineteenth-century, internationally-focused collections and galleries began to appear within the United States, beginning with private collections, and then with university and gallery collections such as the ones donated to Longfellow's own alma mater, Bowdoin, in 1811 and 1826. But both European and American collections, however ambitious in scope, had their foundations in the eclectic home collections of images and artifacts popular for centuries in sometimes extensive curiosity cabinets. These collections were by their very nature incomplete and fragmentary, particularly in the early and indiscriminate period of collecting that characterized the mid-nineteenth century. By 1870, pioneering American collector James Jackson Jarves could still say "We cannot speak of art museums as a matter of fact in America" qtd. in Coleman 90). At mid-century, collections were still more in flux, often unsystematized spaces bringing together natural history artifacts, informal performances, copies or casts of artworks, and original artistic "masterworks." In fact these galleries are, Lawrence Levine argues, emblematic of the permeability of what we now consider as high or low cultural spaces. Museums of the era often had unclearly-defined objectives, and only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did "sacred language and religious analogies" enforce a certain hushed attitude toward art spectatorship (Levine 149).

This idea of the nineteenth-century American museum as culturally unsystematized provides a blueprint for complicating Margaret Fuller's understanding of Longfellow as "middle-class." If, as Levine argues, early to mid-nineteenth century

citizens “shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes than their descendants were to experience a century later,” Fuller’s “middling” of Longfellow presents not a clear cultural category, but a loose understanding of what he is not. To be a “middle-class” poet is to be other than the creators of “mock poetry” who are solely “fed by their own will to be seen of men”(Levine 9; Fuller 151, 152). It is likewise to be other than the poets of “the Pantheon, from which issue the grand decrees of immortal thought”(151). What “middle-class” entails in positive terms is less clear from Fuller’s neither/nor definition of the category. I suggest that we re-evaluate Fuller’s understanding of the class in relation to the mid-century collection. Longfellow’s work is less “tastefully arranged museum” than tastefully disordered, its diversity of influences suggesting that Longfellow does not hold himself tensely between extremes of high and low, as Fuller suggests, but rather participates in the far ends of both of these categorizations. Longfellow’s “middle-class” is not a cultural vacuum, but a space of cultural excess, a space where commercialism and disinterested aesthetics, craft and art, can overlap. This sense of the “middle-class” is a means of understanding Longfellow that goes beyond a convenient critical category, and becomes a means of discussing fragmentation in both the form and the content of his work.

In this chapter, I first trace Longfellow’s habits of home collection, which demonstrate his investment in the material object (whether of art or craft) and his understanding of its function as a personal and historical marker. Next, I look to three ekphrastic poems that puzzle out the boundaries between art and craft. The definition of these terms that emerges from these poems ultimately leads into *Michael Angelo*, an

ambitious work that resists the simplifying gestures of much earlier commentary on the artist in favor of a complex portrayal of a figure characterized as part stonemason, part divinely-ordained artist. Longfellow's resistance to drawing boundaries – whether between craftsmanship and artistry, femininity and masculinity, or imitation and originality— is the factor that most clearly defines *Michael Angelo*. It is also this factor that can allow us to reclaim Fuller's assessment of Longfellow as “middle-class” in constructive terms, not as an aesthetic purgatory, but as a conscious choice, a self-positioning between aesthetic extremes. My readings of Longfellow's representation of the visual arts in *Michael Angelo* and other art-centered works considers how the fragmentary nature of these metaphors can shape our understanding of Longfellow's ekphrastic canon, and of Longfellow's canon as a whole.

### **Longfellow at Home**

In this section, I look to Longfellow's personal and domestic relation to the collection of visual objects as evidence of an aesthetic driven by eclecticism and association rather than strict classification. This aesthetic shapes my reading of his ekphrastic work, which I see as self-consciously probing the categories of art and craft. Longfellow's biographical and literary relation to the visual arts and crafts is usually read solely through the lens of one of three closely related ideas: a concern with materiality, an interest in the history and tradition of the crafted object, and a connection to the conspicuous consumption of nineteenth-century bourgeois “gewgaws.” While all of these relations to the object are evident in Longfellow's biography and work, his poetry transforms these objects from markers of consumption to historical and sentimental sites,

objects that call into play the specific contexts or emotions of their histories.

Longfellow's encounters with the visual arts betray an interest in the aesthetic potential of the eclectic collecting in which he himself participated. Such eclecticism calls into question recent critical perspectives that locate Longfellow solely as a "competent redistributor of cultural goods" in opposition to the role of "godlike creator of unique meaning"(Irmscher 3). I argue that Longfellow's domestic artworks and artifacts, as his ekphrastic poems, show him approaching both of these extremes with equal proficiency.

The Age of the Museum in America had its roots not in international art tourism, but in a national interest in traditional hand-crafted American objects such as ceramics. At the end of the eighteenth century, local historical societies began to form with the goal of collecting and preserving American antiquities including books, manuscripts and household objects. At the fore in 1791 was the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), followed by the New York Historical Society in 1804. An institution of somewhat broader reach but similar goals, the American Antiquarian Society formed in 1812. In the course of the 1820s, more local societies followed in Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Groups of serious individual collectors of antiquities also grew in the first half of the century, especially in New England, where a longer local history facilitated the discovery of collectibles. After the Civil War, a number of societies including the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) encouraged individuals in their collecting efforts. (Lockwood 64-67).

Longfellow's work and life closely follows this interest in the handcrafted visual object. A writer in *The Atlantic Monthly* shortly after his death suggested that the writer's poetry was responsible for the recent rise in "the graphic and constructive arts and music"

because “his appropriating genius drew within the circle of his art a great variety of illustration and suggestion from the other arts”(“Mr. Longfellow and the Artists” 826). Historical perspective may have tempered this assertion: today, it seems clear that Longfellow was a small part of a larger movement drawn to the “suggestion” of the visual arts, broadly defined. By the time that he began attending Bowdoin College as an undergraduate in 1822, the school had secured the first donations that made up its campus museum, the first such collection in the nation (Coleman 10-15). Longfellow’s letters home from his first visit to Europe, shortly after graduating from college, show frequent mention of art and artists. After he had established himself as a writer, Longfellow was actively involved in the illustration and visual layout of his works, offering suggestions for images to the editors of his many illustrated volumes. His writing itself has often been considered strikingly imagistic, and passages of his most famous works, including *Evangeline* and *Hiawatha*, are inspired by paintings. Artistic appreciation and collection formed an important part of Longfellow’s domestic life and lived on in his sons Charles, whose collection of Japanese decorative arts contributed to the aesthetic of his parents’ home, and Ernest, a painter who illustrated a posthumously published edition of his father’s collected poems.<sup>67</sup>

The art of Longfellow’s domestic life has itself been collected in a 2007 Maine Historical Society exhibit, “Drawing Together: the Arts of the Longfellows,” which presents the visual culture of three generations of the Longfellow family. These works

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<sup>67</sup> For a detailed treatment of Charles Longfellow’s travel and collecting practices, see Christine Guth, *Longfellow’s Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting and Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). The “objects” that Longfellow collected included ceramics, furnishings, photographs, and a full-back tattoo of an Asian carp. Prints were made from twenty of Ernest’s paintings in *Twenty Poems from Longfellow* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1884).

showcase the values often associated with the poet's canon as a whole: domesticity, community, history, and craftsmanship. But the eclecticism of the exhibition also indicates the permeability of aesthetic categories—and textual and imagistic boundaries— within the Longfellows' domestic space. The show includes work encompassing embroidery samplers, oil portraits, architectural plans, children's drawings, adults' drawings, sculptures and maps. Some of the works are collaborative, like drawings initialed by both mother and daughter, or large drawings undertaken by both Longfellow sons. Both the poet and his wife Fanny took drawing lessons with the professional artist Francis Greater, who also illustrated Longfellow's poem "The Skeleton in Armor." Ernest Longfellow, who would later become a professional painter, produced childhood drawings that were submitted to serious scrutiny, as the poet-father annotated each with date, subject matter and the graphic problem confronted (Korzenik 493-5). Other childhood art projects were inspired by well-known works, like the spooled drawings that reproduced the aims of John Banvard's panorama paintings of the Mississippi River Valley. Banvard's painting also influenced Longfellow's own textual work, inspiring descriptive passages in *Evangeline* (Irmscher 85). The intermingling of text and image is likewise evident in the local subject matter of many of Longfellow's own carefully rendered drawings of the landscapes or houses in the environs of Cambridge, which embody the dictum expressed at the end of his "Gaspar Becerra"(1850): "O thou sculptor, painter, poet!/ Take this lesson to thy heart: / That is best which lieth nearest; / Shape from that thy work of art." (Korzenik 491-498; *The Seaside* 70).

The interaction of text and image is also sustained in many of the creative projects that Longfellow undertook specifically for his children. Among the works in the poet's archives in the Houghton Library are the extensive illustrated stories that the poet wrote for his children. These tales—humorous, densely illustrated, and often indirectly didactic—reveal much about Longfellow's family and the function that art played in this part of his life. Longfellow's illustrated stories for his children, such as the sagas "Little Merrythought," "Peter Piper," and "Peter Quince" showcase the interaction of the visual and verbal narrative. In "Little Merrythought," the series' protagonist is a tiny man composed of a turkey's wishbone, something between a pet and a companion for Longfellow's children, who appear in thinly veiled as characters. Longfellow at various points considered editing the series, which he worked on from 1847 to 1855, for publication, but it exists today only in manuscript-form. "Peter Quince" and "Peter Piper," likewise unpublished, center on the misadventures of well-meaning but slightly buffoonish protagonists, often in the context of international travel, one of Longfellow's favorite literary subjects. (Irmscher 86-93; 143-155).

The decision not to publish ultimately places Longfellow's illustrations in his home collection of (largely original) art objects rather than in his (largely mass-produced) literary bibliography. But categorizations such as reproduction and originality provide little real guidance in thinking of the place of visuality in Longfellow's life and work. The diversity of his home collection, which features both original objects and reproductions, has a strong parallel in the mid-century museum. Longfellow's home in Cambridge was known to both friends and strangers for its beautiful material objects, and visitors in his lifetime were—as they still are—granted tours of the possessions. For

some, such objects connoted solely material wealth. Emerson, for instance, wrote in his journal in 1853 of his reluctance to visit Longfellow in his home: “Longfellow, we cannot go & talk with; there is a palace, & servants, & a row of bottles of different coloured wines & wine glasses, & fine coats”(447 *Emerson in his Journals*). The “different coloured wines” in the Longfellow home were undoubtedly part of the status-conscious collection of mid-nineteenth century America, but such objects were also a personal means of interacting with history. In Longfellow’s office, for instance, prized objects included markers of both sentimental and commercial value: Thomas Moore’s and Coleridge’s quill pens; fragments of Dante’s coffin; first editions of various works; and crayon portraits of Emerson, Sumner and Hawthorne. Irmischer argues that these objects formed not a high-cultural “shrine,” but were symbolic of Longfellow’s understanding of literature, in which writing was “achieved in patient dialogue with those who had come before”(44). These objects, far from being simply status symbols, stand as personal and historical markers, connecting Longfellow to creators of the past and the present, presiding over the scene of his writing much in the same way that intertextual references and passages permeate the text of his writing. Contemporary photographs and commentary from visitors indicate that the office-collection was less “tastefully arranged Museum” than it was an often disordered space of influence and association in which Longfellow’s children also played. (Irmischer 43-44).

The reading public came to associate Longfellow and his work with this varied home collection—as did the poet himself. A sort of contemporary visual culture sprang up around the home and its contents. In addition to the numerous photographs of the poet in his study—often sitting almost incidentally off to one side, or dwarfed by the objects

on the room—prints of the poet in his home were common, especially by the 1870s, when the poet’s own immortalization as national treasure was complete.<sup>68</sup> A nineteen-page profile of the writer in the November 1878 *Scribner’s* includes no fewer than twelve large illustrations—all of them of a room in the house or its surroundings. Though the article devotes only a few paragraphs to Longfellow’s historic home (which had briefly been Washington’s headquarters), a connection between an artist’s work and his domestic space introduces the profile and contextualizes these prints: “We find in all biographies that all writers, even the greatest, are influenced by their surroundings” (“Henry Wadsworth Longfellow” 1). Other articles note Longfellow’s “*penchant* for pipe collecting,” architectural details of the building, and particular artworks in his collection. An ekphrastic newspaper poem, “On a Portrait Owned by H.W. Longfellow and Painted by Tintoretto,” celebrates the poet as sharing the sight of the painting with “lesser mortals.” Longfellow was conscious enough of this documentation that he clipped many of these articles and assembled them, alongside of hand-written entries on notable events taking place in the home, in a scrapbook labeled “Craigie House.” He also carefully archived the contents of his various home collections, keeping notebooks, for instance, of both alphabetically-organized logs of the wines in the cellar and the paintings throughout his home.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Longfellow National Historic Site at the poet’s former home in Cambridge, MA houses many of the original prints and negatives of these photographs, and keeps a record and reproductions of images at other institutions.

<sup>69</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. I have not been able to find the source for the article noting Longfellow’s “*penchant* for pipe-collecting” or the ekphrastic poem; as many of the articles in the Craigie House scrapbook, the title and date have been clipped off both. The author of the poem is noted as James Berry Bensel; the Tintoretto portrait has been shown to be inauthentic. It is clear

This eclecticism—a careful attention not just to paintings, but to pipes and wines—is the dominant characteristic of the home collection. Longfellow’s own participation in this wide spectrum of art-craft collecting, and his poetry’s participation in the same variety, can get lost in reading Longfellow entirely against the grain of originality. The appreciation of the imitative nature of Longfellow’s verse—which Jackson aptly calls “so thoroughly derivative that it becomes authentic, so artful that it becomes natural”—often makes an implicit argument for understanding Longfellow’s production as craft (“Longfellow’s Tradition” 471). Longfellow’s “borrowings,” hidden to the point of transparency, are an important source of the work’s widespread resonance with mass audiences. If we choose to see Longfellow as “less as an ‘original’ creator than as the competent redistributor of common cultural goods, whose relationship with his audience was based on a system of exchange, both monetary and emotion,” (Irmscher 67) then we are clearly aligning him with nineteenth-century conceptions of craft.<sup>70</sup> So while a positive emphasis on Longfellow’s derivations offers a constructive critical shift, to argue that Longfellow conceived of his poetry exclusively in craftsman’s terms limits the work’s broader spectrum.

This equation of Longfellow’s work with craft is problematized not only by the more open attitude toward art-craft distinctions apparent in the poet’s home collection,

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that Longfellow read these newspaper articles carefully, as many include the poet’s marginalia and corrections.

<sup>70</sup> Longfellow’s business-savvy is well-documented. See for instance Irmscher 53-58 or Charvat 106-167. The division of craft and art in the early nineteenth century depended largely on whether or not one was dependent on such economic “systems of exchange”: artisans were, artists were not. After the Civil War, the role of professional (economically dependent) artist gained prestige only as it set itself in opposition to working class “art labor”: fabric design, “ornamental terra-cotta brick, ceramics, stained glass, and wrought iron” (Korzenik 497-499).

but by the complications of his ekphrastic canon. The ekphrastic work offers a vision of artistry that supplements the diligent workmanship of “craft” poems like “The Village Blacksmith”(1842) whose protagonist “Each morning sees some task begin, / Each evening sees it close.” There is more to Longfellow’s work—and to his artistic self-presentation— than the redistribution of such “common cultural goods,” and his ekphrastic canon shows earnest thought over categories such as craft and fine art, emulation and originality. These poems are much less likely than others to be read critically by either Longfellow’s contemporaries or modern critics. Of less obvious nationalistic or historical import than sweeping narratives such as *Hiawatha* or *Evangeline*, these poems –often short lyrics—are easy to dismiss as ornamental museum pieces, genteel constructions of cultural capital. Suspiciously Euro-centric, they can seem as little more than evidence of travel or learning. But beyond this facade, these poems test the boundaries between artistic classes, alternately pointing categories out as distinct, and treating them in ways that imply overlap. They also suggest an alternate manner of construing the idea of collection at this historical point, emphasizing a fragmentary, cyclic history rather than a clear teleology of artistic development.

### **The Poetry of Collection**

Longfellow’s home, the Craigie house in Cambridge, is a museum that in some ways embodies the idea of cyclic history. The poet initially rented a room there as a young professor in 1837, attracted to a history which included its use as George Washington’s headquarters during the Siege of Boston. When he married into the wealthy Appleton family in 1843, he received the home as a wedding present from his

father-in-law and continued to live there until his death in 1882. George Putnam's *Homes of American Authors* (1853), a volume that includes essays on the homes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Catherine Sedgwick and Washington Irving, also prominently features the Craige House. The sketch begins with a description of the house's "association with the early days of our revolution"(266). These associations, the author writes, inhabit the poet's mind and ultimately influence the course of his poetry: "For ever after, his imagination is a more lordly picture-gallery than that of ancestral halls"(269). The house too is in turn influenced by Longfellow: "He who has written the Golden Legend knows, best of all, the reality and significance of that life in the old Craige House, whose dates, except for this slight sketch, had almost dropped from history"(286). The celebrity of Longfellow's writing preserves the house in cultural memory, as under his ownership it "has again acquired a distinctive interest in history"(278). Longfellow's fame curates, preserving a piece of American history that otherwise might have been lost, even as his writing is shaped by this same history into a rich "picture gallery." Both house and intellect become museum spaces whose collections overlap. By providing a new chapter in the history of the house, Longfellow imbues what is now known as the Craige-Longfellow House with enough cultural capital to continue to function as a museum that showcases not just Longfellow's tenure in the home but that of those generations of inhabitants that preceded him. The poet's ekphrastic work may have fallen short of shoring up an aesthetic legacy akin to the biographical one, but shows a similar appreciation of layered history, and aspires to a similar curatorial power.

The historical witness of artistic objects infused Longfellow's poetry much as his life. Longfellow's writing on (primarily) European art functions as an alternate home

collection, an accumulation of the works that could not or would not be collected on the poet's travels. In "The Old Bridge at Florence," "Kéramos," "Giotto's Tower" and *Michael Angelo*, Longfellow brings together site-specific works and work spaces that most Americans had never seen firsthand. These poems reveal Longfellow's perspective on how such objects might be categorized, assembled, and understood. His literary collection presents a logic as clear as that of any material collection, but as we will see, the understanding that underlies this collection is uniquely inclusive. While the trend in American art collecting and exhibition moved increasingly toward the creation of a comprehensive narrative for any given group of collected works, Longfellow's poems embrace instead the fragmentary, rejecting cohesion in favor of the suggestive part. Longfellow's poems, rather than seeing themselves as providing a teleology of artistic development, emphasize the fragmentary nature of artistic production and artistic history, inviting readers to see themselves as a piece in the narrative, rather than its ultimate culmination.

The ekphrastic sonnet, "The Old Bridge at Florence"(1875), written after what would be the poet's last visit to Europe, marks the monument's historical witness within Florence, but functions as far more than a nostalgic marker of the city.<sup>71</sup> The first lines mark the bridge's origin ("Taddeo Gaddi built me. I am old, / Five centuries old.") and the rest of the work unfolds the experiences that this structure has stood through, including the battles between the factions representing the Holy Roman Emperor and the papacy and the later expulsion of the Medici from Florence. The sonnet's final, awkwardly sensual lines—"And when I think that Michael Angelo/ Hath leaned on me, I

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<sup>71</sup> All citations of this poem are from *The Masque of Pandora and other Poems* 151.

glory in myself”—underline the importance of historical touch, even across centuries.

The bridge has no physical markers of its own and is described through the poem only as “old,” its shape outlined through the touch of the creator that opens the poem, and the form of Michelangelo that closes it. The imprint of this historical touch is more important to understanding the work’s significance than any architectural feature, just as Thomas Moore’s quill pen carries its significance entirely in its former owner’s fingerprint. The value of these objects lies less in the specificity of their crafted features than in their connection to varied historical and aesthetic moments.

At the same time, Longfellow’s choice of cultural monuments calls to mind the intermixing of commerce and high art typical of his poetry. “The old bridge” is the literal translation of the site more commonly known as the Ponte Vecchio, the bridge that since its reconstruction by Gaddi in 1345 has housed the shops built into its structure. In Longfellow’s time as in our own, these shops are jewelers, a fact which provides the sense for the twelfth line of the poem: “Florence adorns me with her jewelry.” That the bridge, which in the first eleven lines is described entirely in terms of historical endurance, is also a central site of commerce, points to the intermixing of artistic categories, and intermingling of past with present, that we see throughout Longfellow’s work. As a monument, the bridge is both a historical site marked by Gaddi’s artistic pedigree and Michelangelo’s leisured leaning, as well as a modern-day bustling center of sale catering to the tourist industry. Commerce, artistry and history are likewise intertwined in Longfellow’s most sustained ode to craftsmanship, “Kéramos”(1877).

“Kéramos,” a narrative poem following a Maine potter through an international survey of ceramic traditions, is obscure today, but was considered culturally relevant

enough at the moment of its composition that *Harpers* offered Longfellow \$1,000 for the rights to publish the ten-page poem in the December 1877 edition of the magazine.

Composed on the heels of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia—at which American potters had made a weak showing—“Kéramos” was largely intended as a call to arms for American craftsmen. The poem had an afterlife in excerpt form in American ceramics periodicals, and apparently accomplished some of its practical aims as late-century potters refined their skills and gained some international renown. But the poem also betrays a clear understanding of the place of original conception in visual craft (and art). (Irmscher 124-137).

