POETRY AND THE TIME OF LABOR IN THE ANTEBELLUM US

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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“Poetry and the Time of Labor in the Antebellum US” argues that nineteenth-century poetic genres, forms, and social practices give us unexpected insights into how workers and reformers understood shifting conditions during early industrialization, a transformational period spanning the 1830s through the 1850s that saw changes in how Americans thought about the place and nature of work. The dissertation examines poetic production within and about three variations on a type of experimental antebellum workplace or total institution—the navy frigate, Lowell factory system, and Brook Farm utopian agrarian commune—where laborers both lived and worked, under a unity of authority, place, and time. Poetry is an important, largely unexamined part of the story of these spaces not only because poems were well used by laborers in the places where they worked, but because of the many ways that nineteenth-century poetic genres and forms both represent and reproduce the time of labor. If time-discipline is a staple of worker productivity in a capitalist system, the poems at the center of this study work against such chrononormativity. As such, they reveal the ways that the total work institutions, poised somewhere between nineteenth-century ideas of home and what we now think of as a workplace—while in ways coercive and exploitative—also enabled nonnormative counter cultures and thus can be seen as part of a genealogy of resistance to
heteronormativity, gendered labor, consanguine kinship, the sex-gender hierarchies of the middle-class family, and industrial capitalism.
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INTRODUCTION

“Poetry and the Time of Labor in the Antebellum US” argues that poetry gives us unexpected insights into how workers and reformers understood shifting conditions during early industrialization, a period from about the 1830s through the 1850s that historians have identified as socially and economically transformational. Factory labor was among the many kinds of new wage labor available in cities as large numbers of young people left their family farms for steadier work, aided by the transportation revolution (Augst 3). A boom in US agriculture made it difficult for smaller farms to compete in the cash-crop market, but the land speculation that fueled market growth was also responsible for a period of economic depression following the 1837 Panic (Burns 52). These changes made labor a target of social reforms. Upon the mass influx of workers to cities, church and business leaders voiced anxiety about how working people spent their time (Augst 178, Skallerup 106-7). Populations of special concern were those considered to be unmoored from the stabilizing influences of family, church, and school, such as the sailors who inhabited port cities during potentially debaucherous periods of leisure, or the young single women newly living in factory boardinghouses in Lowell, MA. In both cases, containing workers’ leisure time and influencing how they spent it were important tools of social control that laborers often usurped for their own empowerment (Eisler 19; Skallerup, esp. 97-105).

The new opportunities provided by industrialization and urbanization changed the nature of workplaces and how Americans thought about the place of work. Prior to industrialization, men and women worked at shared tasks within an economy of
networked households where neighbors helped each other out in times of economic need (Dudden 12-43). Industrialization and urbanization contributed to the isolation of private families, the bifurcation of work and home, and an emergent separate spheres ideology (46-7, 107, 155). Just as the concepts of the workplace and the middle-class home were coming into formation, a number of spaces that defied the division between home and work began to become identifiable as such, and the target of increased attention and regulation. Labor spaces such as the navy frigate, the textile mill, and utopian agrarian communities emerged as a third places, neither homes nor workplaces, but rather sites where one both worked and lived, often apart from one’s family or in ways that destabilized normative kinship. Changes to labor in the antebellum period had consequences for ideas about the nature of work, the laborer’s moral vulnerability, the places of labor, the relation of home to workplaces, and the relation of work to idleness.

The 1840s was a time for trying out new labor arrangements, with important social ramifications. In some cases, new labor models motivated and enabled future emancipations, such as a ten-hour cap to factory labor, the women’s movement, and antislavery activism. In other cases, as with institutionalized reading on shipboard and the dozens of nascent Fourierist socialist communities like Brook Farm, the historical conditions fueling such labor innovations died down before the Civil War. This dissertation tells both of pivotal transformations and of windows of social possibility that opened because of the particular moment that was the 1840s but closed when that moment passed.

My argument depends throughout on Nicholas K. Bromell’s insights in By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America (1993). Bromell enables
my project both by establishing that antebellum literature is a valuable representational medium for understanding labor of the period and by emphasizing how perplexingly murky or even “invisible” work is across antebellum writing, for reasons that are once cultural, historical, and representational (2). He argues that in antebellum texts, “work is deliberately left open… its meaning unfixed, because it is a crucial site of conflict and exchange.” Indeed, work was not an agreed upon idea or phenomenon in the antebellum period; yet, for many reformers, nothing short of social perfection was at stake in getting labor relations right. This fact has consequences for representation—Bromell is tantalized by the difficulty of glimpsing work in action in literature and art, for good reason—but work may also be relatively invisible in literature, Bromell argues, because scholars have not “learn[ed] to look for the ways that it is present” (4). Like Bromell, I seek a historical understanding of literary representation. Where I depart from him is in my strategy for looking.

Bromell turns his attention to the moments in literature “wherever the work of representing work announces itself.” There, he claims, “the visibility of cultural representations of work is greatest” (11). By the “work of representing work,” Bromell presumably means both that representing work is difficult and that writing is a productive activity, often economically so. He argues that, “because writing is, after all, work, a writer’s reflections on his or her practice or aesthetics can be read as labor, or rather work, theory” (11). But following the trope of the writer musing about the labor of the pen produces a skewed history of labor. First, it privileges the bourgeois perspective of the writer or author, who may not be writing on the sly or for themselves, as laborers often did, but in order to enter a professional field. If laborers did see their writing as a
form of work, the word likely held a different set of meanings for them. A second problem with reading literature as a self-reflexive metacommentary on work is that the work of writing is not what nineteenth-century reformers had in mind when thinking about labor. Bromell argues that “during the antebellum period work was understood primarily by way of a distinction between manual and mental labor, which in turn rested upon an assumed dichotomy of mind (and soul) and body” (7). He illuminates the work of literary representation in order to put writing into relation with other kinds of work, but this approach risks promoting a binary distinction between mental and manual labor. I aim to show that this neat division doesn’t hold up against the actual experience of laborers. My chapters question the notion, for instance, that the work of memorizing a poem is only mental, or that mechanical labor is simply physical. Third and lastly, Bromell separates literature from the sites of labor, where literature was well used by laborers, and where the texts we think we know become less familiar to critics. In leaving poetry almost entirely out of his accounts of antebellum labor, he misses opportunities to access labor through a literature that was vitally important to laborers in the places where they worked.

In this study, I look for the ways that literature gives access to genre—for, labor is never unmediated by it in literature, and genre defamiliarizes labor in ways that are critical to the histories we tell. If the imaginative arts seem to bury or hide labor in their representations, it’s because artists are not pursuing simple description or autobiography. Historians of labor have consistently missed the insights poems have to offer by reading poetic voice as simply autobiographical, by failing to recognize the rich tradition of apprenticeship to genres within poetic practice, and by treating the generic in poetry as a
lack of imagination rather than a show of skill, wit, poetic authority, and ambition. Finally, they have commonly assumed that ornament equates with frivolity and that poems only rarely have a political, critical, or theoretical edge. But, reading laborers’ poems is not my only approach to labor in this dissertation. While I focus on mill workers’ poems in Chapter 2, I also look at how and when laborers read poetry, what social and political functions poems have within a workplace, and how poems not written by laborers commented on the issues important to labor reform. Genre dictates not only how labor is represented in a poem, but also gives clues to the ways that laborers knew to use poems.