Throughout the poem, in which we follow the potter on a disembodied journey across different ceramic traditions, central themes circle around originality and individual conception. “All are made of clay” is a continuous refrain, and the creation and destruction of pottery is a well-worn metaphor for the earthly cycles of birth and death.<sup>72</sup> The unoriginality of the trope of man as clay is fitting, as originality is far from the poem’s purpose or the purpose of the potter’s art. This art is made by “no hand” but guided rather by the “Creator”(10). Though the narrator lavishes description on objects and places, many of the craftsmen creating objects, including the poem’s protagonist, are anonymous. A passage near the end of the poem underlines this anonymity:

...Never man,  
As artist or as artisan,  
Pursuing his own fantasies,  
Can touch the human heart, or please,  
Or satisfy our nobler needs,  
As he who sets his willing feet  
In Nature's footprints, light and fleet,

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<sup>72</sup> All of the citations that follow are from the poem’s first publication in book-form, in the volume *Kéramos and Other Poems* (1878).

And follows fearless where she leads. (24).

This perspective on both “artist” and “artisan” favors tradition and natural form over original conception, at the same time as it points up, then conflates the distinction between art and craft. Longfellow’s request to the editors of *Harpers* that the poem be illustrated not with human figures but with images of the vessels and plates described aligns well with this de-emphasis of the individual will (*Letters* 6: 289). *Harpers* ultimately published the poem alongside of images of brawny craftsmen, attractive onlookers, and global landscapes, which speak instead to a more traditional sense of (masculine) artistry as located in specific personality and location.

Other examples of the blending of art and craft, original conception and imitation abound throughout the poem. The poem within the poem, recording the journey through the different regions of pottery-creation, is itself the product of creative hijacking:

Thus still the Potter sang, and still,  
By some unconscious act of will,  
The melody and even the words  
Were intermingled with my thought,  
As bits of colored thread are caught,  
And woven in nests of birds. (5).

This seamless “intermingling” of song and thought produces the subject of the poem, the speaker’s record of the origins of ceramic tradition. This record in turn credits the intermixing of arts for producing ceramic excellence. The workshops of Gubbio “In perfect finish emulate / Faeza, Florence, Pesaro”(12). One Italian ceramicist “caught / Something of [Raphael’s] transcendent grace, / and into fictile fabrics wrought / Suggestions of the master’s thought”(13). In Florence, the “more fragile forms of clay” are “Hardly less beautiful” than the frescos of Lucca della Robbia (14). The images on

the Imari porcelain of Japan are “The counterfeit and counterpart / Of Nature reproduced in Art”(23). Imitation, throughout the poem, is both distinct from the real thing, and entirely equal to it, both its “counterfeit and counterpart.”

“Kéramos” also presents a new approach to craft history in the context of late-century American ceramics collecting. Such historical collecting, as J. Lockwood writes, was often driven by a nativist as well as aesthetic sensibility: “In saving china, collectors often imagined themselves to be recovering a story of Anglo supremacy and to be defending it against the threat of foreigners as well as the threat of lower-class rural Anglos, both of whom were considered incapable of stewarding the nation’s historical treasures”(70). Much American collecting was centered on the ceramics of the northeast states, Northern European, and Asia, which had provided England and America with its first models for porcelains. Collecting was by its very nature nostalgic, reflecting back on an apparently simpler pre-industrial era. “Kéramos” undercuts this aesthetic in the breadth of the ceramic genealogy that it presents, describing potters not just in Holland, China and Japan, but also in Italy, Greece, and Egypt and proclaiming that “The human race, /Of every tongue, of every place...Are kindred and allied by birth, / And made of the same clay”(19). The country most important to American ceramics collectors, England, is elided altogether. The poem’s editor was attuned to this gap, suggesting that Longfellow include some references to Wedgwood ceramics, a popular American target for collection, and he only replied that he did not see any way of “treating picturesquely” such works in the context of the poem.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Letters* 6:298. In spite of Longfellow’s broader aesthetic focus, contemporary Anglo-American firms were likely the lens through which many readers understood “Kéramos.” A local Boston ceramics dealer, for instance, inspired by the publication of

The poem clearly had aims apart from nationalist nostalgia: the focus of “Kéramos” is not retrospective, but forward-looking, albeit driven by a cyclic perspective on craft history. The refrain of the poem, which begins with the potter’s refrain of “Turn, turn my wheel!” centers readers in the idea that the work of the past helps to inform the work of the present, rather than existing within its own hermetically sealed history. The last lines of the poem emphasize this view of history and of art: “Behind us in our path we cast / The broken potshards of the past, / And all are ground to dust at last, / And trodden into clay”(25). Longfellow presents the value of the art of the past not in its wholeness as a preserved and categorized object, but in its existence as a part, a “broken potshard” that makes up a piece of the “clay” of the present. Far from the preservationist aims of the traditional collector, the narrator of “Kéramos” understands the value of past artistry through the processes that it instructs rather than the unscathed objects that it passes down. The poem’s emphasis on the permeability of influence and the fragility of the individual art-object makes for an unusually motley collection, one that provides little cohesion beyond the refrain of movement: “Turn, turn, my wheel!”

The tropes familiar from “The Old Bridge at Florence” and “Kéramos” continue to develop in “Giotto’s Tower” and *Michael Angelo*, in spite of some superficial divergences. By calling attention to the artists’ names in the titles of these works, Longfellow introduces artistic individuality as a central concern, an idea that “Kéramos,” titled for the material of production rather than the producer, and “The Old Bridge,” clearly evade. *Michael Angelo* in particular carries a biographical concern with the

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“Kéramos,” presented Longfellow with a commemorative pitcher featuring the poet’s face on both sides and the titles of his most celebrated works along the spout. The pitcher was created by Wedgewood. (Longfellow National Historic Site).

individual creator through the drama. But both *Michael Angelo* and “Giotto’s Tower” openly question the power of the isolated artist and present creation as a process taken up by many hands rather than a single product depending on individualized originality. The “broken potshards” of Kéramos are picked up in these latter poems in the form of a focus on fragmentation, and a sense that the art of the present consists of a reconfiguration of the pieces of the past. Both works, like “Kéramos” and “The Old Bridge,” embrace the cross-pollination of craft and fine art.

“Giotto’s Tower,”(1867) provides a sense of the different terms that Longfellow consolidates under the idea of fragmentation and partiality.<sup>74</sup> A synopsis of the deceptively complex sonnet might gloss the poem as a celebration of the beauty of the famously unfinished tower, in spite of its incompleteness. As Robert Gale writes: “Many sweet, restrained, uncomplaining persons devoted to answering the requests of the Holy Spirit lack nothing but a halo such as artists paint above saints’ foreheads. So it is with Giotto’s tower”(94). A closer reading produces a subtly different conclusion: Giotto’s tower is perfect because of, not in spite of, its apparent lack. The sonnet’s first octave introduces this idea through its reversal: figures who fall short of perfection precisely because of their apparent flawlessness, who “are in their completeness incomplete.” The restrained structure of these lines performs the self-containment of their subjects, who are too simplistically whole:

How many lives, made beautiful and sweet  
By self-devotion and by self-restraint,  
Whose pleasure is to run without complaint  
On unknown errands of the Paraclete,  
Wanting the reverence of unshodden feet,  
Fail of the nimbus which the artists paint

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<sup>74</sup> Citations are from the poem’s first collection in *Flower-de-Luce*.

Around the shining forehead of the saint,  
And are in their completeness incomplete! (49).

The earnest Christians of these lines “fail of the nimbus” of sainthood not because of any lack on their part but rather because of a too-great “completeness.” What they “want” is not any addition but an absence, “unshodden feet,” and the sacrifice that this absence implies. Instead of making such sacrifice, they are turned inward with “self-devotion” and “self-restraint,” deriving “pleasure” from the idea of self-denial, of running “without complaint / On unknown errands.” The lines themselves enact the self-enclosure of these figures through the ABBA rhyme scheme and end-stopped lines. Similarly, the opening line’s apparent question (“How many lives”) becomes an exclamation by the final line (“in their completeness incomplete!”), breaking down the promise of a dialogue or exchange beyond the solipsistic speaker. Like the “beautiful” lives, these lines are characterized primarily by restraint.

While these devices are familiar features of the sonnet-form, the final sestet of the poem marks a dramatic shift. Focusing on the perfect imperfection of the tower, this section challenges self-containment in both form and subject:

In the old Tuscan town stands Giotto's tower,  
The lily of Florence blossoming in stone, —  
A vision, a delight, and a desire, —  
The builder's perfect and centennial flower,  
That in the night of ages bloomed alone,  
But wanting still the glory of the spire. (50).

The interlacing rhyme scheme, the feminine rhyme of lines 9 and 12, and the dashes at the end of lines 10 and 11 open up the form of this sestet, loosening the restrained form of the preceding octave. The subject likewise opens, from the “self-restraint” of the previous section to the organic “blossoming” in stone of the tower. Giotto’s tower is

described not in terms of beauty, as the aspirants of the previous octave, but in terms of growth and potentiality. It “bloom[s]”; it is a “desire” and a “vision,” rather than a static object. The history of the tower, or Campanile, tells a similar story: designed and begun by Giotto at the end of his life in 1334, it was left unfinished at his death in 1337. The design was then picked up by Andrea Pisano, who in his tenure as builder was faithful to Giotto’s original plans. Finally, Francesco Talenti took over the building in 1348 and completed it in 1359, though he altered Giotto’s design by omitting the tower’s proposed spire. (Trachtenberg 3-5).

The tower, then, is literally incomplete, but nonetheless “perfect”; it reverses the terms of the previous stanza, and is complete in its incompleteness. The tower is overhung always by the shadow-structure of the unconstructed spire, much as the saint of the octave before is graced with the immaterial “nimbus” that signals his “perfection”. The tower is “Giotto’s” because his blueprints form its foundation, but it is also the tower of the “builder,” who made the choice to leave the completion of structure in the minds of viewers. Longfellow’s poem, which in its title seems to defend single artistic authorship, in fact questions the validity of understanding only the isolated artist-creator as the source of “perfect” art, and opens up the idea of perfection to include the collaboratively produced and the unfinished. Within the schema of “Giotto’s Tower,” the sacrifice of some part of the ideal design creates a form of completion that goes far beyond material understandings of conclusion.

In *Michael Angelo*, Longfellow continues to use the trope of the fragment to question the nature of originality and individuality, and in so doing defines the terms for his literary canon. The subject of *Michael Angelo* ensures that Longfellow’s debate

occurs against basic cultural assumptions about artistic production, particularly assumptions held about the European high-art canon. Lene Østermark-Johansen, in her study of Michelangelo's nineteenth-century reception, calls him "the great individual who becomes the receptacle for a wide range of other people's projections"(17).

Longfellow's "projection" is distinct in its embrace of the complexity of Michelangelo's work, including its literary and visual loose ends. *Michael Angelo* may confirm Margaret Fuller's understanding of Longfellow's writing as a "tastefully arranged Museum," a collection in which the parts remain distinct and fail to create a cohesive whole, but as I show in this section, such a collection was based both on an older model of the museum collection and a newer model of criticism.

### **Collecting Michelangelo**

Postbellum, high-profile American art collectors, in striking contrast to Longfellow-as-literary-collector, were concerned with presenting a teleological view of art history, and by showing through their works a narrative of gradual artistic advance. The cabinet of curiosities model was being gradually superseded by a mode of collection and of exhibition that functioned by exclusion, creating a focused narrative of art and leaving out works that did not contribute to this narrative. When wealthy collectors like James Jackson Jarves and Thomas Jefferson Bryan began buying the works that would eventually form the first significant collections of European Renaissance painting in America, they collected with a newly defined sense of purpose. Though the collections were spotty in quality, their aim was toward providing "something like a history of the progress of painting"(Miller 33). Just as American ceramics collectors focused on certain

types of works in creating a narrative of national identity, collectors began to look to art for the narration of specific stories. Jarves's collection of early Italian Renaissance paintings, for instance, told the now well-known story of the development of certain aesthetic characteristics—linear perspective, chiaroscuro, anatomical study—into the High Renaissance. Such narratives necessarily had the effect of limiting the eclecticism of earlier-century galleries and aiming toward, if not always arriving at, an idea of wholeness.

At the same time as this mode of art collection was taking hold, critics and translators were making new strides in the compilation and publication of Michelangelo's poetry. The nineteenth-century was, as Østermark-Johansen writes, "*the* century when Michelangelo became a text, in addition to his previous reputation as a painter, sculptor and architect"(22). The first English biography of the Michelangelo, by Richard Duppa, appeared in 1806 and can be credited with inspiring Anglophone interest in the artist's poetry. Titled *The Life and Literary Works of Michael Angelo Buonarroti*, it reprinted the entire Italian first edition of the poetry, published twenty letters, and included a handful of commissioned translations by Robert Southey and William Wordsworth. By 1869, the biography had been through five editions. In 1840, John Edward Taylor published a monograph on the poems alone, translating 35 in English prose, and introducing the whole with a 100-page essay. John S. Harford's voluminous 1857 biography likewise highlights poetry, and includes translations of nine madrigals and 22 sonnets. No fewer than eight Italian editions of Michelangelo's poetry were published during the nineteenth century, one of which, Cesare Guasti's 1863 text, was widely available in England. Later

in the century, both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Addington Symonds worked on translations. (Østermark-Johansen 33-50).

The interest in narrative cohesion that increasingly shaped art collection is also reflected in these textual collections of Michelangelo. Works not seen as in line with Michelangelo's artistic image, works that "upset [the Victorian] image of him as the divine, grand and melancholy artist" (Østermark-Johansen 60) were either left untranslated or polished into a nearly unrecognizable form. The apparent lack of polish in the poems—which manuscripts show to have gone through extensive revision—was often seen by editors and translators as "yet another instance of the artist's *non-finito*: a difficulty with finishing his works which surely could not be intentional" and so was "corrected" with a filling in of gaps (31). The lighthearted or cynical aspects of the canon, including long burlesque poems in *terza rima* and *ottava rima*, not in keeping with perceptions of the artist, were not translated into English in the nineteenth century (60). Michelangelo's homoerotic sonnets were not faithfully translated until the end of the century, and with this work came an accompanying shift of narrative on the part of the translator, Symonds, who "saw in Michelangelo a potential source for the exploration of 'sexual inversion' and its manifestation in the individual"(47).

The nineteenth century was also the century in which Michelangelo's visual works became accessible to a much broader English-speaking audience, although responses to this canon likewise suggest a very partial embrace of the work. The bulk of Michelangelo's visual canon—consisting largely of monumental marble statues, architectural works and frescos— defied collection and circulation in a way that the verbal work did not, but some images found entry into a newly classified public space.

Today, a quarter of Michelangelo's graphic work resides in three English collections, a shift that took place largely in the course of the nineteenth century, as both drawings and manuscripts passed from private to public hands. The Royal Collection at Windsor, the British Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford all contain significant collections of work that, in the nineteenth century at least, were considered an indisputable part of Michelangelo's canon (Østermark-Johansen 65). The reception of these works by British audiences, though, indicates an unspoken bias echoing that toward the literary work. In spite of the large number of sketches and partial architectural design in public British collections, critics of Michelangelo's work such as Symonds and John Ruskin almost always preferred to discuss the relatively polished drawings. The looser and more apparently incomplete sketches and studies received much less critical attention, even as writers professed the importance of these works to understanding Michelangelo's process. The same aesthetic biases in both cases pushed editors and critics toward considering only works that conformed to a uniform conception of the artist. (75-116).

This idea of the uniformity of his canon also informed Michelangelo's American reception. Emerson typifies a desire to see the artist in terms that stress the cohesion of his canon. He formalized his own views on the artist in an early lecture titled "Michel Angelo Buonaroti"(1835) which emphasizes the unity of Michelangelo's life and art, his universality, and his independence from outside influence. The introduction to the lecture outlines the span of Michelangelo's life in these terms:

There are few lives of eminent men that are harmonious: few that furnish in all the facts an image corresponding with their fame. But all things recorded of Michel Angelo Buonaroti agree together. He lived one life: he pursued one career....Every line in his biography might be read with wholesome effect. (99)

Michelangelo's interest as a subject of biography lies foremost in his story's unity of effect, the manner in which the moral perfection of the life conforms easily to the physical perfection of the artwork. While Emerson presents a very generalist vision of the artist—he admits in his somewhat convoluted introductory remarks that to many in the audience “much more is known than I know” of the artist's life and work—this generality is in fact key to the cohesion of his argument (99). The narrative that he creates depends on the absence of any details that might disrupt the ideal of perfect unity.

The desire to see in the canon a unified effect did not always produce the adulation that infuses Emerson's response. In some cases, the extremity of the criticism swung in the other direction, while a perspective on the canon's cohesion remained fixed. Few writers fleshed out this dramatically polarized approach to the artist more completely—or more famously—than John Ruskin, whose analysis of Michelangelo in his lecture “The Relation Between Michael Angelo and Tintoret,” (delivered 1870-1, printed 1872) provides a good background to Longfellow's treatment of the artist in *Michael Angelo*. The contexts in which the two discuss the artist are similar, and yet the ends at which they each arrive are divergent enough that Ruskin's essay casts light on the elements of the drama—especially its appreciation of Michelangelo's contradictions—that can be taken for granted in isolation. Both writers are centrally concerned with the opposition of craftsmanship and fine art. Both are equally concerned, at least implicitly, with the accessibility of the artist's work to audiences. But if the analogy for Ruskin's collection is the Oxford gallery collection that his lecture purports to bring to a broader public, the analogy for Longfellow's work is the older, more eclectic public gallery that is by its nature democratically inclusive.

Ruskin claims to have composed his lecture to encourage Oxford students and even “strangers visiting the Galleries” to take advantage of the University’s recently acquired collection of Michelangelo drawings, but this apparently democratizing purpose is superficial at best (3). Not only did the speech almost necessarily have a negative impact on admirers of Michelangelo—Edward Burne-Jones “wanted to drown himself in the Surrey Canal” after a private reading of the papers—but Ruskin’s analysis of the artwork casts doubt on his alleged aim of encouraging a viewership (Burne-Jones 18). He notes, for instance, that deep aesthetic flaws damage many works to the extent that they “ought never to be exhibited to the general public” and even those works remaining are best seen only by artists: “Incipient methods of design are not, and ought not to be, subjects of earnest inquiry to other people”(7-8). Ruskin’s lecture, then is not primarily directed at a general public, but rather targets those few who “ought” to reference the works in question.

Even for that select group, Ruskin finds little positive knowledge to be derived from a study of Michelangelo’s work. Many of the writer’s criticisms of Michelangelo center on the lack of technical skill in his work. Ruskin understands the years from “1480 to 1520” as a “deadly catastrophe” in the world of art, led by the triumvirate of Raphael/Michelangelo/Titian and only eventually countered by Tintoretto who “stands up for a last fight, for Venice and the old time”(13). Bad workmanship is a central fault of this earlier group, and Ruskin takes Michelangelo to task for his execution of works either “hastily and incompletely done” or shoddily completed so that “the best qualities of it perished”(16). This artist “lived in world of court intrigue” (as opposed to Tintoretto and his peers, who “lived as craftsmen”) and criticized oil painting (which Ruskin

considered the highest form of art) because he “had neither the skill to lay a single touch of good oil-painting, nor the patience to overcome even its elementary difficulties”(20, 25). In attributing Michelangelo’s most significant failings to technical deficit, Ruskin emphasizes the division between what he sees as courtly but incompetent fine art, and humble but proficient craftsmanship.

The final paragraphs of the lecture confirm this polarized understanding of art practice. If Michelangelo’s failure as a craftsman is evidenced by the destruction of his works by time, the mark of the accomplished craftsman lies in being threatened by the vagaries of human judgment. Ruskin ends his digressive lecture with a long description of Tintoretto’s *Paradise*, “the most precious work of art of any kind, whatsoever, now existing in the world”(44). This huge oil on canvas, he warns, is “on the eve of final destruction,” as a result of impending reconstructive work in the council chamber where it is housed in Venice (44). The contrast to Michelangelo’s work in the Oxford collection is implicit: while this artist’s loose sketches are sheltered within the preservationist realm of the museum, Tintoretto’s supreme craftsmanship is at the mercy of the outside world, sheltered only by the political mundanity of the council chamber. The lecture thus ends with an appeal to readers to offer this work the same protection that they have granted what is deemed fine art, to recall “the treasures that we forget, while we amuse ourselves with the poor toys”(44-45). Instead of encouraging listeners to visit Michelangelo’s work, the piece concludes in encouraging them to sequester Tintoretto’s, to remove this work from the dangers of the public realm that can threaten even good craftsmanship.

Collection, craftsmanship and artistry are for Longfellow as for Ruskin central terms in the consideration of Michelangelo’s work, but these words take on a radically

different meaning in Longfellow's play. Rather than place Michelangelo solidly in the category of either craft or high art, Longfellow questions the cultural assumptions that give rise to these divisions. Michelangelo occupies the space, alternately, of each category: he was nursed by a stonemason's wife, but also claims the aristocratic heritage that the drama connects to the fine arts. The play embraces time's destructive touch and the artist's tendency to leave works incomplete as entry points for a new generation of artists, rather than evidence of a shoddy artistic practice. Longfellow's vision of artists in *Michael Angelo* is better understood through an older, more democratic museum than through Ruskin's Oxford gallery, in which art is "little likely" to be either "useful or dangerous to my pupils" since "no student has ever asked me a single question respecting these drawings, or, so far as I could see, taken the slightest interest in them"(6).

Longfellow's play, unlike Ruskin's lecture, is populated by visitors: critics who discuss Michelangelo's work, and friends who move through the artist's life. Both problematize one-sided characterizations of the artist's life. Inclusive rather than exclusive, *Michael Angelo* incorporates many biographical versions of the artist into its narrative, and in so doing invites a nuanced understanding of the life and work. Longfellow's drama, though it remained in a desk drawer until after his death, ultimately granted the kind of accessibility that Ruskin's writing (and perhaps also the Oxford galleries) only professed.

### ***Michael Angelo's Open Collection***

The critical treatment of Longfellow's *Michael Angelo* provides a good starting point to a reassessment of the text. The work is, of course, a drama, but even Longfellow's earliest critics were dismissive of its status as "real" drama. Written in

blank verse, and supplemented with only the thinnest of stage-settings, the play focuses almost entirely on character development and has little narrative pull. With its emphasis on long, abstract monologues and its complete absence of any stage direction, it is difficult to imagine the play's performance. As a reviewer in *The Spectator* writes in 1883: "with all its merits—and it certainly contains fine passages—it is dramatic only in form" (1587). Other reviews, such as the 1884 acknowledgement in *Lippincott's Magazine*, refer to the work more often as "poem" than drama. Horace Scudder's biographical introduction to *The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (1922) takes the assumption of the insignificance of the dramatic frame to another, more personal level: "The caution against mistaking a poet's dramatic assumption for his own character and expression is of less force when applied to one in whom the dramatic power was but slightly developed; and the whole poem of 'Michael Angelo,' taken in connection with the time and circumstances of its composition, may fairly be regarded as in some respects Longfellow's *apologia*"(xx). The dramatic scaffolding of the play, because "but slightly developed," simply holds up a thin scrim through which we are amply justified in reading the facts and feelings of Longfellow's late life.

Contemporary criticism reiterates this tendency toward biographical readings of the play. Charles Calhoun's 2004 biography of the poet discusses *Michael Angelo* briefly, considering it as a reflection of Longfellow's "own situation as an artist facing death"(244). Christoph Irmischer's 2006 book of essays on the poet, *Longfellow Redux*, also depends significantly on biography, but takes an opposite tack in its analysis of *Michael Angelo*. Devoting a full five pages to the play—the longest sustained discussion

since its publication—Irmscher finds in the central protagonist a figure who “attracted and appalled” Longfellow, but who in spite of their similar life stages at the time of the play’s composition, is more anti-type than model. As Irmscher writes, “Michelangelo is, in a sense a study of everything Longfellow was *not*—an artist consumed by, made desperate even, by his desire to have the ‘labor of his hand’ match the grand, innovative conceptions in his head”(142). Irmscher sees Longfellow as a writer who felt no shame in literary borrowings and never strove for a modern notion of aesthetic originality. This assessment stands in contrast to the critic’s characterization of Michelangelo as an artist who embodies precisely these ideals of “innovative conception.”

In both of these readings of the work, Michelangelo is a stable signifier of high art, devoted to originality as an artistic ideal. And yet, it is precisely this stability that *Michael Angelo* takes to task. The discrepancy between Calhoun and Irmscher’s nearly opposed readings lies only in whether the critics take Longfellow to subscribe to a stable set of “high art” ideals—and certainly the pendulum in recent Longfellow criticism has swung more to Irmscher’s side, with critics increasingly favoring a more inclusive craftsman’s ideal in discussing Longfellow’s “derivativeness.” This perspective on Longfellow’s work as located to one side of debates about originality and metrical innovation is an overwhelmingly positive one, freeing criticism of Longfellow, or indeed that of any number of other “genteel” poets, from an undercurrent of defensiveness. It locates Longfellow as “middle class” in a manner that does not demand apology. My aim in reading *Michael Angelo* is to submit the figure of the Renaissance artist to this same nuanced scrutiny. In an examination of Longfellow’s Michelangelo, we find that the stable reading of the artist as original, monumental, and unified creator so prevalent in

nineteenth-century artistic criticism, quickly unhinges. His role, instead, is strikingly similar to the in-between “middle-class” place that recent critics have found for Longfellow. The poet’s greatest accomplishment in *Michael Angelo* may have been to redefine this unlikely artist-figure as an emblem for his own literary craft. Placing Michelangelo between the fluid categories of art and craft, unity and fragmentation, history and contemporaneity, showcases Longfellow’s innovation as a cultural critic at the same time as it reveals his artistic self-perception to be located between these extremes.

The opening “Dedication” sonnet in *Michael Angelo: A Fragment* (1883) functions as a curatorial note, providing a sense of the mode of artistic collection in Longfellow’s drama. Far from Ruskin’s hermetic gallery, the collection of *Michael Angelo* is open and fluid, equipped with a permeable sense of originality and historical influence. Though this mode is described here in terms of the architecture of literature, the ideas translate to later discussions of the visual arts:

Nothing that is shall perish utterly,  
But perish only to revive again  
In other forms, as clouds restore in rain  
The exhalations of the land and sea.  
Men build their houses from the masonry  
Of ruined tombs; the passion and the pain  
Of hearts, that long have ceased to beat, remain  
To throb in hearts that are, or are to be.  
So from old chronicles, where sleep in dust  
Names that once filled the world with trumpet tones,  
I build this verse; and flowers of song have thrust  
Their roots among the loose disjointed stones,  
Which to this end I fashion as I must.  
Quickened are they that touch the Prophet's bones.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Michael Angelo: A Drama* 5. All *Michael Angelo* citations refer to this 1884 Houghton, Mifflin and Company edition unless otherwise noted.

This perspective on artistic creation resonates clearly with Longfellow's other ekphrastic work, in both its lack of emphasis on original conception and its natural analogies. The central trope of building homes (or art-objects) from the pieces of the past underlines the sense of historical continuity that is at the foundation of all of Longfellow's accounts of creation, especially that in "Kéramos." As creation in "Kéramos," *Michael Angelo's* historical continuity is enabled precisely by breaking apart the forms of the past: "ruined tombs" become "houses," and Longfellow's own poem is constructed alternately of "old chronicles" and "loose disjointed stones," built with little personal volition ("I fashion as I must") or hope for future endurance. Artistic originality or conception is in this sense of minimal importance. As in "Giotto's Tower," the artistic product is also described in terms of natural cycles: clouds that become rain, flowers that vine through the structure.<sup>76</sup> It is fitting, then, that in the 1884 Houghton-Mifflin illustrated edition of the poem, this "Dedication" is printed in a broken piece of stone from a building-plaque, with a hazy image of the ruins of the Roman Forum in the background and some trees in the foreground. The artistic space into which the "Dedication" leads us is one of both historic destruction and organic growth. This notion of artistry is at odds with modern notions of high art, inspiration and artistic will. As Irmscher writes, "There is little here of what Henry James, in one of his prefaces, called 'the muffled majesty of authorship'"(143). Instead, we find an understanding of artistry that is radically open, where works create themselves from the pieces of the past.

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<sup>76</sup> These "flowers of song" refer to the translations of Michelangelo's poetry that Longfellow had initially considered including in the drama, but that he eventually excised and published in *Kéramos and Other Poems* (1878). See Irmscher 218-19.

It is perhaps inevitable given this openness, that conclusions and inconclusions are a source of concern both in the “Dedication” and in the larger work as a whole. Longfellow’s ideas about historical influence and continuity prevent the arrival at any conclusion that carries the stamp of personal artistic volition. The phrase “to this end” in the penultimate line of the “Dedication” illustrates these concerns, speaking both to a preoccupation with death and a concern with artistic conclusions. In the context of the last lines, the demonstrative “this end” is ambiguous, gesturing both to the literal “end” of the sonnet and to “end” as “purpose” (apparently the purpose of verse-building). “Quickened are they that touch the prophet’s bones” ties up the sonnet, reiterating the ongoing theme of death and rebirth that we see in the opening lines (“Nothing that is shall perish utterly...”) as well as the morbid sense of building “houses from the masonry/ Of ruined tombs.” As we will see, the drama as a whole is wrapped up in these same questions—how to end itself, how to mark the end of life—but is far from as tidily contained as the opening “Dedication.” The drama’s lack of real conclusion, its existence as “Fragment” is an essential characteristic of its structure, pointing to an aesthetic ideal of overflow and a fundamental inability to mark isolated endings.

The “Dedication” provides a foretaste of the major forces—craftsmanship and fine art, derivativeness and originality, history and present, conclusions inconclusive—that underlie the drama. But if “Giotto’s Tower” functions both structurally and thematically as a defense of the incomplete detail, then *Michael Angelo* offers a much more divided argument. Perhaps the most structurally broken and conceptually derivative of Longfellow’s works, its idealized and hyper-masculine protagonist nonetheless offers persuasive arguments for unity and aesthetic originality throughout the play. The

centering conflict of the work is, I argue, the extent to which fragmentation enters the life narrative of a character aligned with the admittedly problematic concept of artistic unity. Neither true protagonist nor anti-hero, Michelangelo is for Longfellow a figure who tests the boundaries of isolated individuality and iconoclastic genius, and who questions whether an artist can attain self-contained wholeness. Most strikingly, unlike the false dialogue that initiates “Giotto’s Tower,” this question is in *Michael Angelo* an honest one, and one that ends in a less definitive declaration. In this sense, the work supports Longfellow’s position as a “middle-class” writer, but rely on elements that go well beyond Fuller’s conception of the term, including artistic self-awareness and an interest in formal qualities as a conduit to meaning.

The textual history of *Michael Angelo* confirms the work’s investment in open-endedness: the play, which remained unfinished in Longfellow’s lifetime, literalizes the argument for the fragment in “Giotto’s Tower.” The first published edition was based on an interpretation of Longfellow’s manuscript, with footnotes and illustrations supplied by the editors. The structurally fragmentary nature of the published document is undeniable: when it was found in Longfellow’s desk drawer after his death in 1882, it carried the label “A Fragment” on its first page (*Writings of HWL* 46). Editors have chosen whether or not to emphasize this incomplete state in their own printings. At the poem’s first publication in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1883 editors dropped the subtitle “A Fragment” in favor of “A Drama” and made no mention of the work’s unfinished state. When it was printed in a lavishly illustrated book edition by Houghton, Mifflin and Company later that same year, this subtitle became “A Dramatic Poem” and a publishers’ note told readers that the work “was written by Mr. Longfellow mainly about ten years

before his death, but was kept by him for occasional revision, and printed after his death in *The Atlantic Monthly* from his final copy.” It was first anthologized in Longfellow’s *Poetical Works* of 1884. Other editions, such as the 1886 Riverside Edition of Longfellow’s collected writings, and the 1898 *Complete Poetical Works* reinstate Longfellow’s original subtitle and stress the unfinished nature of the work. The comprehensive Riverside Edition also includes an appendix of the scenes that Longfellow excised from his final draft, including a final scene at the artist’s death-bed.

The notes to the Riverside edition and the manuscripts on which they are based highlight the difficulty, often elided by editors, of determining Longfellow’s “final copy.” This edition includes an appendix documenting the scenes, or expanded versions of scenes, that Longfellow excised from his final draft. None of these scenes appear in any form in the text or editorial apparatus of the *Atlantic Monthly* or the Houghton Mifflin editions. But within the final text of the Riverside edition, the editor places some sections of text in parentheses, indicating that these were passages included in the play only after the first full draft had been written. These passages appear unmarked and integrated into the final copy of the *Atlantic Monthly* and Houghton Mifflin texts. And while the publisher of this latter edition notes simply that the play is printed “from [Longfellow’s] final copy,” the Riverside publisher states that “[i]t is not possible to say [...] what might have been the final form of *Michael Angelo* had its author chosen to put it into type instead of leaving it in his desk”(vii; 49). Critics have followed the earlier editions of the text in glossing over the problematic nature of the “final copy” and the text-as-fragment.

Based on Longfellow’s own manuscript drafts, the unfinished nature of the work and its titling as “A Fragment” is not an incidental fact of history, but an essential

characteristic of the poem's construction. Longfellow's final working draft of the drama, on which the Riverside and other published editions are based, emphasizes process and parts over a stable document. Recorded in thick bound book with *Michael Angelo* embossed on the spine, the document is written in pencil and marked by frequent erasures, crossed-out passages, and marginal notes. The draft also includes a section at the end of the work consisting entirely of scenes or passages marked as "rejected" or "omitted," suggesting that Longfellow saw the work as defined more by the process of its creation than its narrative beginning and end. (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers).

The play's initial draft emphasizes fragmentation even more dramatically. Unlike many of Longfellow's first drafts, which he wrote in a fairly continuous manner from beginning to end, this draft of *Michael Angelo* is literally written in fragments, recorded on scraps of paper and the back sides of other documents, creating an editorial nightmare of Dickinsonian proportions. Early lines and scenes for the drama were collected in a marble-papered folder now in the Houghton Library, the cover of which is hand-titled "Michael Angelo." The contents are motley: there are two pencil sketches of Vittoria Colonna, single lines of text on small cards, sections of scenes or exchanges between characters on notebook paper, and outlines of the work as it takes shape. Many of the shorter scraps reflect the drama's preoccupation with death: one card reads simply "Old grave-stones of the past," while another prints the line "Great death, the King of shadows, with a touch /Cured all our evils" on the back of a business card. (The most jarring juxtaposition of form and content is a monologue labeled "Death" written out on the back of a list of student absences). Compared to other contemporaneous manuscripts—such as "Kéramos," the first draft of which is a chronologically-dated clean copy—the thematic

focus and the general disorganization of these papers is striking. (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers).

The remarkably haphazard format of *Michael Angelo*'s drafts was likely due at least in part to the wide span of time over which the play was composed. Considering that the work that takes up less than 200 broadly-margined, generously illustrated pages in the Houghton-Mifflin edition, Longfellow was unusually long at work on the play. Though most of the scenes were conceived in the early 1870s, Longfellow wrote and dated the earliest part of the poem—a striking scene in which Michelangelo recounts an apocalyptic dream—in 1850. On April 21, 1872, he wrote to lifelong friend George Washington Greene, “I have been writing a poem, which I think will please you. It is not yet finished, but enough is written to make me see my way clear. It is a dramatic poem to be called ‘Michael Angelo.’ . . . The subject is beautiful, and I shall be disappointed if you do not like it”(5: 534). By May of that year he could write in his journal that “the Poem in its first form is complete”(qtd. in Tucker 343). The work then existed in a more or less finished state for the final decade of Longfellow's life, a decade during which he published seven full volumes of new work, one of which, *Kéramos and Other Poems*, included the translations of Michelangelo's sonnets originally slated for inclusion in the drama.<sup>77</sup> But Longfellow approached the dramatic work with patience and an emphasis on process over completion. “I want it,” he wrote in his journal in March 1872, “for a long and delightful occupation”(qtd. in Tucker 342). Longfellow's method of

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<sup>77</sup> These volumes are: *Christus: A Mystery* (1872); *Aftermath* (1873); *The Hanging of the Crane* (1875); *The Masque of Pandora and Other Poems* (1875); *Kéramos and Other Poems* (1878); *Ultima Thule* (1880); and *In the Harbor* (1882). Longfellow also published *The Early Poems* (1878) but this volume consists of work from many decades before, most of which had been published in newspapers and magazines.

composition, which proceeded scene by scene (and scrap by scrap) rather than chronologically, emphasizes his understanding of the work as a composite of parts rather than a unified whole.

In fact, the fragmentary nature of the work infuses even its narrative action and setting, both of which are minimally developed. Longfellow realized this apparent failing in the late-life of story of the artist, writing in his journal when he was first beginning the work: “The subject attracts me; but is difficult to treat dramatically for want of unity of action, and plot in general”(qtd. in Tucker 342). Very little happens to Michelangelo in the course of the play, which spans roughly twelve years: he stays in Rome, attempting to complete various artworks, interacting with other characters that drift in and out of the scenes and city, and performing long-winded monologues on the merits of various artistic media. The play is divided into three acts, the first two of which have six scenes, the final, eight. Michelangelo is at the center of most of these scenes, though some focus entirely on peripheral action, such as the would-be love affair between Cardinal Ippolito and Julia Gonzago, the friend of Michelangelo’s adored Vittoria Colonna. Seventeen characters populate the play at different points, each contributing to the diffusion of any real narrative form. Scenes center alternately on Vittoria’s exile and death; Cardinal Ippolito’s death; the political conflicts around Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*; the complacency of the painter Fra Sebastiano; the artistic development of the jeweler-turned sculptor Cellini; the aesthetic discussions of Michelangelo, Titian, and Giorgio Vasari; and the musings of an anonymous monk who longs to make a pilgrimage to Rome. The majority of these events are disconnected from one another.

*Michael Angelo*, then, is a work that willfully defies the ideal of aesthetic unity, and that, like “Giotto’s Tower,” argues for the artistic value of the unfinished. This argument is complicated by Michelangelo himself, whom the other characters hail throughout the play as an artist embodying unity and the ability to complete artistic undertakings. But Longfellow’s Michelangelo, in his words and his actions, resists these characterizations, suggesting that biographical and aesthetic fragmentation can offer the basis for a new evaluation of his function within the play. Longfellow’s writing shows that the fragmentary nature of Michelangelo’s work does not detract from its value, but rather allows viewers a more active engagement with it. Like Giotto’s multi-generational tower, the work in Michelangelo’s canon invites completion, and its power lies precisely in this invitation. A viewing of the work is necessarily a collaborative act, throwing into question the association of artistic originality with the isolated creator.

### **Longfellow in Pieces**

*Michael Angelo* is unique among nineteenth-century depictions of the artist for the radical fragmentation that characterizes all aspects of its construction. The text is broken on many levels: in the diversity of its historical influence, in its shattered political landscape, and in its dramatically abbreviated conclusion. Through these fissures we can see Longfellow’s contribution to the modern myth of Michelangelo, a myth to which Ruskin, Emerson, Fuller, Lowell and many others contributed in each their own way. Longfellow’s Michelangelo is characterized by instability and constant growth. Against a backdrop of secondary characters who attempt to label him in fixed terms as master and teacher, Michelangelo repeatedly stresses his development as a student and the insecurity

of his status as an artist. Michelangelo sets himself apart from his contemporaries in embracing an aesthetic of flux, but his appreciation for change and movement is also at the root of the play's preoccupation with death, and its ultimate inability to arrive at any conclusive ending.

Fissures appear in the text through the sheer number of scholarly sources to which Longfellow is indebted. These sources imply what the text later confirms: that Longfellow's Michelangelo is a multi-faceted figure, unable to be contained through an argument as polemical or self-contained as Ruskin or Emerson's. By the time that Longfellow began writing his play in earnest in the early 1870s, many secondary sources on Michelangelo—both recent and historical—existed in English, and many more in Italian. If the nineteenth century was “*the century when Michelangelo became a text,*” then Longfellow's *Michael Angelo* is arguably the contemporaneous work that best translates this scholarship (22). A project in scholarly consolidation, the drama aimed to bring these sometimes erudite, sometimes untranslated documents to a mass audience. Emilio Goggio, in “The Sources of Longfellow's *Michael Angelo*” identifies Longfellow's principle references as biographies and histories written by authors ranging from Michelangelo's to Longfellow's own contemporaries. They include, from earliest to latest, Juan de Valdes's *Alfabeto Christiano* (1546), Giorgio Vasari's *Vite dei piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (1550), Asconio Condivi's *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1553), Benedetto Varchi's *Storia Fiorentina* (1721), Benvenuto Cellini's *Vita* (1728), *Rime e Lettere di Veronica Gambarà* (1759), Leopold von Ranke's *Die römischen Päpste, ihre kirche und ihr Staat im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (1834-1836), Jacopo Nardi's *Istorie della Citta di Firenze* (1858), and Herman Grimm's

*Das Leben Michelangelos* (1868). It is likely, though, the poet consulted yet more texts. Longfellow in his journals records reading not just Grimm, Vasari, and Condivi's books, but also more contemporary works, such as John S. Harford's 1857 *The Life of Michel Angelo Buonarroti* and Anna Jameson's 1845 *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (Tucker 342-43). Longfellow's play, then, is a pastiche of the critical perspectives on the Renaissance that by the nineteenth century had infused the literary marketplace in England and America.