My dissertation makes labor its specific focus, rather than the more capacious term, “work.” I consider “labor” to denote a kind of work that would include both the tasks and the particular kind of time involved in maintaining a ship or farm, or operating machinery. By contrast, “work” can include labor, though in practice the term often implies professional employment. One might also call acts one doesn’t do for money, such as thinking or mourning, “work” in order to classify them as psychologically productive. Labor, however, exacts demands on the body through repetitive actions essential to completing a task and getting paid, and those physical demands shape how a laborer uses his or her time. Bourgeois Americans were free to take up labor, and many did at Brook Farm, as I detail in my third chapter, but laboring for money is generally what those do who have limited means and options. When taken in an economic and a social context, then, the word “labor” conveys something about physical exertion, a worker’s relationship to time, and his or her class position.
I also mean to show how labor spaces produce their own temporalities that affect when and how a laborer thinks, writes, reads, or socially engages with poems, and also how poetry of the period may reflect or grapple with the challenge that is labor time. Laborers and reformers considered time to be one of the most important factors in the experience of labor. Their attempts to limit, resist, or completely reconceptualize labor time are responsible for the kinds of experimental living and working spaces I examine in Chapters 2 and 3. The importance of time to labor is also a reason why poetry is important to labor and laborers. With its formal patterning and generic investments in time, poetry is able to represent and reproduce labor time, as well as produce counter-Pacifics. With its portability and accessibility in popular print mediums, poetry is adaptable to the space and time of a workplace.

My understanding of how poems reflect on and reproduce time differs markedly from the argument Sharon Cameron makes in her foundational study, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979). In *Lyric Time*, Cameron seeks a poet (Emily Dickinson) that can help her to differentiate lyric poetry from drama and the novel. Although she calls lyric a genre, she means less that it is a genre of poetry than that it is a genre in this trio of literary kinds. In her usage, lyric is a stand-in for an ideal poetry, if not for all poetry. Cameron argues that more than any other mimetic art (she calls lyric the least mimetic of artworks (241)), lyric aspires to an autonomy from the world outside of it by producing its own temporality. Poems compress sequential time into static, stacked present moments, thereby achieving a kind of closure or unity, autonomy, and insulation from the context outside their textual boundaries (21, 241). For Cameron, the most lyric of lyrics, represented by Emily Dickinson’s poems, transcend time, gaining
immortality or atemporality (defined as “presenting past, present, and future as copresent”) (2, 213). Cameron argues that “only when Dickinson’s lyrics have established an internal order can they ever achieve the desired completion and pull themselves away from the context that partializes” (205).

Cameron’s book defined a prior moment of poetry criticism that has been well critiqued by Virginia Jackson in *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005). Jackson notes Cameron’s and other critics’ collapsing of a broad range of historical poetic genres into “lyric” (7); she counters the supposition that Dickinson’s or any poems are sceneless (6), and contextualizes Cameron’s claim that “the lyric voice is solitary and generally speaks out of a single moment in time” as a product of critics’ own lyric reading (Cameron 42-3). Like Jackson, I question the idea that lyric depends on or produces a boundary between text and context. To give a particularly destabilizing example, in the case of a memorized poem where does a poem end and a laborer’s body begin? Cameron’s solitary lyric voice cannot account for the ways that poems both project publics and reflect real audiences back to themselves. In my case studies, poems are not “pure unmediated speech” (207); rather, poems fortify laboring collectives, mediating between laborers and often representing a collective laboring voice back to sources of institutional power.

My sociohistorical approach to antebellum poetry counters Cameron’s understanding of poetic time more thoroughly than Jackson does. My project proceeds from the assumption that poems reproduce time so as to engage with the real social, personal, political, and economic challenges that time poses for laborers, not to liberate or insulate themselves from these concerns, as Cameron argues. This dynamic is perhaps
most obvious in Chapter 1 where a sailor’s ritual of rehearsing memorized poems to himself while on the clock (a sailor is always on the clock) ends up serving as a form of self-imposed work discipline. The elegiac poems I consider in Chapter 2 reproduce an anachronistic time, but this temporality is a response to the forward moving time of industrialization, not an escape from it. In my third chapter I explore poems, including Emily Dickinson’s, that fantasize about a midday pause within labor, when clock time appears to stop. These poems may appear to aspire to the condition of atemporality, but again this fantasy needs to be understood historically, as a poem’s contribution to the cultural work of imagining utopian labor at mid-century, rather than an essential characteristic of lyric. Whether representing anachronistic time, nonheteronormative time, or a time one doesn’t have to measure, the poems at the center of my study are best described, not as atemporal, but as working against historical ideas of chrononormativity.

In order to understand the time of labor that poems represent and, further, how laborers integrated the work of imagination into their lives, I rely on Jacques Rancière’s *The Nights of Labor: The Worker’s Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (1981, transl. 1989). Rancière’s subject in *The Nights of Labor* is a group of historical French laborers who thought and wrote and published in worker periodicals from the 1830s to the close of the century. Rancière’s laborers wrote in order to make a life of labor bearable and meaningful, to dignify it and themselves. The poet-laborers I examine resemble them in this respect, as well as in the strategies they use to make poetry and contemplation a part of their daily life. Rancière’s most important insight for my project is that every kind of labor and labor space produces its own temporality, which a worker must devise strategies for mastering so as to make an opening for thought. Workplaces are also
timespaces, where time can be described spatially or, mathematically and geometrically.

In order to think, a laborer must “divide” time into day and night (24, 35). The path to emancipation from the overseer’s clock (it’s never a true emancipation) is by reshaping the “work day round” or “circle” into a “spiral” of small positive changes (xi, 82). In some cases, thinking must happen at night; after work, a laborer often doesn’t have the leisure of rest. In the more fascinating cases where nighttime is not available for thought, the laborer must make a night of his day—he (and it’s usually a male laborer, in Rancière) must reconceive of the workplace as a place for thought. The creative strategies that laborers devised to achieve such “reversal[s] of [their] relationship to time” are crucial to understand, from a laborer’s perspective, how poetry enables or complicates labor’s rhythms and what kind of relationship to time poems may be at pains to represent (79).