Longfellow's faithfulness to his sources has not escaped critical notice. As a reviewer in *Lippincott's Magazine* writes, "[t]he poet seems to have followed Grimm's biography of the great master at every point, and in the interview at the church of San Silvestro, he has given an actual transcription of D'Ollanda's chronicle of the conversation"(110). Goggio also shows Longfellow's borrowings to be extensive, reaching sometimes into actual quotation, and he cites a passage that is "taken almost in its entirety from Juan de Valdés's *Alphabeto Christiano*"(319). In moving through the work, Goggio is able to attribute nearly every scene to a close historical reference. To focus on Longfellow's sources is to see the work as a scholarly museum-piece rather than Fuller's ideal of "a new product in which all the old varieties are melted into a fresh form"(158). In this sense, the background texts of *Michel Angelo* point toward a view in which artistic creation and original conception have no necessary points of overlap, and in which pieces of history stand in for a single consolidated authorial perspective. This

resistance to the “melting” of parts according to a writer’s creative direction is itself an aesthetic, a means of understanding and broadcasting a particular view of artistry.<sup>78</sup>

Early reviewers and editors of the play assumed an understanding of this aesthetic that almost entirely negated the significance of the text. Despite being without exception positive, not a single reviewer comments on the stylistic choices or the structure of Longfellow’s work. The 1883 reviews in *The Dial* and *The Spectator* focus their comments almost exclusively on the physical appearance of the book, noting the binding, layout, paper-quality, typography, and of course illustrations, which they enumerate individually. The publishers of the beautifully illustrated 1883 book were perhaps in part

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<sup>78</sup> The text’s illustrations highlight its function as a cobbled museum-piece. Images of Rome, Venice and Florence intersperse its pages, alongside of portraits of key figures in the play and images of some of Michelangelo’s most famous statues. The portraits, as the endnotes specify, are loosely based on historical portraits of well-known figures in the text. Often, individual portraits of characters are merged into compositions adapted to fit the events of the play. In the first scene, for instance, Julia and Vittoria are pictured on a balcony in an engraving composed expressly for the volume; an earlier picture of Julia Gonzago is based on a historical portrait. Other composite portraits feature images of Michelangelo next to his servant; Michelangelo in the Coliseum with Cavalieri; and Michelangelo examining a painting with Titian and Vasari. In all of these compositions, the figure of Michelangelo is closely based on the two reproductions of historical portraits in the frontispiece to the play. Images of Michelangelo’s work are treated in a similar manner, as single pieces of sculpture become composite images. Near the end of the book, a three-paneled engraving combines a line drawing of Michelangelo’s *Moses*, a more fleshed-out image of Michelangelo working on his *Pietà*, and a line drawing of his *Madonna and Child*. The title page to the second section of the play features an engraving of what appears to be the ornate wall of an exhibition hall. Two of Michelangelo’s statues are embedded into wall niches in the left and right of the engraving (*Rebellious Slave* and *Dying Slave*) and the frame in the middle displays Michelangelo’s chalk sketch of Vittoria Colonna. That these three works could never have been displayed in this manner is highlighted by their distorted proportions: the sketch of Colonna appears as large as the 7-foot statues. This image is not a reconstruction, but an imaginative recreation of a fictionalized history, much like the individual scenes of the play. The scenes function not to lay out a cohesive factual narrative, but to assemble pieces of different narratives, presenting a collage of historical anecdotes and perspectives in a new, never before-seen form. Longfellow’s editors, like Longfellow himself, were tasteful “arrangers.”

responsible for guiding this focus. The extensive list of illustrations in the volume credits both illustrators and engravers, creating an enumeration much more detailed than the brief table of contents. The volume also includes editorial endnotes that explicate the various sources for the illustrations, because, as a prefatory note tells readers, “the portraits, which form the chief subject of the notes, could not be referred to except by recourse to a variety of works”(ix). In a text that draws on enough historical and biographical points to merit some commentary, the singular focus on the images is striking, and speaks to the editors’ assumptions of textual transparency.

In fact, a close-reading of Longfellow’s text pays clear dividends. Thematic elements in the play echo the piecemeal qualities of the text’s sources, attesting to Longfellow’s self-conscious investment in fragmentation as a trope. The play’s treatment of its Roman setting and its central monument, the Coliseum, play into this emphasis. *Michael Angelo*’s Rome is a city of ghosts and of ruins, broken not only by political discord but also by the simple course of time. This decay suits the spirit of Michelangelo, who, though a Florentine by birth, and initially an unwilling exile, embraces Rome in his old age as “a second native land by predilection”(148). Ruin has everything to do with this “predilection”: “The very weeds, that grow / Among the broken fragments of her ruins, / Are sweeter to me than the garden flowers / Of other cities”(158). These weeds echo the “flowers of song” in the “Dedication” that “thrust their roots among the loose disjointed stones,” and like these flowers, the weeds both decorate the stones that they inhabit, and push them further apart, reconfiguring the landscape as they beautify it. Rome, like the “ruined tombs” of the “Dedication” is a living artwork, a historical backdrop in a constant state of development.

This setting is a fitting backdrop to the artwork that has the greatest influence on Michelangelo's work in the course of the play, the Coliseum. Like its setting, the Coliseum is characterized by organic destruction and reconfiguration. It is, as Michelangelo says on a nighttime visit to the ruins, "The marble rose of Rome! Its petals torn / by wind and rain of thrice five hundred years; / Its mossy sheath half rent away, and sold / To ornament our palaces and churches"(143). Yet this destruction, and the monument's persistence through it, represents a large part of its attraction to the artist. Unlike his companion Cavalieri, Michelangelo does not speak of the fixed moment in its early history "When this rose was perfect" but rather focuses on its present state (143). Its ruin is less a sign of demise than evidence of a natural evolution, and like Giotto's tower, which "blossom[s]" and "bloom[s]" independently, the Coliseum is described in strikingly organic terms. It remains, as Michelangelo says, a moss-covered rose, "Still opening its fair bosom to the sun," constellations lit up above "like a swarm of bees"(143). As with Giotto's tower, this organicism represents the object's continuing potential: "A thousand wild flowers bloom/ From every chink, and the birds build their nests/ Among the ruined arches, and suggest / New thoughts of beauty to the architect"(147). This image of wildflowers blooming from broken pieces of stone resonates again with the image in the "Dedication" of the "flowers of song" that grow "among the loose disjointed stones," suggesting that Michelangelo's aesthetic theory and Longfellow's own text follow the same basic principles (5).

This vision of the Coliseum as a site of fluctuating inspiration is countered by Michelangelo's companion Cavalieri, who sees it as defined by its early history and association with death. For this young artist, the Coliseum is doubly static, both in its

strictly delineated role and in its association with death. As he tells Michelangelo, “The sand beneath our feet is saturate / With the blood of martyrs; and these rifted stones / Are awful witnesses against a people / Whose pleasure was the pain of dying men”(144). The Coliseum is not a site of constant aesthetic change, but a monument forever haunted by its earliest use for gladiatorial combat. The most obvious conflict between Michelangelo and Cavalieri lies in the former’s pure aestheticism and the latter’s moralism—exemplified when Michelangelo exclaims that “You should have been a preacher, not a painter!”—but this opposition is only part of the story(144). Cavalieri’s criticism of the monument is wrapped up in his larger preoccupation with understanding both people and sites in static terms, a tendency that also emerges in his understanding of this artist’s role.

Cavalieri understands artists as conforming to static categories, while Michelangelo sees the artist’s development as a continuous process. The true artist, for Michelangelo, is, like the true artwork, organic, developing through time and providing different ideas to new generations. The initial exchange between the two men in the Coliseum underlines this discrepancy. When Michelangelo tells Cavalieri that he comes to the Coliseum “to learn,” the younger artist replies, “You are already master, / And teach all other men.” Michelangelo resists this understanding by responding, “Nay, I know nothing; / Not even my own ignorance, as some / Philosopher hath said. I am a school-boy / Who hath not learned his lesson”(142). He later repeats this idea, calling himself a “pupil, not a master” of the Coliseum (147). The repetition of the label “master” here is telling: for Michelangelo, only the builder of the Coliseum, “the great master of antiquity” merits this title, implying an association between death and static categories.

Michelangelo's preoccupations with death, stillness, and conclusions are tied up in this concern with fixed categories.

In this same scene in the Coliseum, Michelangelo tells Cavalieri about his vision of the world's end (147). This ending, like the acquisition of the label "master," depends on the cessation of motion and growth:

All things must have an end; the world itself  
Must have an end, as in a dream I saw it.  
There came a great hand out of heaven, and touched  
The earth, and stopped it in its course. The seas  
Leaped, a vast cataract, into the abyss;  
The forests and fields slid off, and floated  
Like wooded islands in the air. The dead  
Were hurled forth from the sepulchres: the living  
Were mingled with them, and themselves were dead,--  
All being dead...(147).

Michelangelo's dream is remarkable for its central action: destruction and death are caused not by an active change, but by the simple absence of motion, a divine hand that reaches to the earth and "stopped it." This arrest causes an instant end to all life: the ocean becomes a waterfall, the forests become wood, and the living become indistinguishable from the dead. All is, as Michelangelo later says, a "wrack of matter." To this striking image of destruction, Cavalieri's only response is, "But the earth does not move," highlighting both his own static world-view, and Michelangelo's more progressive perspective. This vision of apocalyptic fragmentation was the first that Longfellow composed, some twenty years before the rest of the scenes were written in the early 1870s.<sup>79</sup> That this dream, connected to the larger unfolding of the play only thematically, is Longfellow's first, reveals the extent to which the trope of movement and stasis is foundational to the play as a whole.

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<sup>79</sup> *The Writings of HWL* 152. This passage is dated September 30, 1850.

Stasis and movement likewise inform Michelangelo's preoccupation with his own death. The apocalyptic nature of this foundational scene echoes Michelangelo's anticipation of his own death, an "ending" that in fact never occurs in the course of the play. This (at times impatient) anticipation is the central tension that drives the narrative forward. Few scenes end without the death of a character close to Michelangelo or a remark about Michelangelo's own preparation for death. These preoccupations culminate in the final scene of the play, an anti-conclusion which empties out the action of the play rather than making sense of it. The setting is Michelangelo's studio in the late evening, as he is at work on a new project. When Giorgio Vasari drops in after a night of revelry, the artist is compelled to reveal that he is carving his own tomb, and this last passage follows:

MICHAEL ANGELO, *letting fall the lamp.*

Life hath become to me  
An empty theatre,-- its lights extinguished,  
The music silent, and the actors gone;  
And I alone sit musing on the scenes  
That once have been. I am so old that Death  
Oft plucks me by the cloak, to come with him;  
And some day, like this lamp, shall I fall down,  
And my last spark of life will be extinguished.  
Ah me! ah me! what darkness of despair!  
So near to death, and yet so far from God!  
(178)

These final lines of the play are anti-climactic, the voiding of dramatic action in the scene neatly corresponding to the dominant metaphor of Michelangelo's life as an empty theater. Michelangelo's conceit of life-as-a-theater—unlike the more traditional life-as-play—frustrates any hope for a clear conclusion to the drama's action. The theater, emptied of its light, music and actors, maintains still its "life" for as long as it can be identified as a physical structure. The theater-conceit locates Michelangelo in a position

of passive spectatorship toward his own (eventless) life, a position analogous to that of *Michael Angelo*'s readers, who are by the last scenes witness to a play that has lost any sense of dramatic action. If Michelangelo's life is an empty theater, so too is Longfellow's *Michael Angelo*—a state which its existence as closet-drama literally confirms.

Longfellow's decision to end the play on this note allows both Michelangelo's life and the drama to continue according to the model of organic, continuous growth. Earlier drafts of the work reveal this "unfinished" ending to be the product of extensive reworking, the scene between Michelangelo and Vasari taking its place as the play's last only relatively late in the revision process. Longfellow had written a much more conclusive final scene to the play—titled definitively "The Last Scene"—documenting Michelangelo's death and final words. In this scene, Michelangelo is surrounded by friends Cavalieri, Volterra, and Asconio, as well as his doctor Donati. The four await Leonardo da Vinci, as Michelangelo passes deliriously in and out of sleep, and dies before this last artist arrives. The scene concludes at Michelangelo's neatly summary last words ("My soul to God; my body to the earth; / My worldly goods unto my next of kin/ My memory—to the keeping—of my friends") and the ringing of the vespers (*The Writngs of HWL* 406). The scene was apparently written at the suggestion of George Washington Greene, who had listened to Longfellow's recitation of the poem in 1872. In a March 3, 1874 letter to Greene, Longfellow explains his editorial logic: "I have written the new scene, that you suggested for 'Angelo.' I am not dissatisfied with it, and yet do not want to add it. It seems to me better to leave the close a little vague, than to give a tragic ending, though that may be the proper finis of the book"(5:722). The conflict here

between what is “proper” in a general sense, and what Longfellow feels to be “better” in terms of the particular needs of his work gives insight into his vision for the play as a whole. Leaving the ending “a little vague,” is a way of leaving the play incomplete, as a stylistic echo to Michelangelo’s work, which remains, until the end of his life, unfinished.

The only defiance to the self-containment of this alternative final scene is Michelangelo’s complaint that he never finished St. Peters: “The saddest thing in dying is to leave/ One’s work unfinished”(The Writings of HWL 405). In fact, Michelangelo struggles throughout the play with his inability to complete his designs. The last line of the first act records Michelangelo telling Vittoria not to look at the portrait he is painting of her (“Not yet; it is not finished.”) while earlier in that same scene he notes that his work on the Sistine Chapel progresses “But tardily”(69, 63). Michelangelo assumes that even the end of a life will not bring a real conclusion to the work that will, inevitably, be unfinished. In a conversation with Vasari and Titian in the latter’s studio, this inconclusiveness takes on a positive turn that is reminiscent of the collaborative creation in “Giotto’s Tower.” Speaking of a younger generation of artists with these two older artists, Michelangelo asks, “When you two / Are gone, who is there that remains behind / To seize the pencil falling from your fingers?”(105). Vasari and Titian’s responses are both similarly hopeful. Vasari answers that “many hands” are prepared for the task, while Titian responds in terms that echo both the “Dedication” and “Giotto’s Tower”: “...Our ruins/ Will serve to build their palaces or tombs. /They will possess the world that we think ours, /And fashion it far otherwise”(106). The reconfiguration of both artwork and the larger world is the task of future generations, a fate that emphasizes the fluidity of both works and worlds.

The emphasis on incompleteness and growth in *Michael Angelo* creates an unusually nuanced artist, one that defies the more static and one-sided characterizations of Emerson and Ruskin. Longfellow implicitly pits his characterization of the artist against these opposing perspectives through the other characters within *Michael Angelo*, all of whom seem to share Emersonian views of Michelangelo as a “unifier.” These characters represent the artist as alternately as unifying all people, all artistic media, and all artistic compositions. Vittoria Colonna, for instance, when describing Michelangelo to Julia Gonzago in the play’s first scene exclaims that “all men” fear him, just as “all men” honor him, and “all” should follow him. So much is he in “all men’s thoughts” that when they speak of greatness “his name/ Is ever on their lips”(15) This vision of the world as brought together by an identical attitude toward the great man is matched with a vision of Michelangelo as a man who fits the different elements of his own life together cohesively. He is, as Vittoria says, “one who works and prays, / For work is prayer, and consecrates his life/ To the sublime ideal of his art, / Till art and life are one”(15). For Vittoria, Michelangelo’s magnetic force brings together all men in unanimous opinion and integrates the parts of a varied life into a seamlessly functioning whole.

This conception extends to several other characters. When Cardinal Ippolito asks Fra Sebastiano to tell him “of the artists” a few scenes later, the painter replies in a manner that echoes Vittoria’s description of Michelangelo. The difference between Vittoria and Sebastiano’s characters—the one jovial and self-indulgent, the other serious and ascetic—implicitly illustrates Vittoria’s assertion that “all men” are united in their opinion of Michelangelo. As Fra Sebastiano says of contemporary artists:

Naming one  
I name them all; for there is only one:

His name is Messer Michael Angelo.  
All art and artists of the present day  
Centre in him. (35-36).

On the one hand, this passage reflects on Michelangelo's practice of "all" the three primary visual arts—painting, sculpture, and architecture—a mastery that set him apart from artists like Fra Sebastiano, who as he himself says is "Only a portrait-painter; one who draws / With greater or less skill, as best he may,/ The features of a face"(36). But this distinction also understands Michelangelo as becoming something greater in uniting the parts of his artistry. He is, as Fra Sebastiano says, "a lover / Of all things beautiful" while Fra Sebastiano is, in Cardinal Ippolito's words, a "skilful hand"(37). Portraiture and other artistic skills are located in parts—the hand, the face—but artistry is located in the whole, in "all things beautiful." In bringing together all of the arts, Michelangelo is more than a skillful artisan: he becomes, as Benvenuto Cellini says later in the play, a "miraculous Master"(149).

This distinction between artistic master and artisan dominates many of the artistic discussions of the text, but it soon becomes apparent that Michelangelo, for all of his monologues on the highest form of art, is ambiguous about his own place in this schema. Michelangelo rails repeatedly against the conflation of craftsmanship and art, both as it relates to himself and to others. In discussing oil painting with Fra Sebastiano, he rants:

When that barbarian Jan Van Eyck discovered  
The use of oil in painting, he degraded  
His art to a handicraft, and made it  
Sign-painting, merely, for a country inn  
Or a wayside wine shop. 'Tis an art for women,  
Or for such leisurely and idle people  
As you, Fra Sebastiano. Nature paints not  
In oils, but frescos the great dome of heaven  
With sunsets, and the lovely forms of clouds

And flying vapors. (97).

The seemingly slight distinction between the media of oil and fresco is one that implicates the larger distinctions between art and craft, masculine and feminine, natural and commercial. Oil painting is commercial and presumably closely representational, its slow drying properties ideally suited to depicting the detailed and relatively diminutive images of sign-painting. Women, and feminine men like Fra Sebastiano, appreciate these images for their evidence of “handicraft,” or what Sebastiano calls “skill” in relation to his own portrait painting (executed, of course, in oil). Fresco painting, on the other hand, imitates not merely the forms of nature but its methods. As nature “frescos” the sky in large sweeping gestures, so too does the artist cover domes of chapel ceilings, as Michelangelo did earlier in the play when struggling to complete the Sistine Chapel paintings. The forms of nature and the artist have no purpose but beauty; “the lovely forms of clouds,” unlike the work of sign painting, tells no narrative and elicits no commercial response.

Michelangelo’s association of the highest art form with nature is at the root of the contradictions that emerge in his hierarchy of artistry. Michelangelo outlines this schema in lofty discussions about the various merits of the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture with several other artists in the play including Fra Sebastiano, Titian, Giorgio Vasari and Benvenuto Cellini. Originality is, within the space of the play, the characteristic that most defines artistry and that prompts Michelangelo’s wordy justifications for his preference of architecture over the other visual arts. The hierarchy that Michelangelo establishes is synthesized in a late conversation with Benvenuto:

Truly, as you say,  
Sculpture is more than painting. It is greater

To raise the dead to life than to create  
Phantoms that seem to live. The most majestic  
Of the three sister arts is that which builds;  
The eldest of them all, to whom the others  
Are but the hand-maids and the servitors,  
Being but imitation, not creation.  
Henceforth I dedicate myself to her. (163).

In this passage, painters and sculptors imitate the appearance of nature (with varying degrees of success), while architects imitate its spirit, creating forms that are wholly original. This formulation closely echoes the distinction between oil painting and fresco painting: in both, the higher form of art imitates nature's creative mode. The problem built into this understanding of creativity is that the highest forms of artistic originality are also the most craftsmanlike.

If Michelangelo had hoped to escape from "handicraft" such as Jan Van Eyck's in his favoring of the more "creative" arts of sculpture and architecture, the drama is clear in showing this effort to be a failure. In working through his designs for St. Peter's, for instance, Michelangelo is confronted continuously with his subservient position toward his patrons. At a meeting with Pope Julius III and a group of discontented Cardinals, he is in the position of defending his plans to the men, who, as he says, "censure what they do not comprehend"(129). When they insist on viewing the architectural designs as he creates them, Michelangelo bristles: "I am not used to have men speak to me/ As if I were a mason, hired to build / A garden wall, and paid on Saturdays / So much an hour"(133). He resists viewing this commission, or any of his commissions, as efforts that at all take into consideration the desires of the patrons, saying that their part is merely "to provide the means" while "The designs / Must all be left to me." In spite of

this insistence, the artist is clearly in a position of direct accountability to his commissioners.

Furthermore, while Michelangelo repeatedly stresses that what separates true “mastery” from craftsmanship lies in innate knowledge as opposed to learned skill, he himself slips in and out of this categorization. Good craftsmen can be taught—as Fra Sebastiano has gained his “skillful hand” by training—but true artists are chosen, not trained. As Michelangelo tells his color-grinder Urbino, “All men are not born artists, nor will labor / E’er make them artists, but in every block of marble / I see a statue”(166).

But Michelangelo’s own self-portrayal casts doubt on this category of the “born artist.” Michelangelo’s visits to the Coliseum in the guise of “pupil” indicate that he is far from being above artistic influence. His artistic course has likewise been altered by his contemporaries, as he says of Raphael: “He perchance / Caught strength from me, and I some greater sweetness / And tenderness from his more gentle nature”(101). That Raphael is known as much for his oil painting as for his fresco pushes this influence into the border between “handicraft” and art. And Michelangelo’s first influence is located even more firmly in the realm of craft. As he explains it to Urbino, his propensity toward sculpture is (at least in part) taught rather than inborn: “I must have learned it early from my nurse / At Setignano, the stone-mason’s wife; For the first sounds I heard were of the chisel/ Chipping away the stone”(164). This alternate narrative of artistic development calls into question Michelangelo’s own monologues on the hierarchy of the arts and the sharp distinctions between “handicraft” and artistry.

Both Longfellow and Michelangelo, then, are “middle-class” and middle-brow because they are bound by aesthetic and cultural extremes of which they are both aware.

Like Longfellow himself, Michelangelo is trapped between the apparently contradictory worlds of craftsmanship and fine art, a man with, in Fuller's words, "a fancy for what is large and manly, if not a full sympathy with it." Michelangelo is a reflection of the contradictions of an era that brought the first clearly enunciated distinctions between the fine arts and crafts; Longfellow's great accomplishment in the play lies in reshaping this unlikely artist-figure to become an emblem for his literary craft in a way that is neither obvious nor self-aggrandizing. While critics, since Longfellow's earliest reviewers, have read *Michael Angelo* biographically or anti-biographically, with a shifting sense of Longfellow's place on the spectrum of craft and fine art, acknowledging that Michelangelo's place on this spectrum is likewise fluid immediately complicates the biographical equation. Michelangelo, rather than residing firmly in the category of fine artist, in Longfellow's account tests the boundaries between craft and art, creating a biographical reference-point that is neither simple nor stable. If the play hinges on implicit parallel between the life of the Renaissance artist and the nineteenth-century author, this parallel demands that we acknowledge the complication and self-awareness of both figures.

In collecting authors as in collecting artists, such complication is not always welcome. As we have seen, public collections of Michelangelo as text and image develop rapidly in both England and Italy during the nineteenth century. During the later part of the century, Longfellow himself was also gaining status as a collectible commodity, and as with Michelangelo's work, narratives of meaning developed alongside of these collections. *The Longfellow Collectors' Hand-book: A Bibliography of First Editions* (1885), first published only two years after Longfellow's death, provides a detailed

delineation of what is—and what is not—worth holding onto in Longfellow’s canon. It was published by William Evarts Benjamin, a dedicated fine books dealer in New York. The preface to the edition notes what this bibliography leaves out: *Poems of Places*, the thirty-one volume anthology that Longfellow spent much of his last decade editing; any collected editions of Longfellow’s work that do not include new writing; illustrated editions that are not strictly first editions; and magazine and journal publications. While these omissions are understandable in light of the bookseller’s interests, they also serve the purpose of superimposing degrees of value onto Longfellow’s only recently compiled canon, a creation of hierarchy that goes against Longfellow’s own crow’s eye aesthetic. In the case of *Michael Angelo*, for instance, the *Hand-book* makes note only of the illustrated Houghton-Mifflin edition, omitting its first magazine-publication as well as its first complete publication (including appendix) in the Riverside edition, which arguably qualifies as “new work.”

Longfellow’s canon was shaped through works like this *Hand-Book*, and the anthologies that followed his death. We have only recently found the means of reshaping it. The *Hand-book*, true to form, mentions only the physical layout of *Michael Angelo*, noting that “The woodcut illustrations are numerous and beautiful”(47). The drama has been only sparsely anthologized since the 1885 Riverside edition. The work’s collection in volume one of the 1993 Library of America *American Poetry*, as well as its online availability through Making of America hold the promise of doing to Longfellow’s canon what *Longfellow* attempted to do to Michelangelo’s life: to open it up in all its conflicting parts, to allow its contradictions to be visible rather than subsumed within a single narrative. If anyone reads it— which seems to have always been the problem with

*Michael Angelo's* physically beautiful and seemingly shallow text—the drama can help to unhinge notions of Longfellow's one-sided approach to authorship. It shows him to be a writer who, like his drama's protagonist, confronted terms like “originality” and “mastery” without the ultimate goal of overcoming them. This state of being, between competing cultural storylines, is precisely what makes Longfellow and Michelangelo both, in a literal sense of the word, “middle-class.”

## Chapter Four

### “Gaze On!”: Osgood, Poe and the Visualization of Antebellum Authorship

#### Introduction

In the last and most exhaustive edition of her poetry that Frances Osgood was to oversee, *Poems* (1850), a short four-line poem appears tucked away a quarter of the way through the 400-plus page volume. Printed almost as an afterthought at the bottom of a page, the simple quatrain of rhyming couplets introduces a complex intermingling of the visual arts, poetry, and the affairs of the heart:

Gaze on! I thrill beneath thy gaze,  
I drink thy spirit's potent rays;  
I tremble to each kiss they give:  
Great Jove! I *love*, and *therefore live*.

This poem's emphasis on self-creation through love can easily be seen as an emblem for a writer who proclaimed that “love-lays are my vocation.”<sup>80</sup> But its title—“The Statue to Pygmalion”—enmeshes the seemingly simple lines in a much larger network. By alluding to the classical story of Pygmalion, in which the sculptor brings to life his own creation, Osgood participates in a resurgence of nineteenth-century interest in the narrative. Allusions to the myth are a commonplace in her canon, but rather than simply rehashing a familiar trope, these references become a means of navigating the strange new world of poetic publicity.

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<sup>80</sup> Frances Sargent Osgood, “Kate Carol to Mary S.,” *The Columbian Magazine* 7.5 (May 1847), 207. Quoted in Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception* 72.

“The Statue to Pygmalion” is Osgood’s most explicit use of the classical archetype, and follows many of the story’s typical outlines. The simplicity of its language and the brevity of its form echoes early nineteenth-century representations of the sculpture Galatea as “childlike” and “passionately pure” (Joshua 135). Osgood’s decision to ventriloquize Galatea rather than her creator Pygmalion anticipates feminist re-writings of the myth later in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which gave the statue a voice as a means of subverting Galatea’s traditional passivity (xvii). The poem even has its own direct contemporary inspiration—in Grace Greenwood’s “Pygmalion”—and prompted at least one response poem, published in a memorial collection after Osgood’s death (*The Memorial* 325). This network of poetic influence and the speaker’s direct address to the silent Pygmalion, opens up the intimate exchange of the poem to a public space. The “gaze” that brings Galatea to life is as much that of the reader as that of the sculptor. In many of Osgood’s Pygmalion works, the interactions between networks of reception and creation are even more explicit.

Osgood uses the distinctions between art and life in her Pygmalion-themed works as a way of thinking through her own role in an increasingly public, printed literary world. For Osgood, the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea was more than a cultural touchstone: it was a means of interrogating the intersection of romantic intimacy and the circulation of print. As Eliza Richards has shown, the intimate relation between women poets and antebellum magazine publication “led the poetess to market an unlocalizable eroticism that conflated coquetry and print proliferation”(26). Her printed flirtations, addressed to no one in particular and everyone at once, seduced male and female readers alike. Osgood’s writing, replete with fairy-like speakers and embodiments of poetic

Fancy, manages to both exude sexual charm and deny any grounding in real physicality (Richards 72). That Osgood's biographical persona was often conflated with her child-like poetic voice highlights her paradoxical ability to exist in a rapidly expanding print culture as an intimately familiar (but nationally-read) poetess (71-2). The myth of Pygmalion offered a particularly potent representation of such intimacy. In the standard telling of the narrative, the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with his ideally beautiful statue Galatea and, with the help of Venus, turns the statue into a woman whom he eventually marries. Ovid's version of the tale ends with Venus blessing the lovers' bed and "e're ten Months had sharpened either Horn, / To crown their bliss, a lovely boy was born."<sup>81</sup> The erotic relation between the art-object and its audience is tempered by the traditional classicism of the tale, which renders this sexuality, like Osgood's, "unlocalized." The Pygmalion narrative was one that the poetess would return to throughout her career to consider the ways that poetic work did, and did not, come to life for its readers. Her changing interpretation of the myth in the course of her lifetime reflects a shift in her understanding of literary audience.

Osgood's use of the Pygmalion trope comes into sharpest focus in "the Osgood-Poe affair" of 1845-46, a literary exchange whose falsification of public intimacy can help us to understand the poetess's career-long concern with audience. The exchange, consisting of poems and stories printed by Osgood and Edgar Allan Poe in the pages of

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<sup>81</sup> This translation is from Sir. Samuel Garth's 1717 collection of the *Metamorphoses*, one of the most popular of the early-nineteenth century editions. The translator of this section of book ten ("The Story of Pygmalion, and the Statue") is John Dryden. See Norman Vance 224. Because Ovid was, as Vance writes, "nearly always mediated" in the nineteenth century, and because such mediation is notoriously difficult to trace, I depend in my readings on Garth's well-known compilation of translations, unless another source is noted (215).

the *Broadway Journal* and *Graham's*, hinted broadly at a romantic relationship between the two literary acquaintances. In nearly bi-weekly installments, it offered readers—through fairly obvious quotation, the use of transparent pseudonyms, and a tone of romantic confidentiality—a sense of being witness to a private flirtation. But in spite of the best critical efforts, no real evidence exists for a biographical romance between Osgood and Poe, and Poe's track-record as an editor and publisher suggests much more mundane possibilities.<sup>82</sup> The literary exchange began just as another, the so-called “Little Longfellow War,” was ending. This earlier (and somewhat one-sided) exchange centered on Poe's articles and reviews accusing Henry Longfellow of various plagiarisms and borrowings, all, some critics allege, to promote the sale of *The Broadway Journal*. In fact, Poe's stint as editor and owner of the *Journal* in 1845-46 was marked by a number of such publicity schemes, including the publication of “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”(1845), a story that Poe framed as the eyewitness account of extended mesmerism and gruesome death, misleading many readers before his admission of its fictionality. The first-person address and apparent confessionality of lyric poetry, as both Osgood and Poe were fully aware, was at least as easy to conflate with biographical reality. In the Poe-Osgood exchange, then, the Pygmalion narrative becomes means of representing the creation of intimacy and trust, not only between two biographical figures, but also between their work and its audience.

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<sup>82</sup> See for instance Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) 278-293. There is little direct documentary evidence of Poe and Osgood's relationship. John Walsh's 1980 *Plumes in the Dust* embroiders the outlines of the Poe-Osgood affair with an obvious fascination for the lurid details, but falls short of proving the nature of the relationship. John May's 2004 page-turner *Poe & Fanny*, which imagines Poe as the father of Fanny's third child, is a novel that takes clear liberties in filling in historical detail.

In the Pygmalion poems from the Poe-Osgood exchange, Osgood uses the intimacy of the myth to reflect on the falsifications of sentiment that print culture—or at least Poe’s sensationalist brand of print culture—encourages. The exchange, which relies on an echoing series of Pygmalion interpretations, provides a backdrop to the changes in Osgood’s perspective on this intimacy. The works from this period use the rewriting of the Pygmalion myth, quotation from both Poe and Osgood’s works, and references to a broader intertextual landscape simultaneously to create a sense of intimacy and to question the possibility of authentic sentiment within an expanding literary sphere. This perspective runs counter to Osgood’s earlier, more sanguine approach to the networks of authors and readers. It also anticipates her later literary reflections back on the Poe-Osgood affair, which show an increasing cynicism about the possibility of an author-reader relationship unmarked by the inconstancies of the marketplace. These later works are failed Pygmalion narratives, centering on lifeless statues and artists railing against the idea of audience. In their cynicism, they seem to propose a radically new conception of artistry, one independent of the networks of reception that built up Osgood’s earlier career. But in dismissing the exchange between audience and artwork as sentimentally fraudulent, they paradoxically rely on allusion to the very audience-centered intimacy of the Osgood-Poe affair. This short romantic exchange, then, haunts Osgood throughout her career not simply because of its dubious foundation in biographical reality, but because it represents the public posturing that she, even at the end of her life, participated in.

This performance of intimacy bears the mark of a particular phase in antebellum literature, when increasingly professionalized writers, both male and female, worked to

define their shifting vocational status. Such professionalization was both the product of, and to some extent defined by, the culture of print. The second quarter of the nineteenth century is the period in which literary professionalization—spurred on by new technologies of production, promotional strategies, transportation networks, and the expansion of the literate middle classes—first became possible. As Michael Newbury, Nicholas Bromell, and others point out, this market transition was far from seamless, and is apparent in the work of antebellum authors in part through a concern with the text’s mass reproducibility. Newbury, for instance, shows that critiques of popular female writers in the antebellum period were frequently bound up in a cultural division between craft and mechanization. Works such as Melville’s “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” figure female writers as a “mass of working-class factory operatives who have no legitimate claim to the individuated imagination and autonomy of a romantic and independent agent of creativity”(29). Though male writers fare little better in Melville’s story, the equation of femininity and mass production was widespread, and the concept of “fiction factories” linked to the emergent working-class literature of the 1830s extended into middle-class sentimentalism (34). The urgency with which readers desired a personalized author-figure, even in relation to sentimental “factory fiction,” is apparent in the public campaigns to out pseudonymous popular authors, to discover the person—or mechanism—behind their writing.<sup>83</sup> While Osgood and Melville are

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<sup>83</sup> As one newspaper article purporting to provide information on the biography of the best-selling “Fanny Fern” begins: “Now that the thirty thousand homes have been made brighter and happier by the introduction of *Fern Leaves* to their social circles, the question: Who is FANNY FERN? and, What is FANNY FERN? appeal strongly not only to the curiosity but the sympathies of the public.” See “Interesting to Ladies,” *Pittsfield Sun*, 22 September 1853. As Lara Langer Cohen points out, the slippage here between “who” and “what” Fern may be is significant, implying both the public’s desire for

obviously very different authors writing for very different audiences, Osgood's negotiations of intertextuality, pseudonymic representation and fabricated intimacy before and during the periodical exchange show an awareness of this sentimental factory. Her late-life poems, meanwhile, gesture toward a more romantic view of the singular poet, even as this is a vision that they are unable to fully commit to.

Where these analogies of authorship and mechanization had their poignancy was in the emptiness that they implied: if female writers churned out books in the same way that factories spat out rolls of paper, each writer was broadly interchangeable with the other, and the notion of authorial personality was essentially a ruse. This sense was closely tied in with the widespread antebellum representations of American literary culture as a fraud or "humbug." Far from unique to high-cultural sensibilities such as Melville's, this sense of fraudulence applied equally to writers such as Poe, for whom the literary landscape promised economic as much as aesthetic opportunity (though it often failed to deliver on both counts). Poe's work, with its predilection for literary jokes, puffery, and a maniacal obsession with plagiarism, both critiqued and participated in what he called American literary culture as a "vast perambulating humbug."<sup>84</sup> Varied antebellum accounts compare literary culture to devalued currency and land bubbles, positioning literary culture as one of the period's confidence games (Cohen 24-64).

Skepticism toward literary culture at large had everything to do with growing print networks that distanced producer from consumer. The new marketplace of print culture laid claim to both artistic and exchange value. However, artistry often maintained

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authorial personality and their suspicion that her persona may be simply a literary production or farce. See Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature* 133-135.

<sup>84</sup> Poe, review of *The Quacks of Helicon*, *Graham's Magazine* 19 (August 1841), in *Essays and Reviews*, 1006.

a tense relationship with its status as product, prompting public grumbling about poetry displayed “mid candies, cakes, and, nuts” (Cohen 12). As Newbury puts it, “If the promise of sales, an expanded reading public, and professional respect gave writers something new to shoot for, it also gave them something to shoot at”(6). The very same authors who aspired to the professionalism (and sales) of a viable marketplace, often complained about the power that this forum held over their production.

Osgood, and poetesses in general, have not usually been implicated in the critiques of the print marketplace that so clearly influenced and amplified the distribution of their work. When Lawrence Buell writes that the idea of romantic authorship “started to become a major influence in New England at the time when professionalism also started to become a viable option”(69), he is clearly not referring to Osgood’s verse, which seems designed for the marketplace that it encountered. Yet, as I argue, Osgood’s Pygmalion poems show precisely the trajectory from writing for a mass audience to (haltingly) denying it, and while her commitment to the idea of romantic authorship is certainly incomplete, this partial shift is itself worth considering. In this chapter, I follow the development of Osgood’s perspective on literary audience and networks through chronological readings of several of her Pygmalion works. In the first section, I lay the groundwork for considering the Pygmalion myth as an analogy for the coming to life of a work (and an author) to its readers. In the second, I examine some of Osgood’s early art-to-life works, and demonstrate their optimism about the strong emotive bonds between authors, publishers, and readers. In the third, I look at Pygmalion works from the Poe-Osgood periodical exchange, and show how these poems and stories construct audience as a necessary and valuable component to the process of the artwork’s coming to life.

And finally, I consider Osgood's late-life attempts to distance herself from audience and from the modes of reading that her earlier work was itself responsible for encouraging. Throughout Osgood's canon, the Pygmalion myth is a touchstone for her shifting conception of artistic creation in relation to print and the networks of print. Ultimately, I understand Osgood, and to a lesser extent Poe, as a way of creating a more textured picture of the effects of literary publicity on both the lyric and the lyric author.

### **Pygmalion's "Golden Age"**

Retellings of the Pygmalion myth gained popularity during the nineteenth century, even as Classicism more generally was on the decline. The most well-known art-centered English-language texts from this century—*The Picture of Dorian Grey*, "The Oval Portrait," several of Hawthorne's tales, and any number of James's works—play with the tenuous divide between life and art as a matter of course. This focus extends beyond the Anglo-American experience: several critics have noted the prominence of retellings of the myth of Pygmalion in Western tradition during this time, with Stephen Guy-Bray declaring the period "the golden age" for such reconceptualizations (446). Prominent writers known for their narration of the myth in some form or another include Balzac, Zola, Rousseau, Hazlitt, Browning, Rossetti and Hardy. J. Hillis Miller, in his liberal interpretation of the myth in *Versions of Pygmalion* includes Kleist, Melville, and Blanchot in the mix. The interest in a myth of the love between an artwork and its creator attests at the very least to a sense of the emotional presence of inanimate images, and a tendency to see the viewing of an artwork as a truly interpersonal exchange. It also often

betrays an apprehension about the lifelike power of images precisely at a point when printed imagery was becoming all but unavoidable in daily life.

J. Hillis Miller's *Versions of Pygmalion* (1990) can, somewhat ironically, provide a historical framework for Osgood and Poe's approach to the myth. Ironically because, as Miller himself writes in the preface to the study of the myth in various nineteenth-century works, his book is less invested in the historical context for works than in asking "whether writing literature, reading it, teaching it, and writing about it make anything happen in the real historical world"(viii). But this interest in the ethics of literature provides a framework for thinking about Pygmalion that seems particularly well-suited to print culture. For Miller, the myth (and its various interpretations) functions primarily as a "literalizing allegory" for prosopopoeia, the rhetorical device ascribing "a face, a name, or a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead"(3,4). In this sense, the myth becomes a metaphor for the 'coming to life' of literary characters in print, and centers fundamentally on the tenuous divide between art and life. (As Jane Miller similarly writes, the Pygmalion myth is "a metaphor for the creative process: the artist creates a perfect work of art which then comes to life"(206)). All literary versions of Pygmalion are, according to Miller, meta-narratives; because the myth expresses "the personification essential to all storytelling and storyreading," the "characters in the story do something like what its author, reader or critic must do in order to write, read, teach, or write about the story." Every Pygmalion-figure, then is both author and reader, and reflects self-consciously on the way that literature is both composed and received.

While Miller's study is not specifically historical in its focus, the implications of the argument clearly are, suggesting a common thread running through the nineteenth

century “golden age” of literary Pygmalions. In light of what critics have described as a decline of interest in the Ovidian myths more generally, such a thread seems a valuable necessity. If Hermann Frankel could write in 1945 that “[i]t was only in the nineteenth century that Ovid’s prestige fell as low as it stands today,” and Norman Vance enumerates the stumbling blocks against the Latin poet’s nineteenth-century reception as his perceived lasciviousness, his apparent immorality, and a facile derivativeness running counter to Romantic conceptions of poetry, it is worth asking how the narrative of Pygmalion and Galatea escaped this condemnation (qtd in Vance 215, Vance 216-26). My argument in this chapter is that Pygmalion’s Galatea, alternately distanced and intimate, offered nineteenth century writers a means of figuring authorship.

The Pygmalion myth’s focus on the ‘coming to life’ of a work of art was an increasingly vital issue for nineteenth-century American authors. For writers newly invested in a publishing field that was international in scope and did reach—or at least could reach—an audience that for the first time in history could be described as “mass,” the public space of print and its reception was an increasingly urgent question. For readers surrounded by increasing amounts of text and image demanding emotional animation, the question of the art-life divide likewise became newly culturally relevant. The Pygmalion myth may be “a metaphor for the creative process” but it is also a metaphor for art’s reception, as the sculptor is both artist and primary audience. In this sense, Poe, and particularly Osgood, whose work is positioned neatly between print and performance, are excellent case studies for these concerns. Poe and Osgood’s periodical poems show the kind of intertextual allusion that the Ovidian narrative delights in, referring back and forth between stories and poems, quoting liberally from each other’s

(and other writers') works. Through quotation, they bring each other's works to life in new textual contexts, and create a conception of original art that depends on the reprinting of cited phrases or passages. At the same time, Osgood's work also delves into the darker side of Pygmalionesque transformation, as it considers what happens in a public landscape when works do not come to life as they were intended.

### **Early Osgood and the Networks of Print**

Osgood's first incorporation of the themes of the Pygmalion myth occurs not through the outlines of the tale, but through a more generalized interest in the network of an artwork's creation and dissemination. In most retellings of the Pygmalion myth (including Ovid's) Galatea comes to life not simply through her creator's desire, but following his prayers to Venus. In this sense, insofar as the literal 'coming to life' of the artwork references an imagined movement into life in the minds of readers, this movement is one that the myth itself recognizes as mediated. This idea had particular resonance in the antebellum period, as publishers gained a position of unprecedented importance in establishing the careers of popular writers, and in bringing their works to the public. Osgood's career in this regard was no exception, shaped as it was through her work with powerful publishers and editors including George Rex Graham (of *Graham's Magazine*), Rufus Griswold (who would become her and Poe's literary executor) and George Palmer Putnam (who published her *A Letter about the Lions* in 1849). From Osgood's earliest volume of poetry, *A Wreath of Wildflowers from New England* (1838) we find that these concerns about the networks of print's dissemination.