Though each work space I examine has its own temporality, the navy frigate, textile mill, and utopian agrarian commune share much in common, making this project not so much a history of the differences between nineteenth-century workplaces as a history of common themes in labor reform. The 1830s-50s was a period of intense experimentation with labor through the creation of institutions that managed how laborers spent their time. Though the navy frigate was not a new workplace in the nineteenth-century, it became transformed in the 1830s when philanthropic societies and the navy itself institutionalized reading on ships so as to improve the common sailor’s idle hours. I argue in Chapter 1 that this development constituted a significant phase in the history of the navy, one that shaped Herman Melville’s experience on the USS United States and influenced the antebellum sea narrative, including Melville’s White-Jacket (1850). In
bringing books onto ships, reformers understood that a ship functioned as a total institution, substituting for each of a sailor’s spiritual, practical, and social needs while at sea—needs that were otherwise fulfilled by families and neighborhoods.\(^1\) There truly is no outside to a ship when it is in passage. Lacking such a separation from the ordinary world, the Lowell factory corporations sought to engineer their own protective cocoon for the young single women they hoped to attract to the mills through careful urban planning. The Lowell factory town was another total institution, where corporate-owned boardinghouses served as imperfect substitutes for private family domiciles. Lastly, residents of the Fourierist agrarian commune at Brook Farm liked to think of themselves as a society apart. The commune’s microcosmic aspects—the extent to which it sustained and modeled a different way of life—makes it an experimental, potentially representative, socially aspirational space, like Melville’s ship and the Lowell factory. In these spaces, laborers lived publicly: both in view of each other and, disconcertingly, in the public eye, as test subjects for social reforms.

The inevitable failures of these total institutions to approximate and accommodate normative ideas of living produced important countercultures and histories. In serving both as a workplace and a home, the total institution resembled neither, at midcentury. On shipboard and in factories, unmarried members of the same sex who were typically not family members slept and worked communally. At Brook Farm, the community’s needs often superseded those of the private family. Attempts to innovate labor that may have felt controlling to participants at the time, and against which they often rebelled, can be seen today as part of a genealogy of resistance to heteronormativity, gendered labor,

\(^1\) I rely on Erving Goffman’s definition of total institutions in *Asylums; Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961), in Chapter 2.
consanguine kinship and the sex-gender hierarchies of the middle-class family, and industrial capitalism.

To say that the total institution imperfectly replicated the family home is to recognize that in ways it did more for laborers—particularly for women—than domestic economies could. The poet Lucy Larcom said of her years living and working in Lowell factories, “I often think that I knew then what real society is better perhaps than ever since” (*A New England Girlhood* 224). Larcom is not unique among the laborers portrayed in this dissertation in her belief that life within the total institution is potentially more socially and culturally enriching than life outside of it, in spite of exploitative conditions. We can better appreciate what she meant by looking at Julia Ward Howe’s portrait of a failed relationship between a mistress and her domestic servant within a middle-class home in her elegy, “Tribute to a Faithful Servant” (*Passion Flowers*, 1853).

Howe’s “Tribute to a Faithful Servant” portrays a bourgeois woman poet’s thoughts while holding her dying domestic servant’s hand on her deathbed. The mistress reflects on her servant’s “weary tasks of foot and hand,” feeling guilty that she may have “abridged thy little life” through overwork (pp. 143-4, ll. 62 and 49). She imagines the maid accusing her, “Hadst thou been here, I had not died” (l. 52). The fantasy of trading places and the action of holding the servant’s hand leads the mistress to reflect on the maid’s domestic labor, which took the place of her own. Indeed, the mistress may only be able to see her maid’s labor by thinking about the poetry it made possible and the domestic work she’ll now have to do, instead of writing, before she can hire a replacement. Her new recognition of a kind of kinship is embedded in the phrase “tasks
of foot and hand,” which refers both to the mistress’ task of writing poems and the maid’s domestic labor. In the following lines, the mistress seeks to equate the two kinds of work:

She ranged my hair with gem or flower,
Careful, the festal draperies hung,
Or plied her needle, hour for hour,
In cadence with the song I sung. (ll. 21-4)

These lines bespeak a desire to honor the maid’s abridged life by ennobling her labor, by recasting needlework as a craft or aesthetic sensibility equitable with poetry writing. She wants to see the two as partners in their acts of making verses and drapes, but the two kinds of work remain asymmetrical: a mistress lives, but a maid has died.

Howe’s poem clarifies the importance of examining poetry about work in the context of labor history. First, unlike shipboard, Brook Farm, and the print publics of the Lowell Offering, the private middle-class home where Howe’s mistress writes her elegy to a maid does not support the cross-class sociality she seeks. Though the two share a space for working and socializing, their relationship is limited to that of an employer and an employee; their physical isolation in the home and from others further traps them in their different roles. There’s little opportunity for the mistress’s sentiment to affect the labor conditions it bemoans. Poems aren’t socially transformative on their own, but among and between people; her maid, now deceased, is neither the addressee nor a potential reader of this poem. Howe’s mistress operates on a popular assumption, further, that art is free to all (it is not) and socially liberating (it can be, but only if the conditions for a laborer’s empowerment are there—if they have access to some of the resources of the bourgeoisie, either through peer exchange or institutional provision.) If not, poetry is certainly capable of assisting in social control, as I show in Chapter 1. Harping on the
obvious, poetry isn’t something the maid gets to have in the world of Howe’s poem, making the maid and her labor relatively inaccessible to her mistress and to us.

Returning the reading and writing of poetry to scenes of collective labor, each of my chapters takes up a specific antebellum live-work environment as a case study for asking questions about the relations of poetry and labor. In asking those questions, each chapter pursues a slightly different approach: Chapter 1’s primary focus is sailor-readers of poetry; Chapter 2 takes up laborer-poets of the Lowell mills; and Chapter 3 focuses on poetry about the time of labor and leisure. The chapters divide, additionally, by genre. Chapter 1 compares the politics of singing verses on shipboard to that of reading verses as a shared text. Chapter 2 argues that factory operatives used elegy perhaps more than any other genre to process and represent transitions in women’s labor. Chapter 3 shows that pastoral was an important resource for conceptualizing the time and the queer erotics of utopian labor.

Chapter 1 asks what kind of pressure the rule against singing on a navy ship put on poetry to do the community-fortifying work of collective vocalization. In White-Jacket, Melville’s fictional counterpart to the real wooden frigates of the original U.S. navy, the Neversink, harbors a crew well-versed in poetry. Poetry is full of subversive potential on this ship, first because it substitutes for something the navy doesn’t want the sailors to do (sing, act as a collective) and second because poetry was not among the institutionally authorized reading sailors were encouraged to do, but was rather something they traded among themselves. Still, Melville’s sailors are not entirely in agreement about how poetry will best serve their populist purposes, and the ship ultimately becomes a forum for Melville to stage a debate about democratic poetics. In
this respect, I find *White-Jacket* to be as important as Emerson’s “The Poet” and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in offering a definition of democratic poetics, but it does so by an entirely different strategy.

My archive in Chapter 2 is the many elegiac poems women factory operatives working in the Lowell textile mills published in *the Lowell Offering*, a magazine produced entirely by this community from 1840-1845. Though *the Lowell Offering* has long been regarded as a valuable record of women’s lives, historians and literary scholars have consistently dismissed its poetry as overly sentimental and imitative. In order to understand what these poems have to say, we have to first understand the function and the language of elegy. Perhaps the most difficult thing for modern readers to comprehend is why a laborer would use a set of conventions associated with mourning if they were not personally sad, if they generally regarded life at Lowell as a good thing, offering unparalleled opportunities for independence. They did so, I argue, both to claim poetic authority by participating in a recognized genre—a genre well practiced by women poets of the period and to great acclaim by Felicia Hemans and Lydia Sigourney—and to process collective losses and changes to women’s roles as a result of the new labor at Lowell.