In one of the most arresting poems of the collection, Osgood introduces the division between life and art specifically in terms of print and reprinting. “On Parting for a Time with an Infant’s Portrait,” centers on a mother sending away an image of her child to be engraved and copied for a broader audience, and reflects equally on the dissemination of Osgood’s own printed creations. In offering her readers a token as sentimentalized as a child, Osgood stresses the emotional bonds between them. And in conflating the printed child with the actual one, she invites all of her readers to share in a piece of the work that is as authentic as her own original copy. The relation of the processes of print to emotional ties is strikingly apparent from this poem’s first lines:

Fair image of my fairer child!  
Full many a moment’s weary woe  
By those blue eyes has been beguiled!  
How can I let my idol go?

The framing of this image as “idol” has resonances with the Pygmalion narrative, at the same time as it casts the child as interchangeable with its image. If idolatry is the worship of an object *as* the deity that it represents, then Osgood’s labeling of the image as “idol” counters the idea that the child is “fairer” than this picture. They are, or at least she understands them as, one and the same. The next stanza affirms this conflation, noting that when the infant hides her face in sleep, “Thy cherub face unchanging keeps/ Its precious bloom and smiles for me!” The image in this sense represents the perfect preservation of a more capricious living reality, the capture of a physical ideality not always accessible in actual life. This simple image is not merely material, but demonstrates, as the speaker notes later, “The soul that lightens in thy gaze.”

This material representation of “soul” prompts the speaker to address the image directly, as if addressing her living child:

Yet go! and with those earnest eyes,  
O'ershadowed by thy silken curl,  
Gaze smiling into stranger-hearts,  
And bid them bless my fairy girl!

The image's mission, in leaving her "mother," is to inspire a similar love in "stranger-hearts." But the aim is not for the reproduction of love for its own sake, but rather to "There plead for him who fondly wrought/ Thy soft and sunny loveliness"; that is, the artist. The poem, in other words, centers on the sending away of an image for practical aims: its engraving and subsequently broader dissemination. But if the painting is conflated with the child, the engraving is also aligned with the original from which it is reproduced. All fall under the singular second-person, a bloated "you" that encompasses child, portrait, and every reproduced engraving.

This conflation of original and reproduction is further confused by the identity of the image's artist. A later edition of this poem prints the text alongside a vignette of the Osgoods' eldest daughter holding a butterfly on her finger, painted by Samuel Osgood. "Him who fondly wrought" this image also wrought the child, a construction that is doubled in the "fairy child" written into existence by the mother. In this sense, it is not only the processes of manual and mass reproduction that are conflated, but those of biological and technological reproduction. As Eliza Richards writes, "Poem and picture refer to their place in a duplicative system: the couple produced the child and then reproduced her likeness in word and image; the volume's publication then multiplied those replicas"(60). The butterfly in the engraving, Richards suggests, "signals metamorphosis" from "life to art." In the light of the Pygmalion myth, we might add, "and back again." This poem is, after all, at least as concerned with the manner in which

the art object comes to life in the hands of readers, as it is with the way in which living beings take the form of artworks.

This concern with the reader's reception becomes clear with the speaker's desire that the engraving "win for him that simple meed, / For which his spirit long has pined,— / Th'approving glance of critic-taste." The loving looks that the parents bestow on this "fairer child," then, will be returned to them not by the child herself, but by the audience for this child's engraving (and implicitly, the accompanying poem). The girl of the poem is in this sense a conduit of emotion, a middleman between artist and public. For Fanny, at least, the dissemination of the child brought the desired effect in this, its first publication. As one of the "Notices of the Work" printed before the book's title-page reads, "This lady writes charmingly about babies, and we could quote sweet little lyrics enough from her volume to render her poet laureate of those enchanting little people"(1).

The poem thus participates in a set of poetic conventions—poems about children, poems as children—but also comments on a newer sphere in which both intimate poems and images are multiplied as a matter of course. The most striking aspect of this poetic commentary is its apparent lack of discomfort in sending the child into the world for the end of gaining critical approval. The poem is, in fact, utterly unapologetic about its traffic in children, though the sustained metaphor of the final two stanzas does offer some faint sense of discomfort with this strange new world:

Go forth, my bird of beauty!—leave  
The lowly ark of home, and when  
Thy loving mission is fulfilled,  
Come to my waiting heart again!

And though no promise-branch be thine,  
On which faint Hope may dare to feed,  
Thou'lt bring us back thine own sweet smile,

To cheer us in our hour of need!

The oddity of imagining the home base as an “ark,” presumably equipped for animal husbandry, underlines the importance of reproduction here. The metaphor figures the speaker as Noah, sending out a dove in search of land, to return—or not—with a “promise-branch” as evidence of habitable earth. This role mirrors the artistic production of the Osgoods: Samuel’s painting, though created in England (like the child, Ellen Osgood, that it pictured) was reproduced by the American engraver J.I. Pease at least in part to secure his reputation in that country. Similarly, Fanny’s book of poems, while first printed in London, was reprinted in 1841 in Boston (under the same title) and welcomed as “a new thing under the sun” (*Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*). Thus the American poetess’s proverbial wreath of flowers did make its way back to New England once she had firmly established herself within the publishing circles of that country.

But even as this image of the ark is a fitting metaphor for the Osgoods’ situation, it is also an exceedingly strange one in the context of the poem. The ambiguity of the analogy hints at the possibility of the mother’s loss, and so underlines the generosity of Osgood toward her readers. Putting aside even the obvious discomfort in setting one’s own child to work in securing the family reputation, the poem betrays an impossible scenario, a fantasy of public dissemination in which the multiple returns as singular, not in any way diluted by the “mission” of self-multiplication. This scenario—in which the child is both blessed by “stranger-hearts” and equally present in the mother’s “waiting heart”—clearly resonates with Osgood’s position as a poetess of public intimacies. But the poem ends on a note of anticipation rather than resolution. The “bird of beauty” could

return to the ark with an olive branch of critical acclaim, or she could return with nothing but her “own sweet smile,” or she could fail to return at all. This final scenario, though unspoken in the poem, resonates clearly through the tale’s Biblical source, in which the third dove’s failure to return marks Noah and his family’s approach to habitable land, and signals their journey’s success. That the child might be conclusively lost to its parents is the only definitive indication that it has gained a place in “stranger-hearts,” and so Osgood’s desire for readerly acclaim is a mark of the highest sacrifice.

This willingness to exchange private bonds for public ones, dramatically establishes artwork as a medium of emotional exchange between the parties engaged in the creation and the reception of a work. “To George P—, Esq. On his Commissioning the Author to purchase for him some Landscapes, by Doughty—a Summer and a Winter Scene,” also published in *A Wreath of Wild Flowers*, emphasizes this bond in the triangulated relationship between artist, patron, and public audience. The scene of the poem is located in the space between older, more private networks of patronage, and the newer model of print patronage, in which visual works, once purchased, could be widely disseminated. The George P— of the title is George Putnam, Osgood’s friend and sometime publisher, as well as publisher to the illustrated *Putnam’s Magazine*. That Putnam was both a patron of original artworks and their printer is central to the poem’s meaning, as centers on the sentimentalized bonds between artist, patron and public.

The poem stages the speaker as the intermediary in the purchase of the American landscape painter Thomas Doughty’s works, and emphasizes the emotional bonds between the three over any aesthetic treatment of the paintings. It opens by asserting that the artistic value of the works is secondary to Putnam’s own appreciation, trumped by the

memory of his generosity as patron: even if Doughty had “less proudly and well” depicted the landscapes, “For thee they would still wear a magical grace, /.../ For the thought of that impulse, so noble and kind, / Which prompted their purchase.” The artist, meanwhile, is equally astounded by the patron’s generosity: “Hadst thou watch’d the proud Artist with me, when his eyes/ Were suddenly lifted in joy and surprise, /.../ Thou wouldst bless heaven’s goodness for giving thee power / To soothe for the lonely, one sorrowful hour!” And the speaker, charged with the “pleasant behest” of communicating the sale is also affected and “full of childlike emotion.”

George Putnam’s history as patron suggests that the sentimentalized scene of this purchase takes place between old and new models of arts and literary commissions. The poem precedes an encounter from 1845, when Putnam reluctantly agreed to loan Doughty \$30, taking as collateral several of his works. “To George P—“ implies that 1845 may not have been the first time that such an exchange took place, while Doughty’s financial desperation in the later anecdote suggests some additional meaning for the extremity of the artist’s “joy and surprise” in Osgood’s work. The poem, in other words, highlights the awkward position of the artist (or author) at this point in publishing history, when networks of sale fell somewhere between the professional and the personal. The 1845 anecdote offers clear substantiation for Leon Jackson’s claim that multiple economies—including gift and loan economies—were at work behind the publication of antebellum works: when Putnam sold two of the three paintings to the American Art Union for \$50, Doughty alleged that this move not only compromised his reputation by underselling the work, but violated the terms of their agreement. In this imperfectly “professionalized” world, the artist’s loan was the publisher’s sale, and the confusion of these categories

demonstrates clearly that much more was at stake in these networks than the circulation of money. The poem's titular dedication to this publisher is further evidence that these ambiguous relationships extended to literature. (Greenspan 184-5 n4).

Putnam's role as a publisher and strong advocate for international copyright gives "To George P—, Esq." resonance in terms of the reprinting of text and image, and positions the speaker as a stand-in for a broader reading public. As Osgood's contemporaries would have known, publishers such as Putnam routinely purchased original artworks, not just for cultural capital, but for the practical aim of having the image engraved and reprinted in their publications. (The engraver would be paid for his work each time he created a new plate, but the artist would general only be paid at the purchase of the original image, or not at all, if the image was on loan (Patterson 21-22)). Though Putnam did not use the Doughty landscapes in any of his volumes, in this poem about the reproduction of emotion between members of an artistic network, reproduction of a more prosaic kind lurks just beneath the surface. And in the absence of a physical print, the speaker works to transmit these works—or at least their most elements, the emotional bonds that they create—to readers of the poem.

Both "On Parting" and "To George P—," then, consider not just the artwork's effect on a single speaker, but this work's existence within a complex network of sentimental and economic exchange. These works are destined from their inception for public consumption, and yet are on these grounds no less personal. Even in Osgood's early work, the image and text both are considered in the context of the social bonds for which she is today largely known. These poems, though they do not deal explicitly with the Pygmalion myth, anticipate some of the concerns in Osgood's later work centering on

this symbol, including the tenuous divide between life and art, and the social networks that create the public text.

This early volume, then, anticipates the concerns about the divide between private and public, life and art, which would come to dominate the poems of Osgood's exchange with Poe in the mid-forties. Osgood was clearly conscious early on of the potential for imagery and text to create personal ties even as they circulated in seemingly impersonal forms, their ability to, through their reproduction, replicate of the emotional bonds that created them. This was the careful idealism of Osgood's early work: to see the girl and her engraving as both distinct and identical, to see a painting as defined only by its easily transmissible sentimental bonds. This dichotomy is problematized in Osgood's periodical poems and stories from the mid-1840s on, which take on sight through the story of Pygmalion, and unlike Osgood's earlier work approach the threat of idolatry and self-infatuation which had long haunted retellings of the myth. If earlier poems construct the division between life and art as negligible, the works of the Poe-Osgood exchange examine this divide with a more critical eye, finding in this juncture a real potential for danger. At the same time, the biographical history of the literary exchange worked in precisely the opposite way, blurring the divide between life and art, and causing much of New York's literary world to feel that Osgood and Poe meant what they said in the poems that they published in *The Broadway Journal* and *Graham's*. Thus this Pygmalion-work is a part of the larger dialogue between two writers, but it also suggests, at a time when Osgood's own text circulated with increasing rapidity, that a work's audience was not always "full of childlike emotion."

## **The “Osgood-Poe Affair”**

In late February 1845, Poe spoke at the New York Historical Society, in an event that has gone down in history primarily for being his first public reading of “The Raven.” But the ostensible purpose for the evening came earlier, when Poe entertained the audience with the talk “The Poets and Poetry of America,” a largely critical examination of the day’s literary stars. As Meredith McGill has shown, the talk inspired the admiration of the literary side of the nationalistic Young America movement, particularly that of publisher Evert Duyckinck, who embraced Poe for his discriminating eye toward the field of mass publication. Like others in the movement, Duyckinck was suspect of the periodical press based on its unscrupulous dissemination of foreign reprints and “mean” American writing alongside the work of “good writers”(qtd. in McGill 202). Poe’s lecture, McGill argues, was thus useful in making severe judgments of quality, and in making distinctions that were not readily apparent in the dangerously democratic field of magazine publishing. Duyckinck’s review of the talk emphasizes these points: “In the exordium [Poe] gave a great and cutting description of the arts which are practised, with the aid of the periodical press, in obtaining unmerited reputation for literary worth” (qtd. in McGill 207). One of the few writers of the popular press who Poe singled out for praise rather than criticism was Fanny Osgood.

Of poets and poetesses including William Cullen Bryant, Henry Longfellow, Henry Dana, Lydia Sigourney, Amelia Welby, and the Davidson sisters, Osgood was the only one who inspired unconditional praise. The terms and the means of this praise strikingly anticipate the central concerns of the two authors’ later literary exchange. Poe praised Osgood for technical skill, grace, and, not least, originality (Walsh 6-7). This last

term was a loaded one in a lecture devoted to separating the legitimately literary from the “puffery” of the periodical press. According to Osgood’s own letters, Poe also “recited a long poem” of hers prior to his reading of “The Raven” (Silverman 286); this juncture of originality and quotation, in the conceptive moment of their relationship, sets the stage perfectly for their literary exchange. After their first meeting some weeks later, engineered by mutual friend Nathaniel Willis, the two would conduct an intimate friendship that left its primary historical record in the form of poems that they published in *The Broadway Journal* and *Graham’s Magazine* in 1845. These works, when read as a group, trace the general outline of illicit love. But they also center strikingly on the question of originality and quotation, and the place that quotation has in an artwork’s coming to life for readers.

The conjunction of romance and artistic originality comes to play most prominently through the Pygmalion myth. The Pygmalion-Galatea story is reinterpreted in both well-known and lesser-known works of the exchange and performs two important functions for the writers. On the one hand, it very literally expresses a culturally-forbidden love that is initiated through the gaze: precisely the kind of public, distanced and troubled romance that Poe and Osgood appeared to act out. At the same time, it is also a narrative that, even in its early forms, picks up on the artistic issues of origination. Galatea is brought to life because the uniqueness of her form demands it. Sculpted from an ideal rather than an actual woman, Galatea inspires Pygmalion’s love for the ways in which she is distinct from the mortal women that he disdains. Many versions of the story, though, including Ovid’s, show Pygmalion praying not that the statue should come to life, but that he find a wife that mirrors the statue. When he instead receives the original

living statue rather than a copied statuesque being, Venus is responsible for this interpretation of the transformation.

This intersection of romance and a consideration of the nature of originality makes this story almost ideally suited to self-reflexive retellings within the periodical press. The romantic and apparently secretive nature of the works in the literary exchange between Poe and Osgood seems designed to sell journals—as it perhaps was. The works in the exchange that depend on the Pygmalion narrative only heighten this sense of scandal, associated as this story traditionally is with idolatry and incest. The narrative's simultaneous association with concerns of artistic origination means that it participates in the other debates that raged in American journals during the 1840s, debates centered on the development of copyright laws, as well as the nature of artistic originality in an age of mass reprinting and wholesale quotation. In fact, the works of the Poe-Osgood exchange overlapped with the last letters printed from the “Little Longfellow War,” a public debate that was located precisely at this intersection of scandal-mongering and genuine intellectual debate.

The Pygmalion poems of the Poe-Osgood exchange, then, not only appear in the press, but they are in a very real sense about the press and the relation to audience that it enables. The exchange could clearly only have taken place given Poe and Osgood's close association with the *Broadway Journal* and *Graham's*, and it can only be considered an exchange at all because of the intertextual quotation and repetition within their works. The understanding of authorship that emerges from these works depends intimately on the networks of print, presenting an emotional intimacy that seems immediately legible, but that depends closely on the construction of what came before. This intertextuality is

represented as creative act: unlike the mechanized and wholesale reprinting that Poe critiqued in his advocacy for copyright laws, the selected copying and recopying of their works was a dynamic process that brought new meaning to the words for both authors and readers. And readers in these works are summoned as necessary witnesses to the coming to life of stories, poems and artworks.

The April 5, 1857 issue of the *Broadway Journal* includes several early entries from the exchange, but begins with an entry from the end of another famous (and contentious) literary exchange, the terms of which provide a framework for thinking about Poe and Osgood's works during this time. Poe's preoccupation with plagiarism as Newbury has noted, is intimately tied up with his advocacy for strengthened copyright laws that ensure an author's recompense at his text's reproduction. It is not surprising then, that this issue of the journal begins on the front page with Poe's last textual entry into what would become known as the "Little Longfellow War," the periodical exchange that was initiated in January 1845 when Poe accused Henry Longfellow of plagiarism in his review of *The Waif*. In the article in this issue, "Plagiarism—Imitation—Postscript to Mr. Poe's Reply to the Letter of Outis," Poe responds to a letter from the pseudonymous "Outis," recently published in the *Broadway Journal*, in which the author accuses Poe of the same literary plagiarisms which Poe had earlier leveled against Longfellow. (That Poe is widely believed to have not only published but authored the "Outis" letters in an effort to increase his journal's sales only complicates the issue of authorship). In this open letter, Poe denies that there was any malice behind his original accusations, and concludes by saying that "for the most frequent and palpable plagiarisms, we must search the works of the most eminent poets"(212). Poe strikingly frames these "plagiarisms" in

terms of biological conception. Ideas culled from another author, he writes, may lie dormant in the poet's consciousness, and then through association, will "spring up with the vigor of a new birth—its absolute originality [...] not even a matter or suspicion"(212).

This last entry, then, justifies literary borrowing through an analogy of artistic creation that recalls Osgood's self-replicating child in "On Parting with an Infant's Portrait." For both Osgood and Poe, the processes of biological reproduction and the dissemination of printed matter are aligned. While there are clear differences between how Poe and Osgood use reproduction in these works—most particularly, that Poe is concerned with the reinterpretation of work while Osgood centers more exclusively its dissemination and reception—that both rely on this trope for considering the encounter with a text can tell us something about how they envision the act of reading images and text. For both writers, the encounter with a publication is a dynamic one; you are likely, as Poe puts it, to be "possessed by another's thought"(212). The literary text becomes a living being, capable of taking control of your thought, or in the case of Osgood's poem, relaying words of praise from audience to artist. This concept of dynamic possession finds a place for selective literary quotation apart from the unauthorized—and mechanized—reprinting of works that Poe would continue to rally against in the journal.

Such "possession" is the centering trope of "The Rivulet's Dream," a short allegory of failed love that appears some pages later in the same edition of the *Broadway Journal*. The poem is both an example of Osgood's dynamic use of quotation, and the way that audience gets introduced, often explicitly, into the Pygmalion works of the Poe-Osgood exchange. As Osgood's first contribution to the literary exchange, the poem

hides behind layers of confused authorship: it is subtitled enigmatically as “From the German of—Somebody” but published in the “Original Poetry” section of the journal under one of Osgood’s pseudonyms, Kate Carol. This pseudonym was so generally known that it reveals rather than conceals identity, and like the guise of translation in the subtitle, is a half-hearted attempt at literary distancing that fails almost immediately. Poe makes this thin disguise all the more apparent by gesturing toward it, and in so doing, points out both his and Osgood’s awareness of their audience. As Poe’s editorial introduction recounts: “We might *guess* who is the fair author of the following lines, which have been sent us in a MS. evidently disguised—but we are not satisfied with guessing, and would give the world to *know*.” Though what follows is an somewhat innocuous poem about a stream’s love for the star that reflects itself in her surface, Poe’s frame introduces into the Pygmalion narrative both himself, and the gaze of spectators. While the stream, then fails to convince her love-object to “dwell with me”—once daylight comes, the reflection disappears—Poe’s knowing aside to reader’s facilitates another kind of coming to life, a biographical reading of the work.

Such a biographical move is even easier to make through the quotations of another failed Pygmalion poem in the same edition of the *Broadway Journal*. Osgood’s “So Let It Be,” which appears on the following pages of this same edition of the *Broadway Journal*. Subtitled “To—,” the poem centers on the speaker’s relationship to one who is “bound by nearer ties.” The narrative of unrequited love here is told, as in “The Rivulet’s Dream,” by contrasting the speaker’s animation to the love object’s unresponsiveness: the speaker “vainly strive[s] to hide” her “grief” while the love-object is unexpressive, untouched by “The shade that feeling should have cast,” looking on with

“serene and silent eyes” and speaking in a “heartless tone.” The inhuman immobility of the love-object casts him as a marmoreal Galatea-figure, who resists coming to life even in the face of his lover’s animation. At the same time, the poem brings to life one of Poe’s earlier stories, through the title and echoing refrain “So Let It Be.” This refrain—framed in the title with quotation marks and elsewhere with italics—is a direct citation from Poe’s story of ill-fated romance, “The Visionary,” first printed in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in June 1833, then later in 1840 in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, and then finally, in June of 1845 in the *Broadway Journal*.<sup>85</sup>

Osgood’s borrowing from this particular tale does more than just flag a connection between the writers: it shows her own investment in the Pygmalion narrative as a means of considering audience, and specifically the function of audience within the Poe-Osgood exchange. The poem centers on the death-pact between two secret lovers, a pact declared by the exclamation, “so let it be!” And like Osgood’s poem, it also contains thematic references to the Pygmalion narrative, albeit in a modified form. The outlines of the Pygmalion-narrative enter into “The Visionary” through the descriptions the Marchesa Aphrodite, whose head is described as “classical,” her form “statue-like.” When she encounters her lover, the story’s protagonist, her physical transformation echoes that of Galatea, down to her blush: “the entire woman thrills throughout the soul, and the statue has started into life! The pallor of the marble countenance, the swelling of the marble bosom, the very purity of the marble feet, we behold suddenly flushed with a

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<sup>85</sup> This final reprinting during the literary exchange seems to signal Poe’s awareness of Osgood’s quotation, and does his re-titling of the work as “The Assigination,” echoing a poem of the same title in Osgood’s collection *The Poetry of Flowers and the Flowers of Poetry* (1841).

tide of ungovernable crimson”(358). As in Ovid’s version of the tale, her coloring is a sign of her awakening to life, as well as her love for the one who has awakened her.

These clear allusions to the traditional outlines of the Pygmalion narrative are complicated by the story’s culmination in a death-pact, and its conspicuous summoning of an audience. The story’s ending not only transforms the Marchesa and her lover into art-objects, but it does so in the presence of the narrator, a stand-in for readers who suggests a motive for Osgood’s interest in the tale. This anonymous narrator is an acquaintance of the young lover (also unnamed), and is summoned to the lover’s home on what turns out to be the morning of the death-pact. The invitation is a privileged one: the lover’s home is a palace, and contains a collection of rare paintings, sculpture and design that he has kept carefully guarded from the public eye. As he declares to the narrator, “you are the only human being, besides myself, who has ever set foot inside [the palace’s] imperial precincts.” The rich collection of art-objects, particularly a painting of the Marchesa as an angel with “delicately imagined wings”(260) anticipates the transformation of the lovers themselves. And the narrative, in citing Chapman—“He is up/ There like a Roman statue! He will stand/ Till Death hath made him marble!”—makes the connection between art and death explicit. This connection suggests Osgood’s motives in citing the tale early in the periodical exchange. The reason for the narrator’s invitation as witness to the lover’s pact is an unexplained fact of the narrative, that in the context of the Poe-Osgood exchange furnishes a useful analogy for the reading audience. Like the narrator of “The Visionary,” Poe and Osgood’s readers in the *Broadway Journal* and *Graham’s* become privileged spectators to, not a love affair, but the transformation of two biographical figures into works of art.

Two other Pygmalion-themed stories of the periodical exchange also set up Osgood and Poe's (complicit) expectations of audience. They are thematically entwined—an early edition of Poe's story seems to have inspired Osgood's, while lines from Osgood's narrative found their way into Poe's revised edition—and though drastically different in tone, reflect a similar perspective on their expectations for audience. Osgood's story, "Florence Errington," published in the early part of the exchange in *Graham's*, seems most directly to instruct readers in how to approach her work. Subtitled "An O'er True Tale," the story demands a biographical reading even more insistently than most of Osgood's stories, but its frame-narrative suggests that such a reading is untrustworthy. It centers on a narrator called Fanny, and a main character called Florence, Fanny's juvenile pen-name (*The Memorial* 15). This story, published around the time of Poe's New York Historical Society lecture, opens with Fanny imploring an "Anna" (the name of Osgood's sister) to "do something ridiculous, or pathetic, or sublime, and furnish me material for a story!"(54)—a story, the narrative tells us, to be printed in *Graham's*. When Anna fails at the task, another friend furnishes the narrative of Florence Errington for the "poor, storyless author"(54). The frame for this narrative sets readers up for ridicule, pathos, or sublimity, all in the service of periodical publication, but certainly not for literal truth.

Given that the central story is—like so many of Osgood's versions of the myth—a failed Pygmalion narrative, it offers some insight into the skepticism that with which we might well approach Osgood's works in the periodical exchange. It centers on the unhappy union of Florence, "the most delicate, ethereal creature"(54), and a man of a more "worldly" temperament. Florence is compared throughout the narrative to an art

object in terms that recall Galatea: she is “as lovely a picture as the painter or poet ever conceived,” “prone to “a quick vivid blush would burn and fade in her pure cheek”(54). The story culminates in a moment of romantic mortification that brings a transition from life to art-object. When she is asked to act out a tableau vivant at a party immediately after her husband’s mistress, the knowing gaze of the audience is too much for her: “so motionless, so statue-like she seemed! Not a breath—not a sigh! It was too perfect! almost painfully so”(56). The performance ends as Florence’s husband rushes toward her and discovers her lifelessness: “She was dead! Life had left her even as she stood ‘the observed of all observers!’”(56). The stern moral of the tale—the deadening effects of worldly society on “delicate” spirits—is clearly at odds with the lightheartedly worldly purpose that the narrative performs within the frame narrative. In this unlikely conjunction, Osgood provides a means of reading the serious moral tone of her Pygmalion works—within the context of periodical demands and deadlines. Fittingly, when the tale was reprinted the next month in *The Green Mountain Gem*—presumably without Osgood’s permission, as her name was removed from the byline—its inclusion in the “Moral Tales” category was made possible by the removal of the frame narrative.

The cross influences between “Fanny Errington” and Poe’s story “Life in Death,” drives home the central similarities of the works, particularly in regards to their profoundly amoral perspectives on audience. “Life in Death,” published in *Graham’s* in April of 1842, at a time when Osgood was a regular contributor and Poe was in his last months as editor, is, like “Fanny Errington,” a frame-narrative that centers on the undoing of Galatea’s movement into life. “Life in Death” may have inspired the general outlines of Osgood’s tale, and it is almost certain that “Fanny Errington” in turn influenced Poe’s

revision of “Life in Death” and its publication as “The Oval Portrait” during the periodical exchange. And these connection can help to highlight the commentary of both works on audience. If “Fanny Errington” hints at the market motives that underline even the creation of “moral tales,” then Poe’s story suggests that an audience’s reaction to any work has little to do with truth or morality, but relies simply on an effect of “lifelikeness,” and a bringing to life of the audience.

“Life in Death,” and its later revision, “The Oval Portrait,” are usually read as principally concerned with “the nature of art and its perplexed relationship with the life it copies, alters, or transcends”(Freedman 7). According to this framework, the tale seems to suggest that artistic greatness “comes at mortal cost to the human subjects the artist reduces to the disposable raw materials of an alchemical art” (8). To look at the tale in the context of the Pygmalion narrative and artistic reprinting can complicate this analysis. When read in the context of Pygmalionesque language and the concerns with art’s dissemination that follow this myth in Osgood and Poe’s writing, it becomes apparent that the story is as concerned with the effect of an artwork on its artist and audience as on its subject. Thus while the subject of the artwork does suffer a “mortal cost” from the creation of the work, the artist and the narrator-audience go through a transformation that echoes the subject’s own. In this sense, the story not only documents the creation of a copy of life, but re-creates this copy in the minds of the artist, the narrator, and ultimately the readers of Poe’s tale. To be affected by a work, Poe’s narrative emphasizes, is to believe that it is real.

The narrative’s first reference to the Pygmalion myth emphasizes the effect of a work of art’s “lifelikeness” on its audience. The narrator, “desperately wounded” and

heavily drugged, has taken refuge for in an abandoned chateau for the night, and is falling into a dream-like state when an adjustment of the candelabra brings a portrait of a young girl into sight. The sight of this painting has an immediate enlivening effect on the viewer: “the first flashing of the candles upon that canvas had seemed to dissipate the dreamy stupor which was stealing over my senses, and to startle me into waking life as if with the shock of a galvanic battery”(201). This initial sight has the effect of prompting the narrator’s return to life, but further consideration of the work brings about a reversal of this effect. After studying “for some hours perhaps” the nature of the painting’s striking effect, he ultimately concludes: “I had found the spell of the picture in a perfect *life-likeness* of expression, which at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled me”(201) To appall is both an emotional and physical descriptor, denoting horrification and connoting the associated physical effect of pallor. As Paula Kot notes, Poe’s use of this adjective in the narrative is both recurrent and significant (4).

Pallor describes not only of the narrator’s transformation, but also the artist’s and the female subject’s, tying the three in to a shared experience. The transformation is most obvious in the case of the subject of the painting, who in the course of her sitting moves from being “all light and smiles and frolicsome as the young fawn,” to “pin[ing] visibly,” and eventually dying at the portrait’s completion. The deterioration of the subject’s health is linked explicitly to her coloring, as “the tints which [the painter] spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate beside him”(201). Though the canvas gains “tints” on its formerly “pale” surface, the artist responsible for the portrait goes through a transformation in the process of his creation that echoes that of his sitter. The work renders him “passionate, and wild, and moody”; he “took a fervid and

burning pleasure in his task.” This “burning” echoes the initial enlivening blush of Galatea, but is short-lived. On first seeing his completed portrait, the artist becomes “tremulous, and pallid, and aghast”(201). As the sitter’s husband, he is a Pygmalion-figure who echoes the coming to life of his artwork, and also ultimately this movement’s reversal.

The broad application of this progression from animation to petrification suggests that more is at work than a moral about the male artist’s objectification of his female subject (as Leland Person suggests) or about the creative process more generally as vampiric (as Mario Praz and James Twitchell argue). The echoing of the reverse Pygmalion narrative through the figures of artist, audience and subject suggests that the experience of art—from any perspective—brings about a transformation from life into art object. The art object thus circulates not in its material form but as an effect—lifelikeness—that copies itself and ‘comes to life’ through its audience. If the abandoned chateau—both the site for art’s creation, and the site for its experience—is modeled as a private, even secluded space, it is also the intensely public space of art’s reproduction. Poe’s dissemination of the tale in *Graham’s* is the culmination of the narrator’s “appalled” state; in becoming and producing an artwork, this narrator submits to reproducing the same process of enlivening and deadening in the readers who will encounter “Life in Death.” The experience of art in this context, then, is both creative and deadening, private and public, endlessly copied and endlessly original. The tale, rather than purporting to judge the apparent dangers or morality of artistic representation, is profoundly amoral, demonstrating the realities of the public/private text as the world of print disseminated it. This is a world in which art is both plentiful and unoriginal: even

the inspired image at the center of the story depends for its beauty on what it takes from its subject.

The cross-pollination of ideas between “Life in Death” and “Fanny Errington” is marked. That the impression which circulates in Poe’s tale is one of “lifelikeness” has clear application to the works of the periodical exchange, which capitalize on their connections to biography for the effects that they had on readers. This relevance may have attracted Osgood to the tale in her own reverse-Pygmalion narrative. Meanwhile, Poe’s changes to “Life in Death” and its republication as “The Oval Portrait” in the course of the periodical exchange indicate the influence of “Florence Errington.” When Poe published “The Oval Portrait” in April 1845, it appeared in print just two months after Osgood had published her story in *Graham’s*—and just one month after Poe had announced in the editor’s column of the *Broadway Journal* that this journal would publish a monthly review of the contents of *Graham’s*. It is almost certain, then, that Poe came across the story. His revisions to “The Oval Portrait” suggest the same: this later version of the tale ends abruptly as the painter “turned suddenly to regard his beloved:—*She was dead*” (265). This last italicized “*She was dead*”—“who was dead” in the original story—echoes an identical line in the last passage of “Fanny Errington.” The thematic connection between the two tales is even stronger. Poe would undoubtedly have found resonance in a narrative that questions the reading of truth (or “o’er truth”) into fiction, just as his tale isolates “lifelikeness” as a quality that does not have privileged access in life itself, but that circulates freely between subjects, artists, and audiences.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The revision of Poe’s story appears in the *Broadway Journal* just two issues after his article “Anastatic Printing,” a short but significant piece that comments on the new printing process by which, Poe believed “the ordinary process of stereotyping will be

Osgood's later work confronts the idolatry of the Pygmalion narrative with increasing skepticism. The literary exchange between Poe and Osgood peters out toward the end of 1845, but Osgood continues to compose and publish Pygmalion-themes poems that recall the outlines of the affair, as well as the exchange's investment in the sphere of print. While early works celebrate the public exchange of print, and works from the periodical exchange with Poe see audience as essential to the performances of artistry, Osgood's later poetry strikes a tone that is much more unambiguously critical, and calls up the Pygmalion myth for a discussion of a public literary sphere from which the poetess increasingly sought to separate herself. The poetry of the final years of her life reveals a shifting formulation of artistry, one that distanced itself from quotation and the circulation of a public intimacy, emphasizing instead a more private artist-figure.

### **Pygmalion's Retrospective**

Osgood's use of the Pygmalion trope following the 1845 periodical exchange develops in a manner that reflects her representation of Poe as a poetic and biographic figure, as well as her own changing conception of the print sphere. In several narrative poems from 1848-9, all published in *Graham's* as so much of Osgood's work, Osgood

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abolished”(230). The process of anastatic printing relied on the application of acid to a sheet of text or image; the acid would be neutralized by the ink but not by the paper, so when pressed against a zinc plate, would create a stereotype plate. In this manner “any engraving, or any pen and ink drawing, or any MS., can be stereotyped” cutting out the printer and putting the means of print reproduction directly in the hands of the author. Poe images a situation in the not-to-distant future, in which “authors will perceive the immense advantage of giving their own MSS. directly to the public without the expensive interference of the type-setter, and the often ruinous interference of the publisher”(230). This era of self-publication would have to wait longer than Poe anticipated—anastatic printing failed to take off, in part because its frequently destructive effect on the acid-soaked original—but ties in strikingly to the free circulation of artworks in “The Oval Portrait.”

confronts the Pygmalion myth from a new perspective, intertwining it with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In Ovid's version of the myths, both stories appear in Book X of *The Metamorphoses*, and so, as the other tales that appear within this Book, are conceptually linked; for Osgood, this link takes on significance as a means of contrasting aurality with a more visual world of print. These late Pygmalion poems are striking for the way that they give the female Galatea-figure voice, in direct opposition to most other retellings of the myth during this (or indeed any) time-period. This voicing is a central component in these longer pieces, but more is at work here than a feminist re-imagination of the narrative. This voice is also means of stressing aurality over the image of the traditional Pygmalion myths. In granting these characters voice, Osgood emphasizes their ability to restructure the traditional moral confines of the stories in which they find themselves. If the 'coming into life' of the Pygmalion narrative is in Osgood's earlier work a symbol for the intimate relationship of public print, this progression has, in these late poems, shut down entirely. These pieces are populated instead with statues that fail to come to life, false idols, and unrequited love. But Osgood's later works enact an alternative version of this coming to life, in which the speakers determine their own fates through transformative words rather than a transformative physicality. In taking this control, they distance themselves from the public intimacy which Osgood's earlier lyrics held out as a promise, withdrawing instead into a private space that increasingly came to characterize Osgood's later work. For this analysis, I center especially on the late Pygmalion poem "Eurydice," and her final collection, *Poems* (1850).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The entwining of allusions to Poe, Orpheus, and Pygmalion is also seen in other late poems such as "Fragments of an Unfinished Story," an unusually long narrative poem in blank verse, published in the November 1849 edition of *Graham's*. Griswold

In “Eurydice,” a poem published only a few months after Poe’s death, in the May 1848 *Graham’s Magazine*, Osgood picks up both myths in a work that likewise resonates clearly with Poe’s own. Opening with a frame narrative that, like “The Oval Portrait,” introduces the central narrative as a re-telling of a written text, the speaker presents herself as “reading o’er that antique story, / Wherein the youth half human, half divine, / Of all love-lore the Eidolon and glory/ .../In Pluto’s palace swept, for love, his golden shell!” The language of this frame clearly echoes that of some of Poe’s most well-known works, in particular “The Raven” and “Dream-land.” The story that the speaker reads, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, likewise has resonances with Poe’s representation within Osgood’s canon; Osgood’s most well-known late work, “The Hand that Swept the Sounding Lyre,” uses language from Poe’s verse to represent the deceased poet as an Orpheus figure. Though these references call to mind the periodical exchange with Poe, Osgood’s perspective on audience in this late poem has clearly shifted from those earlier works.

Osgood’s version of the Orpheus tale in “Eurydice” emphasizes the connections between this myth and that of Pygmalion, interweaving the two in a way that exaggerates the dormant connections within Ovid’s own telling. But in so doing, the figure of audience becomes a threat to life rather than means of creating it. Osgood’s use of language emphasizes the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice as a prefiguring (and condensation) of the theme of coming to life that resurfaces in the story of Pygmalion and

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mentions this poem in his biographical sketch of Osgood in *The Memorial* (1851) immediately after his description of “Ermengarde’s Awakening” and “Eurydice.” Of these latter two poems, he writes that they are “upon a similar subject, and in the same rhythm”(23). Considering that the works are not explicitly on the same subject at all, it seems that Griswold was well aware of the conceptual links between “Ermengarde’s Awakening,” “Eurydice,” and “Fragments from an Unfinished Story.”

Galatea—and that is undone by the deaths of the later stories of Venus and Adonis and Myrrha and Cinryas. The story of Orpheus centers on several movements from death to life, but the overall arc of the tale falls in direct opposition of that of Pygmalion and Galatea: Eurydice dies, as the speaker says, “because beloved too well!” Osgood’s retelling elides Eurydice’s first death, from a snake-bite on her wedding day, and moves directly into Orpheus’s descent into Hades and his efforts to rescue his wife. The language of this scene immediately brings the Pygmalion-narrative to mind: Eurydice is Orpheus’s “idol blest,” and as he enters the underworld, playing his lyre, she “drink[s] *life* from *his* dear gaze” and “the life of life regain[s].” The music has the opposite effect on the other inhabitants of Hades, who are “charmed into statues by thy God-taught strain.” While several translations of Ovid use the word “charm” to describe Orpheus’s effect on the inhabitants of the underworld, the idea of being turned into statues, and as Osgood writes later in the same passage, “fettered,” is her own emendation (Migraine-George 239).

In entwining elements of the Pygmalion narrative with her version of Orpheus and Eurydice’s story, Osgood emphasizes the contest between aurality and sight that is more understated in traditional versions of the myth. This contest begins with the speaker’s own experience of the myth; she enters the tale from the print of an “antique story,” and from this space, projects her imagination of the scene in terms that are exclusively visual:

I see *thy* meek, fair form dawn through that lurid night!  
 I see the glorious boy—his dark locks wreathing  
 Wildly the wan and spiritual brow  
 ...  
 I see him bend on *thee* that eloquent glance  
 The while those wondrous notes the realm of terror trance!

A spectator to Orpheus's "eloquent glance," the speaker retells the myth to reveal a version of the narrative in which Orpheus's "dear gaze" and his "God-taught strain" play an equal part in bringing Eurydice back to life. Ultimately, though, it is music that saves Eurydice, and sight that ruins her. When Pluto, "relenting to the strain," allows Eurydice to leave Hades he pronounces the "awful will" that Orpheus not turn back before the pair has safely departed the underworld. This ultimatum brings Eurydice's undoing: when Orpheus, unable to resist, turns to her with "those eyes of fire" she is "lost, forever lost!"

The last half of the poem emphasizes aurality's dominance in the abrupt (and almost unmarked) switch from the speaker's retelling of the tale to Eurydice's own voiced narration. At the end of the poem's seventh stanza, the speaker, addressing Eurydice directly, as she has throughout the poem, writes "Within thy *soul* I hear Love's eager voice replying—." The next stanza then begins with Eurydice's own exclamation of "Play on, mine Orpheus!," a narration which continues through the rest of the poem. The speaker's frame narrative thus functions to allow Eurydice, who in traditional versions of the tale is a silent victim twice lost, a chance to tell the story from her own perspective. Though at the mercy of Orpheus's glance, Eurydice nonetheless has the power of voice; she cannot undo Orpheus's actions or their effects, but she can cast them in her own light, as she exclaims in the final lines, "I faint! I die!—the serpent's fang once more/ Is here!—nay, grieve not thus! Life but *not Love* is over!" Eurydice succeeds in resurrecting herself by insisting on the transcendence of love, and rewriting her own story to reflect a truth that relies on more than material fact. Though Eurydice enters the narrative through the reader of antique volumes, the resurrection that she engineers at the end of the poem depends on no one but herself. In this alternate Pygmalion tale, Osgood

represents Eurydice's redemption in precisely a moment that the "antique story" fails to record, and emphasizes the detrimental effects of the gaze—both Orpheus's and by extension, the reader's.<sup>88</sup>

The pervasive skepticism about the world of appearances in late poems such as "Eurydice" makes itself felt likewise in *Poems* (1850), which presents earlier work through a lens of musicality and draws away from the intimate ties to audience that her earlier work stresses. The prefatory apparatus of the volume goes to pains to distance Osgood's biographical self from her work, pulling back from the earlier intimacy with readers that was explicit in *A Wreath of Wild Flowers*. The dedication begins on a note of intimacy, reading "To Rufus Wilmot Griswold, as a souvenir of admiration for his genius, of regard for his generous character, and of gratitude for his valuable literary counsels." But on the very next page, the preface includes a much more cursory and impersonal consideration of these same "literary counsels." The selection of works in this volume was made, Osgood notes, by an unnamed "literary friend," and on looking over the final collection, Osgood finds in it "some pieces which my mature taste would have rejected...while others are omitted which I would more willingly have inserted." Griswold, in other words, might have "Genius" but even as her literary executor cannot profess to speak for her taste. In "intrust[ing]" the selection of the volume to him, Osgood ensures that it has the personal stamp of an "attached friend" even as its final form is placed at a distance from her personal values and judgments. (We can only guess, of course, which works are not up to her "maturer taste"). This distancing continues in the

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<sup>88</sup> This dichotomy between aural and visual also emerges in "Ermengarde's Awakening," another *Graham's* poem, this one from August 1849. In this poem as in "Eurydice," references to Poe, Orpheus, and Pygmalion are entwined in a narrative that follows the title character's movement from material to spiritual love.

next lines of the preface, as Osgood notes, “It is proper to observe, in explanation of the character of some of the songs and other verses, that they were written to appear in prose sketches and stories, and are expressions of feeling suitable to the persons and incidents with which they were originally connected.” In linking the works to the feelings of fictional characters, Osgood effectively distances them from her own, a move away from the sort of biographical-poetic conflation of the periodical exchange. At the same time, since she does not distinguish the particular works to which she refers, this personal distance in practice applies to all of the book’s songs and verses. On this note, the preface ends, fittingly not with the author’s signature, but with the date and place of composition.