Chapter 3 reflects back on the previous chapters by bringing questions about labor time to the fore. Well aware of the exploitative labor practices on ships and in factories, labor radicals and utopian thinkers sought a free labor option that was both anticapitalist and antislavery. Followers of the French socialist Charles Fourier built communities predicated on the idea that nature offered an authentic set of limits on labor, ensuring that

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2 Paula Bernat Bennett and Jennifer Putzi are noteworthy exceptions, as I detail in the chapter.
one does not work too much. Small-scale agriculture was the ideal labor model at the transcendentalist-Fourierist community of Brook Farm, although participants also earned income through tradeswork and tuition collected from students of the Brook Farm school. In order to imagine and represent how agriculture might provide a more easeful and socially harmonious environment for working and thinking, literary writers of the period frequently relied on the pastoral mode. I argue that pastoral allowed utopian thinkers to elaborate a labor model built on the potential within the midday pause or noon hour, a time both for homoerotic sociality among laborers and for sharing and making poetry.

Believing himself to be an actor in a pastoral drama, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s protagonist in The Blithedale Romance (Hawthorne’s fictional portrait of Brook Farm) assumes that his copartners are open to polyamory because he associates both pastoral and Fourierism with nonnormative sexuality. For their part, poems by friends of Brook Farmers published in The Dial join in labor reform discourse by playing with the transformative reversals possible within the noon hour, a pastoral trope. In these poems and those by Emily Dickinson, noon is sexually, socially, and economically liberating because it’s an hour when time seems to have stopped, freeing laborers from the source of their hardship: having to mark time.

Readmitting poetry to the historical record of antebellum labor gives us a fuller picture of laborers’ sociality, of the rhythms of their labor and their strategies for coping with it. It also offers scholars insight into the representational tools at hand to nineteenth-century labor commentators. In what follows, I will show how poetic forms, genres, and social practice offered laborers a variety of ways of understanding, representing, and reclaiming their experience.
CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF POETRY IN A MAN-OF-WAR

As may readily be imagined, the business of writing verse is a very different thing on the gun-deck of a frigate, from what the gentle and sequestered Wordsworth found it at placid Rydal Mount in Westmoreland.

Herman Melville, White-Jacket

Readers of Herman Melville’s novels have long remarked on their poetry—their numerous poetic references, quotations, poet figures, and in some cases, original verse. Documenting early reviewers’ interest in Melville as a reader and writer of poetry, Hershel Parker argues in Melville: The Making of the Poet (2008) that it’s only later scholars who regard poetry as a late-career development for Melville. Nineteenth-century readers knew he was deeply invested in poetry, well before he published his own volumes (11-22).³ Important bibliographical scholarship on Melville’s reading and marginalia initiated by Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (1948-50, 1988) and Wilson Walker Cowen (1965) ballasts Parker’s argument by demonstrating that Melville began reading poetry intensively in the 1840s.⁴ Such bibliographical insights have reinvigorated questions about Melville’s authorly influences, as Robin Grey pursues in her compelling critical edition of Melville’s marginalia, Melville & Milton (2004).⁵

These scholars’ archival research lays invaluable groundwork for understanding poetry’s centrality to Melville’s craft and has catalyzed scholarship on Melville’s own

³ Battle-Pieces (1866) was Melville’s first published volume, though Parker presents evidence that Melville was writing poetry much earlier (Making of The Poet).
⁵ Students interested in Melville’s reading of poetry will find useful material in the appendixes of Herman Melville, Published Poems, pp. 869–921.
published verses. What remains for scholars to investigate, however, is Parker’s lingering question: what role does the poetic serve in Melville’s novels? I ask a version of that question here. What role does poetry serve in a man-of-war? The question is key to understanding the complex generic variety of Melville’s literary career and important for American literary studies, which has historically prioritized novels and prolonged binary thinking about prose and verse traditions.

Melville’s 1850 novel, *White-Jacket*, upsets such binary thinking by offering a compelling set of answers as to why Melville pursued poetry within the novel form. In *White-Jacket*, poetry has a social and a political role. Poems mediate sailor sociality as objects of exchange and forms of address, thus assisting Melville in portraying how a shipboard could be an ideal, democratic community.

By calling *White-Jacket* a democratically optimistic text, even as it documents violence and violations to personal liberty, my interpretation departs from some classic studies. *White-Jacket*’s characterization disqualifies the novel as democratic for Larry J. Reynolds, and in “White-Jacket: Authors and Audiences,” Wai Chee Dimock wonders whether Melville’s “disdain” for the book, which he claimed to have written (only?) for “lucre,” is “woven into the text” (297). My emphasis on the “world in a man-of-war” part of Melville’s title—indexing Melville’s interest, in this book, in representing shipboard as a world unto itself (a society, a culture, a city)—produces different conclusions.

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My claim, that the Neversink is a workplace commons constituted by poetry, may come as a surprise. Verse form, poetry’s most visible feature, is largely absent from White-Jacket’s pages, making it a very different book, stylistically, from Mardi (1849) or Moby-Dick (1851). The absence of verse in White-Jacket in fact reflects the politics of poetry on the Neversink. In his 1850 novel, Melville explores a specific shipboard environment: the navy frigate or man-of-war, in which sailors were not permitted to sing, among other regulations. Whereas one might expect singing to feature significantly in a sea novel, as sea shanties and working songs appear regularly in depictions of shipboard life during the period, these forms are conspicuously missing, and missed, by the novel’s eponymous hero. Without song, White-Jacket complains, “you must pull the ropes, like convicts, in profound silence; or else endeavour to impart unity to the exertions of all hands, by singing out mechanically, one, two, three, and then pulling all together” (58). What kinds of pressure does the rule against singing put on poetry to ease labor or liberate workers—to facilitate worker solidarity?

As David Alworth has argued (2014), Melville writes as a sociologist in White-Jacket as much as an artist. Nineteenth-century readers interpreted White-Jacket as an argument against flogging in the navy. Watson G. Haynes invoked the book repeatedly at antiflogging campaign events in 1850 as “the truest picture of life on board a man-of-war that he had ever read,” reportedly recommending that it be distributed to “all the officers of the Government” (1). Though the novel is not merely functional, readers should remember White-Jacket’s repeated charge to describe “the world in a man-of-war.” We

cannot understand White-Jacket and the social role of poetry between sailors without understanding ship environment that Melville was at pains to represent.

The rule against singing drives sailors to devise creative ways of overcoming limitations on their leisure, their labor, and their sociality. Poetry offers them various resources for doing so. My chapter, which tracks three poet-figures in White-Jacket, begins with the institutionalization of sailor literacy on navy vessels during the 1820s–’40s. This historical context forms a backdrop for the collective resistance on Melville’s ship via covert reading directed by Rose-water, a racially and socially marginalized poet-figure. A second poet-figure, Lemsford, serves as a cautionary tale against the private uses of poetry on shipboard when routine cannon fire destroys his manuscript of poems. Through Lemsford’s foibles, Melville critiques the publication industry, which he deems poetry for the “public,” proposing instead a populist literary audience modeled on the ideal ship: poetry for the “people” (192). Finally, poetry’s highly structured linguistic form assists with the self-regulatory work that sailors must do in a coercive environment. Jack Chase, a third poet-figure, achieves collective voice for the Neversink’s sailors when he adapts literature for performance. Poetry becomes a subversive, democratizing force on the Neversink through the many ways that Melville’s sailors substitute it for song.

Though Evert Duyckinck famously denounced Melville’s next two books, he praised White-Jacket as “thoroughly American and democratic” because it imagines a solution to the problems with navy practices in a democracy, beyond merely representing them (271). To provide such a solution, I argue, a published collection of poems wouldn’t do—Melville needed the novel form. As in Emerson’s lecture, “The Poet” (1842, 1844), and Whitman’s 1855 preface to Leaves of Grass, poetry acts as a sign of democratic
culture, in *White-Jacket*. But *White-Jacket* also theorizes the relationship between poetry and labor differently from these models. In “The Poet,” Emerson distinguishes among “knowers,” “doers,” and “sayers,” strongly suggesting that workers, as doers, cannot be poets. Initially, he defines “knowers,” “doers,” and “sayers” as equal and permeable categories, each having “the power of the others latent in him,” but doers soon emerge as dominant strawmen in his thinking (449). He ends up defining poetry against occupations (453), settling for a division of labor by which the poet acts on behalf of men, including workers. Because modernity has produced “dislocation and detachment from the life of God,” the poet takes on the job of “[reattaching] things to nature and the Whole” (455).

While Whitman celebrated laborers, his workers never operate as a collective in *Leaves of Grass*. The sailors of *White-Jacket* are, however, present to each other as participants in a workplace commons constituted by poetry. In Melville’s vision, the ship’s intimate architecture enables democratic poetic sociality.

**Sailors as Urban Readers**

Melville’s interest in the relationship between poetry, labor, and sociality exceeded the conceptual and physical confines of a man-of-war, but the particular influence of this space on his writing has been underrecognized and overshadowed by scholarship on the whaler. The United States Navy’s original wooden sailing vessel—the frigate—differed significantly. It was a ship of state first and foremost. A large, compartmentalized, socially hierarchical living and working space, the frigate was supported by government interest and defended by the United States Marines, but operated by ordinary sailors of many nationalities. It aspired to the British fleet’s cultural and political monumentality. The months when Melville served as a common sailor on
the USS *United States*, August 1843 to October 1844, were pivotal in his career. This time offered him the unique resources of a growing institution that prioritized sailor literacy and constituted the last leg of his employment at sea before he returned home and began writing.

In their respective work on sailors’ reading, Harry S. Skallerup and Hershel Parker make a strong case for regarding the *United States* as among the most substantial of Melville’s noncredentialled educational and social-intellectual environments before he became a professional writer (Skallerup 93-4; Parker, *Herman Melville*, 258-9, 273). Melville would have found sailing a welcome opportunity; he didn’t need reputation, money, formal education, or experience to do it. In Albany, Melville lived in the shadow of his grandfathers Melvill and Gansevoort—both celebrated Revolutionary War heroes—and in the shadow of his infamous debtor father, Allan Melville. When the family could no longer afford Herman’s primary school education, he learned what he could from his eldest brother Gansevoort and participated in local debate and mutual improvement societies outside of various day jobs (Parker, *Herman Melville*, 1-21; 91-99).

Adding to these informal educational experiences, when Melville enlisted in the early 1840s, the US Navy was in the early stages of establishing an academy, which was not formally founded until 1845. In the meantime, ships served as academies: navy recruits shipped with the crew to study under a navy-employed schoolmaster or a sailor-tutor. In 1827, Navy Secretary Samuel Southard developed a program for distributing books to navy vessels and yards using standardized reading lists (Skallerup 135, 230). In 1841, he extended this program, initially intended only for officers, to common sailors as
well. The seaman’s library consisted of around eighty titles, all quality current publications, including selections from the voluminous *Harper’s Family Library* and issues of the *Penny Magazine*, a British initiative for working-class literacy. The mobile library program was unusually egalitarian for the notoriously hierarchical navy: though sailors read from a different list than officers, their books were distributed universally, meeting sailors where they were stationed. Although the seaman library program only lasted a few years, it endured long enough to shape how Melville represented shipboard literacy.

Books came to sailors from a variety of sources in the antebellum period. In addition to the Secretary of the Navy, philanthropic or religious societies like the Seaman’s Friend distributed books in an effort to morally improve sailors’ off-duty hours (Skallerup 106–7). Like the mercantile libraries that cropped up in Boston and New York in the 1820s, and in Cincinnati and Baltimore in the 1840s, sailors’ libraries were intended to “substitute for the brothel, the saloon, the gaming table, the theater, and other sites where men could spend ‘unemployed hours’ with ambivalence, if not hostility toward the genteel domesticity of Anglo-Protestant morality” (Augst 178). Though Melville’s sailors resent being objects of charity, they and their antebellum counterparts embraced library initiatives in their own way, often pooling portions of their salaries to

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9 The navy book list for seamen (1841–43) included seventy-nine titles confirmed to have been on board the *United States* in the mid-1840s by the storekeeper’s inventory at New York Navy Yard in 1846 (Skallerup 221–3).

10 In 1821, the Seaman’s Friend Society organized a “Committee for the Distribution of Books to Seamen” and began advertising for book donations in their New York monthly, the *Sailor’s Magazine*. Skallerup describes the society’s library initiative, pp. 97–105.

purchase additional books.\textsuperscript{12} Somewhat like the clerks who paid $2 a year to access the reading room at the New York Mercantile Library (Augst 177), sailors adapted the practice of subscription to their own desire for pleasure reading and sociability. This common property—a symbol, furthermore, of one’s ownership over his unemployed hours—inevitably created conflicts of interest between sailors and their overseers or benefactors (Skallerup 77–88). The library was one of several grounds on which common sailors negotiated their freedoms on US Navy vessels during the 1840s. In one respect, the shipboard library was a means by which sailors maintained their intellectual capital within a workplace and a living space that, like the factory or textile mill, served many functions. More than a means of self-improvement, however, books on shipboard enabled cross-class sociality (see figs. 1-2).\textsuperscript{13}

Because sailors treated texts as shared property, shipboard communities included omnivorous readers, nonreaders, disenfranchised readers, and the illiterate alike. As a resourceful group exhibiting diverse literacy levels, sailors valued the library less as a collection of texts and more as an intellectual commons. White-Jacket reports reading voluntarily and socially on board the Neversink, following his whims and pleasure rather than the prescriptions of the sailor’s library. By his appraisal, the sailors’ library contains “numerous invaluable but unreadable tomes, that might have been purchased cheap at the auction of some college-professor’s library” (167–68), but none of the books that sailors

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Life in a Man-of-War} (1841)—the popular, anonymously published narrative of a cruise on the USS Constitution—documents sailors’ practice of pooling wages for books and theatrical production materials (pp. 105–9, 118–25).