We see this dance between distance and intimacy similarly in the illustrations to the volume. *Poems* is by far the most extensively illustrated edition of Osgood’s poems, and the only one that prints engravings based on her husband’s paintings; S.S. Osgood is the most well-represented artist in a collection that also includes designs by the likes of F.O.C. Darley and G.H. Cushman. But this familial tie fails to make the personal appeals that it might: not only is there no discussion of S.S. Osgood’s work in the textual apparatus, but the titling of individual works pulls back from familial connections. We see this clearly in a the picture titled “The Child’s Portrait,” which is labeled much more tellingly just the next year in a memorial collection for Osgood, as “Portrait of Ellen Frances Osgood.” In this image, the Osgoods’ eldest daughter, a toddler with shoulder-length hair, looks out intently at viewers with large dark eyes, while a small butterfly perches on her right index finger. The vulnerability of the image is stressed by the child’s bare shoulders and the vacant backdrop against which she stands, and matches the

trepidations of its accompanying poem, “On Parting with an Infant’s Portrait,” which considers a mother’s reluctance to send away a child’s image.

Like the impersonal titling of the image, though, Osgood’s revision to “On Parting” show a pull back from personal engagement with her audience. The poem, as we have already seen, considers the speaker’s temporary separation from the “fair image of my fairer child” for the purposes of this engraving’s wider dissemination. But the poem printed in the 1850 volume ends after the fourth stanza, on the lines “Gaze smiling into stranger-hearts,/ And bid them bless my fairy girl!” As such, this edition of the poem excises the last five stanzas from the *A Wreath of Wild Flowers* (1838) version, in which the speaker implores the portrait to “win for [Osgood] that simple meed,/ For which his spirit long has pined,--/Th’approving glance of critic-taste.” Perhaps these five stanzas express what is no longer necessary: the reprinting of the child’s image in the elegant volume is evidence enough that her mission has been fulfilled. The image stands in as evidence of the favor of “critic-taste” that the intervening years have brought both Osgoods, and personal appeals would appear out of place in such a late publication. But Osgood’s emendations shift the meaning of the poem significantly, transforming its focus from the speaker’s generous offering to her audience, to a mother’s worries at parting with a precious possession. As such, these revisions mark the significant shift away from audience in Osgood’s later work.

We see this shift clearly in another poem in the volume, “To S.S. Osgood.” In this poem, Osgood the painter is cast in direct opposition to the artist in the early edition of “On Parting with an Infant’s Portrait”: rather than pining for “Th’approving glance of critic-taste,” this artist is “careless of what others call Renown,” and “disdains/ The

common meed that genius earns of men.” Instead: “with rapt, thrill’d heart and eye,/ Thy very *life* to thy loved task in thrall.” This image of the artist subjugates the end products of composition to the inspired process: not only is the artist indifferent to his work’s reception, but the poem itself is, as the subtitle tells us “Suggested by an Unfinished Picture” of an unspecified subject. The artist is suspended within the process of creation, “Kindling the canvas with thy *soul*,” a construction that suggests not only that the act of creation more valuable than the material work or gains that it might bring (“praise or gold”), but that the truly inspired creative process functions to consume the material end-product. In offering his life to the work (rather than bringing the work itself to life) Osgood marks the distinction of this artist from her earlier (audience-focused) Pygmalion figures.

In fact, the idea of a “kindling” creativity directly recalls another late poem (this one posthumously published) dedicated to Samuel Osgood, “The Artist in the Burning Ship.” This poem centers on a biographical event in which the young Osgood witnessed the ship on which he was a passenger struck by lightning, but the romantic vision of the artist that follows is wholly out of proportion to this same biography. The emphasis on the private and immaterial nature of this artist’s work is apparent from the last lines of the poem:

And the boy lost his all in that wreck,  
Yet he gave not a thought to his gold;  
For he saved in his spirit that pageant of light,  
And it lives there—a treasure untold. (*The Odd Fellows’ Offering* 2)

This artist’s work exists entirely in private memory, a “treasure untold.” Not only does it not make appeals to its audience, but it has no discernable physical form with which to make such appeals. This romantic representation is all the more striking given Samuel

Osgood's conventional career path as a portraitist to the gentry. The arc of Samuel's career during Fanny's lifetime runs in almost entire opposition to Fanny's late-life representation of his ideals. Though of humble origins, Osgood gained notoriety for his portraits of cultural celebrities such as Martin Van Buren and Davy Crockett—and wealthy sitters such as the young Fanny Locke herself. By the end of Fanny's life in 1849, as "one of America's most prominent and successful portrait painters," Samuel traveled to California under the lure of the Gold Rush (Houston 50). He exchanged painting for mining for some months, and by all accounts did well, earning enough money to dabble in real estate speculation. When he returned to painting three months later, it was, as a local newspaper article wrote, "with a well lined purse," and with 24 property lots in Sacramento. His work by then commanded "California prices," and his letters show him to be far from indifferent to this salability. In a letter he notes that he voted in the California elections for a recent sitter, Captain Sutter, "more from personal feeling than any other, since he has been the means of my being some thousand dollars richer than I should have been, had I not painted his portraits"(qtd. in Houston 51). And in an anecdote that neatly contradicts the premise of "The Artist in the Burning Ship," Osgood's apartment was in 1849 a victim of a fire that consumed dozens of buildings in San Francisco and caused millions of dollars of damage. The painter managed to escape with both a recently completed portrait and his summer's earnings, even returning to the burning building for a suitcase. This flouting of biographical truth in an apparently biographical poem does not in itself represent a shift in Osgood's canon, but her emphasis in these changes on the private, anti-materialist artist do.

Since this dance rejects the materiality of print that the figure of Pygmalion represented for both Poe and Osgood, it is perhaps not surprising that where this figure held dominance in the Poe-Osgood exchange, the trope of the song now comes to take its place. Osgood was increasingly consumed by the idea of her verse as music; in Griswold's biographical sketch of her in *The Memorial*, he notes that on her death, she was at work on a long blank verse poem "upon Music," which caused her to judge "all she had written of comparatively little worth"(24).<sup>89</sup> Osgood's poetry was increasingly set to music by composers in the 1840s, and following her death, in the 1850s. One of these composers was Herrmann Saroni, later the editor of *Saroni's Musical Times*, an influential New York weekly that covered music, literature and the fine arts from the late 1840s into the early 50s. Saroni set Osgood's "Echo Song"—a central lyric from the journal exchange, printed on the front page of the *Broadway Journal* and citing Poe's "Israfel"—to music in 1845, the same year that it was first published. In 1849, he composed music for another of Osgood's poems, "I Wandered in the Woodland." His journal became the first site of publication of two of Osgood's works honoring Poe shortly after his death: "A Dirge," published in the October 13, 1849 edition, and "Reminisces of Edgar A. Poe" for 8 December, 1849. (Pollin 27-32). Of these, "A Dirge" is the most well-known, and in fact perhaps the most reprinted of Osgood's works; it appears as the final work in the 1850 *Poems*, under its more familiar title, "The Hand That Swept the Sounding Lyre."

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<sup>89</sup> Ovid's Orpheus makes the link between poetry, music and infatuation explicit, through the Latin word "carmen," translated alternately as "song," "poem" or "incantation"(Migraine-George 239).

This poem, almost explicitly addressed to Poe, is a good example of the anti-materialist perspective on art in Osgood's late work. The re-titling and organization of this piece was likely done at the discretion of Griswold, who would later change the masculine pronoun to a feminine one in another reprinting of the poem. In *Poems*, then, "The Hand that Swept the Sounding Lyre" appears at the end of the section of the volume designated as "Songs." The grounds for titling the 113 poems in this section as such is not explained within the editorial apparatus, but several of the works—such as "Happy at Home," "Call Me Pet Names, Dearest" and "I Wandered in the Woodland"—are among those that are known to have been set to music. The organization, then, is at least to some degree a pragmatic one, but also functions to distance the voice of the speaker from a biographical persona. This distancing is compounded, in "The Hand that Swept the Sounding Lyre," with dematerialized artistic creation. The last stanza ends on this note:

Love's silver lyre he play'd so well  
Lies shatter'd on his tomb;  
But still in air its music-spell  
Floats on through light and gloom,  
And in the hearts where soft they fell,  
His words of beauty bloom  
For evermore!

The image of the shattered object directly recalls this same trope as used in poems and stories of the Poe-Osgood exchange, including "The Assination," "Slander," "To Lenore" and "Ermengarde's Awakening." In all of these works, the broken object signals the entrance into a different stage of life (or afterlife). Such a transition is clearly also at work in this poem, and the persistence of song after the obliteration of its material source also marks Osgood's investment in a transcendent perspective on creation.

At the same time, this poem's references to the periodical exchange and its seemingly obvious anchoring work to counter this aesthetic. The poem neatly illustrates the difficulty of reading Osgood's work throughout her career: while the canon is far from transparently biographical, it is circularly referential, quoting both from within Osgood's own canon and from without. This quotation, like the quotation of the periodical exchange, creates a narrative of its own, a story that while perhaps not quite biographical, has touchstones in biography. The task of shoe-horning biography from artistry in Osgood's canon is notoriously difficult, and only exacerbated by the fact that the most extensive account of her life that we have is the (questionably reliable) one of Rufus Griswold, whose sketch in *The Memorial* is an extension of his review of her *Poems* that appeared in the *Home Journal* earlier in the year. The sketch performs much the same back-and-forth dance as Osgood's final volume, alternately aligned and distancing person and poetry. Griswold begins by tying life to work—"There was a very intimate relation between Mrs. Osgood's personal and her literary characteristics."(21)—but then, in describing her frequently romantic subject matter, backs away from this equation: "It is not to be supposed that all these caprices are illustrations of the experiences of the artist, in the case of the poet any more than in that of the actor"(22). In relation to the poems to her children, however, Griswold shows no such hesitation, asserting that these works "admit us to the sacred recesses of the mother's heart"(28). This ambivalence falls in contrast to the general sentiment toward Poe, whose work critics made an almost painful effort to separate from life. Compare for instance these somewhat contradictory statements on Osgood to this unambiguous statement in an obituary sketch on Poe in *Graham's*: "Now, in the case of Mr. Poe, we cannot in the least

perceive that the defects of his private life had any connection at all with the consideration of his works or of his genius”(“The Genius and Characteristics of the Late Edgar Allan Poe” 218).

Tracing the myth of Pygmalion in Osgood and Poe’s work allows us to mark a shifting attitude, albeit on a limited scale, toward the public/private world of print. That the coming to life of the Pygmalion myth is so clearly tied in Osgood and Poe’s work to print publishing—and its incumbent challenges, such as the professional networks of publication and issues of reprinting and copyright—should encourage us to reevaluate the nature of this myth’s nineteenth-century heyday. If the story of Galatea and Pygmalion finds itself at the center of reinterpretation during this era of Ovid’s more general decline, this interest speaks necessarily to the outlines of the tale, to its investment in following the increasingly intimate relationship with increasingly accessible works of art. That Osgood, in her own work, ultimately replaces this material intimacy with a more ephemeral vision of art suggests that accessibility is followed by challenges, including the brand of artistic celebrity that was on the rise by mid-century. Osgood may have fostered a sense of intimacy with audience within the space of her artwork—but she saw this sense of connection extend well into her personal life. Osgood’s late work attempts to evade such connection to audience, but her memorialization speaks to the enduring power that such bonds had to readers.

The Pygmalion myth, centered on the emotional bonds of art object and audience, proved a fertile trope for readers’ reflections on Osgood’s legacy in the years following her death. William Gillespie, for instance, contributed his poem, “Pygmalion,” to *The Memorial*, a volume that was published in honor of Osgood shortly after her death.

Nathaniel Hawthorne also chose a Pygmalion work for the memorial volume, “The Snow Image: A Childish Miracle,” a story that considers the sculpting and coming-to-life of “snow sister” by two young siblings, and her subsequent destruction by adult rationality (45). And Sara Willis, a friend of Osgood’s who would attain literary celebrity after her death under the pseudonym Fanny Fern, produced perhaps the most memorable tribute to the poetess in her *Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio* (1854).

In an entry titled “Fanny Sargeant Osgood,” Willis records her visit to Osgood’s grave in Mt. Auburn Cemetery in the year following her death. Astounded to find that neither Osgood’s grave nor those of her daughters had been marked with a headstone, Willis bemoans the poetess’s position of being “so soon forgotten by all the world!” Her manner of memorializing Osgood to readers in the last lines of the passage is strikingly redolent of the Pygmalion myth, and suggests the personally intimate relationship that Osgood would continue to inspire in her readers after her death: “Poor, gifted, forgotten Fanny! She ‘still lives’ in *my* heart; and, Reader, glance your eyes over these touching lines, ‘written during her last illness,’ and tell me, Shall she not also live in thine?”(158). What follows is Osgood’s “A Mother’s Prayer in Illness”(1848), the kind of seemingly autobiographical lyric for which Osgood was best known, and which was particularly poignant given both Osgood and her daughters’ recent deaths. Asking readers, then, to “glance your eyes” over this poem, and to feel her come alive for them enacts the intimate bonds of the Pygmalion myth, and grants readers the power to activate them. Osgood’s late works—and even her final recorded word, “angell”—attempt to evade the uncomfortable effects of such intimacy, but audiences would continue to remember their own ability to look, and to bring to life.

## Epilogue

This dissertation highlights understudied ekphrastic works by popular nineteenth-century writers, arguing that this genre of art description provides unique insight into authorship and audience in an era of expanding literary production. The ekphrasis of print, centered in an era when engravings were increasingly accessible to middle class readers, imagines these readers as accompanying spectators, the sometimes unspoken but always present third figures in the dialogue between writer and artwork. We see this attention to audience in Sigourney's lyrics, which are based on easily obtainable prints, or Sophia's Hawthorne's travelogue, whose descriptions function to render more obscure works equally available. Even Longfellow's *Michael Angelo*, which seems initially a traditional hagiography of the artist, is just as much about how others see the artist, and how Longfellow's contemporaries see the writer. Osgood's early poetry too was deeply invested in the role of literary audience in the coming to life of a work of art. The difference that print makes, then, is in creating the assumption—founded or not—that the reader too can “see” the image, and in making this shared spectatorship an important component of the writing's unfolding.

It is with such a moment of shared spectatorship—this one from the twentieth century—that W.J.T. Mitchell opens his essay “Ekphrasis and the Other,” taking the popular radio comedy “Bob and Ray” as an example of the draw and difficulty of image description. In this example, popular nineteenth-century ekphrasis seems the natural precursor to the chummy image-sharing of the hosts, who invite their listeners to “see” photographs from their summer vacations (*Picture Theory* 151). It also seems natural in this context to understand this earlier popular canon as a forerunner to the “pictorial turn” that Mitchell describes as beginning in the late nineteenth century with the advancement of photo-technologies, experiments with film, and ultimately the advent of digital media. If the twentieth century is, as Mitchell pronounces, the age in which reading and the text lose their cultural dominance to sight and the image, it seems perfectly in line with this construction to understand the earlier proliferation of print as feeding into this large-scale shift (*Picture Theory* 11-34).

But I want to resist the inclination to pull back Mitchell’s “pictorial turn” another 50 years, or to see in the development of media any such sweeping cultural change. To claim any age as particularly “imagistic” in contrast to any other, is, as Mitchell himself has written after his term gained broad currency, something of a compelling fallacy. The image, in its various forms, has been an important artifact of every historical era, and pegging one period as “textual” and another as “pictorial” may be unproductively divisive (Holly and Moxey 240). In this dissertation, I have focused not on broad shifts from verbal to visual cultures, but on more specific changes within visual media. These seemingly small changes, I argue, make an important difference in the way that visual work is represented.

In thinking about ekphrasis, medium matters. Nowhere is this more apparent than in looking at the ekphrasis of the nineteenth century against that of earlier and later periods. Compare for instance Washington Allston's polished sonnets on works including Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling and Rembrandt's *Jacob's Dream* to the popular ekphrasis from later in the same century. Allston's stylistic influences are clearly European, and his writing follows to some Neoclassical ideals of aesthetic unity as his carefully balanced history paintings. Allston's poetry, his titling makes clear, is inspired not by reproduction but by the same artistic travels that provided him with his artistic training. One picture, he specifies, is "in the Institute at Bologna," another "in the Vatican." A poem that seems clearly to describe Rubens's *The Landing of Marie de Medici at Marseilles* is titled simply as "Sonnet on the Luxemburg Gallery." Allston's sonnets are concise records of the aesthetic lessons that he has learned from individual artworks in these particular locations. The imagined audience of Allston's poems consist of the master artists that he emulates, not a broader antebellum public (Allston 149-153).

The ekphrasis of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is equally influenced by its media and points of access. With the founding of major public collections in the late twentieth century and into the early twentieth, much Modernist ekphrastic work was centered in the museum, from Marianne Moore's natural history exhibits to W.B. Yeats's Municipal Gallery poems. Other works depended on the close associations between visual artists and poets; Frank O'Hara's poem "On Seeing Larry Rivers' *Washington Crossing the Delaware* at the Museum of Modern Art" as well as O'Hara and Rivers' collaborative work is illustrative of such personal ties. And the development of the media that inspired the phrase "pictorial turn"—photography, film, and digital media—have

prompted their own ekphrastic work. John Hollander notes that the use of photographs as ekphrastic subjects may have begun with Melville's *Battle Pieces*, but grew exponentially into the twentieth century. Meanwhile, poets from Hart Crane to Anne Carson have looked to film for inspiration. The variety of these media, and the ways that they are experienced, all make a difference for the way that art description works.

The central difference that print makes in nineteenth-century ekphrasis lies, as I have argued throughout, in its appeals to audience. But other common points also stand out, suggesting new directions for exploration in nineteenth-century art description. For one, the availability of engravings has the effect of flattening art history, particularly in an American context where there is little general access to original works. Ekphrasis is imagistic, but also essentially historical, reflecting back both the era in which it is written and the era of the scenes that it records. For writers such as Sigourney, who mined historical biography for didactic anecdotes for her students, or Henry Longfellow, for whom history was a grab-bag of styles and postures that could be easily adapted to suit the moment, ekphrasis was also a means of tapping into these varied historical moments. And it was print that granted these moments their easy immediacy, translating them into the present of the periodical. Because nineteenth-century ekphrasis allows for a present in which the past was always superimposed and transparently accessible, the function of this work is more than simply to think about the place of images, or even, as I have been arguing, the place of audience in literary culture. Instead, ekphrasis functions as a means of showing American readers what they might become, much as Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* series sketches out a dystopian American future through a Greco-Roman past. If print culture places descriptive writing and artistic engravings in direct

juxtaposition, so too does it place side by side the stories that we tell about the past and those that we tell about the present.

The very ubiquity of text and image also begs the question of the continuing relevance of the term “ekphrasis” to this form of writing. Critical definitions of ekphrasis are notoriously contentious, and much of the early nineteenth-century ekphrasis that I have examined in the course of this dissertation only includes moments that describe works of art in the context of longer sections that are not strictly ekphrastic. And, as I have stressed throughout, during the early nineteenth century art writing more generally—including art reviews and designated art journals—was in a period of expansion. If Mitchell and James Heffernan’s definitions of ekphrasis do not work with nineteenth-century popular print, that is to some degree because ekphrasis as a theoretical term has grown up around a specific set of Romantic and Modernist writers. This dissertation has focused primarily on thinking about what it would look like to take what we know of ekphrasis and apply it more inclusively to other canons. But it might also be worth thinking about other points of access. To place these works in their contemporary contexts would mean thinking more about Sigourney in terms of Hemans, more about Sophia Hawthorne in terms of the art descriptions in other travelogues, and more about writers like Margaret Fuller in terms of contemporary art journals like *The Crayon* or the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. This dissertation aims to provide an opening for such contextualized historical ekphrasis within the still largely unexplored field of nineteenth-century American art writing.

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