\textsuperscript{13} In an essay on American adaptations of \textit{Aurora Leigh} (1856), Mary Loeffelholz describes how women factory workers read aloud popular books such as \textit{Aurora Leigh} as a form of cross-class sociality and mutual improvement (“Mapping the Cultural Field: Aurora Leigh in America,” \textit{The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange}, edited by Meredith L. McGill (Rutgers University Press), 2008.)
most like to read: paperback novels and works of poetry and drama—books one “pick[s] up by chance here and there,” which “pretend to little, but abound in much” (169). White-Jacket’s comments ironically suggest not that charity is lost on sailors, but that sailors have refined taste and can obtain better reading material on their own.

The Neversink library’s shortcomings highlight the degree to which seasoned sailors likely accessed the current literature through their own peer trade networks, independent of the navy’s standardized reading lists. Melville introduces characters who possess specialized knowledge of poetry, ultimately minimizing the authority of the sailor’s library, which historically favored nonfiction prose over poetry. White-Jacket’s most trusted source for reading recommendations is Rose-water, one of three black cooks on the Neversink and a valued alternative to institutional authority. Whereas the navy rarely incorporated the recommendations of sailors when compiling their reading lists, Rose-water’s knowledge of books likely comes from years of peer exchange (Skallerup 141–42, 207.)

Breaking with presumptions about nineteenth-century subaltern literacy, Rose-water recommends to White-Jacket The Loves of the Angels (1823), Thomas Moore’s comically-titled serious poem about angels disgraced through their passion for mortal women, but he omits the Irish poet’s more popular collections of songs and ballads, Irish Melodies (1808–34). Rose-water also dismisses a “Negro Song-book” circulating on the ship as “vulgar stuff” (168–69). Nineteenth-century readers will have remembered that it was Moore’s The Loves of the Angels that reviewers found “vulgar.” In April 1823, The North American Review charged Moore with sullying the holiest of subjects with “the

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14 The United States did carry a copy of William Cullen Bryant’s Selections from American Poets (1840) (Parker, Herman Melville, p. 56). See also Skallerup, p. 93.
rooted vulgarity of his tastes and the sensual tendency of his imagination” (354). With his uncommon preferences in literature, Rose-water makes an unexpected claim to high cultural taste. He is an unsuspecting participant in a transatlantic literary commons that was still debating the fitness of high cultural genres for low themes and the marginal social classes. Surprisingly mobile, through the ship’s routes Rose-water accesses books and ideas typically unavailable to a person of his rank and race. He gains representative power through his association with the ship, that “living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” described by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) as “immediately focus[ing] attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs” (4). Rose-water is a figure of the black Atlantic—a space shot through with the histories of black lives, defying our attempts to separate cultural histories according to national or ethnic belonging. In Melville’s depiction, the navy administration seriously underestimates the cultural power and social reach of a sailor like Rose-water.

Rose-water implicitly singles out folk song by omitting mention of Moore’s *Irish Melodies* and denouncing the “Negro Song-book” (201). By effectively separating the genres of poetry and song, Rose-water exposes a complex politics of reading on the *Neversink*. As a subordinate, Rose-water well knows that one’s ability to read poetry or sing verses on a navy frigate is determined by rank and race. Whereas administrators promoted respectable reading among (implicitly white) common sailors that could include poetry, they prohibited singing because they claimed sailors’ numerous voices would make commands difficult to hear on a large ship. At the same time, our first
glimpse of Rose-water is of him singing a “St. Domingo melody” with his fellow cooks while White-Jacket longingly listens on (58). American navy vessels followed the tradition of the British Royal Navy by prohibiting singing (Roger 503). Melville portrays this regulation as one of many forms of censure in the “The Pursuit of Poetry Under Difficulties” chapter of White-Jacket (43). More is at stake in the rule against singing than the ability to hear commands. In the eyes of the navy administration, black work song is not threatening if black sailors are effectively segregated from common sailors, whose united voices always threaten mutiny.

Overlooking institutional differences between the management of navy vessels and that of other nineteenth-century ships, modern readers have typically presumed that sailors universally experienced poetry in the form of song. White-Jacket tells a very different story: on the Neversink, the institutionalized distinction between singing verses and reading poetry intentionally disrupts sociality by reinforcing differences of race, class, and rank. In a telling moment of racial voyeurism, White-Jacket recalls, “When I listened to these jolly Africans, thus making gleeful their toil by their cheering songs, I could not help murmuring against that immemorial rule of men-of-war, which forbids the sailors to sing out” (58). We can add singing to Jeannine Marie Delombard’s account of the many ways that White-Jacket marks social and racial difference, making it easy to tell, as she writes, “who is and aint [sic] a slave,” quoting Ishmael from the “Loomings” chapter of Moby-Dick (Delombard 51–67). If the cooks’ permitted singing underscores their exclusion from sailor culture as the US Navy imagined it, a culture in which the highly scripted shipboard library also played a socially stabilizing role, then Rose-water’s knowledge of poetry interferes with these goals.
Rose-water’s rejection of the “Negro Song-book” is, further, a critique of minstrel performance, which vulgarized and stereotyped his culture. With this detail, Melville deliberately revises the racial politics of one of White-Jacket’s chief sources, the sailor-memoir Life in a Man-of-War (1841). In this sea narrative, the sailors’ library functions more like a competitive marketplace than an intellectual commons. When a (black) cook asks “in quite a polite style for Moore’s ‘Loves of the Angels,’” a (white) sailor responds to his request for a highbrow volume by insisting he should prefer a racialized songbook: “Never mind, … I’ve got Sittin on a Rail and Gumbo Squash in my ditty-bag I can let you have, they will answer you just the same; you will be more at home with them at all events” (108). “Sittin on a Rail” (or, “The Racoon Hunt”) and “Gumbo Chaff” were minstrel songs popularized by the American blackface performer, Theodore Dartmouth Rice in the 1830s and 40s. One of many possible antebellum counterparts to Melville’s Negro Song-book, the 1836 United States Songster featured “Settin on a Rail” on its title page (see fig. 3). The songbook celebrates this and other popular tunes and minstrel songs as American cultural heritage by including a woodblock engraving of a sailor holding an American flag next to other representative citizens and the words, “E Pluribus Unum,” beside its title page. The woodblock image accompanying “Settin on a Rail,” of a black-faced banjo player sitting on a fence and grinning at a racoon, is precisely the kind of representation that Rosewater rejects in White-Jacket.

15 In his portrayal of sailor reading, Melville responds to the “Literary Tars” chapter in Life in a Man-of-War, pp. 105–9.
16 See Berth Lindfors, Ira Aldrich: The Vagabond Years, 1833-1852 (University of Rochester Press), 2011, p. 94; and W. T. Lhamon, Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture (Harvard University Press), 2003, pp. 27, 29, 144-5.
17 Kevin J. Hayes puts forward the Negro Singers Own Song Book, Philadelphia, [1843?] as a possible source in his Melville’s Folk Roots (The Kent State University Press), 1999, p. 18.
Melville makes several key revisions to the sailor’s library passage from *Life in a Man-of-War* that give Rose-water more agency than he had in the source text. In *White Jacket*, Rose-water owns his own copy of Moore, making it possible for him to operate independently of the sailors’ library. Melville also recasts the Negro Song-book as an object of exchange among interested white readers, rather than an emblem of white ideas about black intelligence.\(^\text{18}\) If the sailor’s library in *Life in a Man-of-War* is a hotly contested space marked by rank and by race, Melville instead suggests the artificiality of parceling out what was always acquired collectively, through the intermingling of persons and goods in ports and on ships. By referencing the Negro Song-book together with the Irish folk writer Thomas Moore’s verse, Rose-water inevitably evokes minstrelsy’s own roots in both Irish and African American traditions,\(^\text{19}\) whose sea shanties and Afro-Caribbean work songs *White-Jacket* considers important features of shipboard life. Finally, by juxtaposing the activities of singing and reading verses, *White-Jacket* exposes the social divisions on shipboard, subverting the improvement programs that underpinned them. Melville reveals that, in fact, maritime laborers were already united as cultural traders in a broader Atlantic commons.

Naval administrators contended not only with resourceful readers, but cunning, sophisticated urbanites. When Melville depicts the *Neversink* as “a city afloat, with long avenues set out with guns instead of trees, and numerous shady lanes, courts and by-ways” (74), he extends urban metaphors found in sea narratives like *Life in a Man-of-war*, which characterizes the gun-deck as a “promenade” “like our Broadway” (97).

\(^{18}\) Melville also rewrote the cook’s “polite style” of speech as dialect. \\
\(^{19}\) See “Jump Jim Crow” from *The History of Minstrelsy*, curated by the University of Southern Florida Library, exhibits.lib.usf.edu/exhibits/show/minstrelsy/jimcrow-to-jolson/jump-jim-crow
Melville uses “Broadway” figuratively throughout *White-Jacket*. At another moment, *White-Jacket* describes the ship’s “scrupulously neat” decks “as the sidewalks of Wall Street of a Sunday morning” (87). Arguably no ship of the period more resembled a city than a frigate, with its division into discrete zones, the publicness of its open-air spaces, and its forced intimacy. The metaphor holds political meaning, for Melville, too. By calling a ship a “city of the sea,” he emphasizes the scope of the US government’s failure to protect a large population’s civil liberties (144).

Sailors’ own use of urban terminology marked them as the frequent inhabitants of port cities. Indeed, the period’s popular literature associated sailors with urban spaces: seamen often figured in magazine fiction as easily criminalized flaneurs, as in Edgar Allan Poe’s tales, “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) and “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842). Both capitalized on public anxiety about urban strangers by featuring sailors. In Poe’s portrayal, a sailor can commit a crime in plain sight because he is the consummate cosmopolitan: transient, an only sporadically active community member, as visible or invisible as any other “man of the crowd.” However, he can also be caught, as is the sailor in “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” because, as a member of the urban public, he leaves a paper trail: he reads and subscribes to periodicals.

Like the sailor in “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the sailor that Melville is most interested in portraying in *White-Jacket* is an urban reader. He is, by David Henkin’s definition, practiced in the “public spectacle” of reading texts that include signs,

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20 See *White-Jacket*, pp. 50, 69, and 117.


22 “The Man of the Crowd” refers to the 1840 Poe tale.
handbills, pasteboards, and dailies “alongside…and over [other people’s] shoulders” (11, 12, 58–59). Melville enacts urban reading in *White-Jacket* by incorporating an artifact from the fictional shipboard performance of “The Old Wagon Paid Off!” (92). The rectangular, bordered playbill—a full page of bolded, italicized, and underlined text—interrupts the narrative and gives readers the perspective of a sailor casually perusing pasteboards on the gun-deck. White-Jacket notes the playbill’s incongruity, but he also assumes that it is legible to all as a scene of urban reading: “The following written placard, presenting a broad-side of staring capitals, was found tacked against the main-mast of the gun-deck. It was as if a Drury-Lane bill had been posted upon the London Monument” (91). Conspicuously out of place, the sign potentially violates shipboard protocol, but it shares with urban texts the ability to transform and redefine a public space, embodying numerous contradictions. For instance, if one interprets the sign as a notice to sailors rather than as an advertisement for a play, then “The Old Wagon Paid Off” makes a false promise. This phrase was common nautical slang for the sailor’s payday at the end of a cruise, but at this point in the narrative, the *Neversink* is far from its final port.23 A quintessential urban text, the handbill speaks to a diverse but inclusive public through its multiple modes of signification, requiring a discerning reader to steady its meaning (Henkin 59).

As urban readers, Melville’s sailors regularly engage with texts as common property. Moreover, the genres they most prefer—poetry and drama, according to White-Jacket—are ones that can be performed, thus creating an occasion for sailor sociality.

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23 The fictional play performed on the *Neversink* appropriates the original play, “Old Ironsides Paid Off,” performed on the USS *Constitution* ca. 1840 and described in *Life in a Man-of-War*. See Isbel pp. 15, 21–22.
Nineteenth-century sailors prioritized performance on board ships in the same way that they ensured there would be books worth reading—by pooling their wages to purchase the desired materials. Imitating the British Navy’s longstanding practice, theatrical performance became common in the US Navy beginning about 1819. American shipboard theatricals differed from their British counterparts, however, by being thoroughly amateur productions. Typically, self-taught actors initiated these theatricals, passing on their knowledge from ship to ship (Isbel 9). Theatrical performance is another example of how sailors collaborated for their own pleasure—a tangible example, furthermore, of their investment in genres that exceed the page.

“To have it all in common”: Shipboard Publics

To understand the roles for literary sailors on Melville’s Neversink, one must first understand how peer and institutional desires shaped nineteenth-century sailor literacy. Because of the Neversink’s literacy culture, our guide to Melville’s man-of-war world, White-Jacket, does not behave like other learned narrator-protagonists of his type, including Melville’s own Ishmael. For Hester Blum, the topmast sailor is a sea narrative type who embodies the consolidation of a sailor’s mental and bodily labor—sailors’ knowledge—in his bird’s-eye gaze toward the sea (109-32). However, Melville deliberately departs from this sea narrative staple in portraying White-Jacket, who shirks his job as topmast sailor in order to recount the ship’s social history. In view of “one of the most magnificent bays in the world,” White-Jacket resists saying “all that might be said” of Rio de Janeiro because he must, as he reiterates repeatedly, “adhere to my one proper object, the world in a man-of-war” (160). With White-Jacket’s self-correction, Melville adjusts his readers’ expectations concerning sea narratives, telegraphing that he
will not privilege the singular, meditative view of the Romantic sailor positioned “before the mast,” as Richard Henry Dana Jr. did in his memoir, *Two Years before the Mast* (1840).24 Melville learned a great deal from this volume, but by rejecting the sea eye trope in *White-Jacket*, he countered the kind of narrative Dana made popular. Unlike *Two Years before the Mast*, *White-Jacket* is less invested in the sailor as an individual and more interested in the idea of a ship as a commons.

In an example that illustrates the difference between Dana and *White-Jacket* as sailors, Dana recounts how he withdrew to his cabin to read his personal correspondence alone rather than waiting until the entire crew was available to share their letters with each other, violating a cardinal rule of shipboard reading. For a sailor to receive even a single letter during a year’s voyage at sea was a matter of chance. Because of the dearth of fresh material for amusement and the chance of hearing news from home, Dana’s mates were ceremonial about the occasion of reading letters aloud, as if their arrival permitted a sailor to imagine that he was at home by the fireside. They considered personal correspondence common property: “Supper, too, must be eaten before the letters were read; and when, at last, they were brought out, they all got round any one who had a letter, and expected to hear it read aloud, and have it all in common. If any one went by himself to read, it was—‘Fair play, there, and no skulking!’” (240).

But Dana unapologetically exempts himself from the ship’s common code. He retires alone with his letter, so that he can read it “without interruption.” Preserving the letter as a form of intimate exchange is one way he protects his class status and, he claims, his pride: “Jokes were made upon those who showed any interest in the expected

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24 For Dana’s importance to the nineteenth-century sea narrative, see Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, pp. 86–87.
news, and everything near and dear was made common stock for rude jokes and unfeeling coarseness, to which no exception could be taken by any one” (240). Dana had not yet completed his degree at Harvard when he went to sea to cure “a weakness of the eyes” (5). When he wrote *Two Years Before the Mast*, he was newly admitted to the Massachusetts Bar; he specialized in maritime law and later took up the antislavery cause, representing fugitive slave Anthony Burns in 1854. Risking pariah status by perusing his letters privately, Dana cultivates the very markers of sensibility for which he imagines his messmates would tease him.

However, the crew’s jealous obsession with the private lives of fellow sailors was not the hazing ritual that Dana portrays, but rather an indulgence in sentiment. Exploding secrets was how the sailors of the *Pilgrim* fostered their community—a community made through speech, sharing, and critique.  

Laughing and jest also likely served a community-strengthening function on the *Pilgrim*, as it did for onshore literary clubs (Shields 70). The process of making private feelings public removes the threat of isolation or individual vulnerability. Through diffusion, sentiment becomes available for common use and transformation into something else: material for advice, consolation, solidarity, debate, conversation, or amusement.

In *White-Jacket*, Melville describes a shipboard community so practiced at the prank of stealing from one another that “a community of goods seems almost established” (39). As in *Two Years before the Mast*, an act of withholding writing from the shipboard crew poses a special threat to such an economy and creates suspicion about a sailor’s role in his community. A potential Dana-figure, the After-Guard sailor-poet

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25 Marcus Rediker characterizes sailor collectives as “speech communit[ies]” (164).
Lemsford takes extreme measures to preserve his poetry manuscript from tampering by those who “hated his box [of poems], as if it had been Pandora’s, crammed to the very lid with hurricanes and gales. They hunted out his hiding-places like pointers, and gave him no peace night or day” (41–42). The poems do not themselves endanger the ship, but Lemsford’s determination to keep them to himself does. Lemsford attempts a material defense of his poesy by hiding his manuscript box among the camouflaging guns, while the quarter gunner roots out the black manuscript box like an enemy among the ranks. When Lemsford finally takes an extreme measure, hiding his papers in a gun barrel, it is only a matter of time before his manuscript, Songs of the Sirens, becomes a casualty of navy routine, sounding off “with a terrific report” as the Neversink was returning a “shore salute” received at Rio de Janeiro Bay (191). Harrison Hayford suspects that cannon fire destroyed many original shipboard compositions, as scrap paper was sometimes used as fodder for guns.26

Lemsford is a parodic figure within White-Jacket and a social problem for the Neversink. The incongruity of poetic inspiration in the context of a man-of-war makes him a comic type, as does the crude and literalist defense of his poetry using the most modern artillery. Lemsford’s plan to profit from his pages when the voyage ends further compromises his pretensions to creative purity. But the comically extravagant, public loss of his manuscript becomes an unexpected opportunity for consolation, conversation, and critique. Topmast Captain Jack Chase suggests that Lemsford celebrate the destruction of the physical form of Songs of the Sirens: “No printer could do the business for you better. That’s the way to publish…. Fire it right into ’em; every canto a twenty-four-pound shot”

26 Harrison Hayford speculates about the real-life sailor poets Melville may have based his representation on in “The Sailor Poet of White-Jacket,” Boston Public Library Quarterly, vol. 3, 1951.
Chase’s militaristic metaphor fantasizes a level playing field in which Lemsford could respond to his critics in kind. For his part, Melville once characterized the critical response to *Mardi* as a “broadside” fired at its metaphorical hull (Melville, *Correspondence* 131). Chase’s critique goes two ways, suggesting both the potential for a nonprint afterlife for Lemsford’s poems and that publication is itself a form of destruction. In the same conversation with Chase, Lemsford admits that a prior experience with publishing had destroyed him financially and socially: “The cursed publisher sued me for damages; my friends looked sheepish; one or two who liked it were non-committal; and as for the addle-pated mob and rabble, they thought they had found out a fool” (192). The destruction of Lemsford’s single manuscript copy of *Songs of the Sirens* by friendly fire becomes an opportunity, finally, for him to reassess why and form whom he is writing.

The scene dramatizes two related issues for Melville: the risks of publishing and the artist’s relationship to his community. In a letter to Dana composed shortly after *White-Jacket*’s publication, Melville fantasizes that he might share his next “sea book” only with Dana: “I almost think, I should hereafter—in the case of a sea book—get my M.S.S. neatly & legibly copied by a scrivener—send you that one copy—and deem such a procedure the best publication” (*Correspondence* 160). With Dana standing in for an ideal, sympathetic reader, Melville weighs the advantages of intimate exchange against those of mass circulation, taking pleasure in the thought of producing a single copy. Melville later explored the social effects of such a scheme in “Bartleby” (1853), his tale about a scrivener who prefers not to verify that multiple copies of a document are

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27 The writers corresponded briefly about the possibility of Dana helping Melville secure a British publisher for *White-Jacket* on 1 May 1850.
identical versions and finally decides not to copy them at all. The fantasy suggests the continued allure for Melville of an older kind of sociability associated with literary clubs and coteries. Within the social club, the unpublished text functioned both as an object of exchange and as a community-strengthening token of friendship, valuable precisely because of its ephemerality and irreproducibility. Members of the coterie wrote for each other and the occasion, not for posterity; for this reason, David Shields postulates, their documents were not intended to survive (xxiv–xxv). Lemsford and Chase arrive at a similar conclusion in *White-Jacket*, but their ideal audience is a populist one.

When Lemsford instinctively blames “the public” for his misfortunes as an author, Chase acts offended, challenging Lemsford to specify his resentment’s true object:

> “What they call the public is a monster, like the idol we saw in Owhyhee, with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion!”

> “I don’t like that,” said Jack; “when I’m ashore, I myself am part of the public.”

> “Your pardon, Jack; you are not. You are then a part of the people, just as you are aboard the frigate here. The public is one thing, Jack, and the people another.”

> “You are right,” said Jack; “right as this leg. Virgil, you are a trump; you are a jewel, my boy. The public and the people! Ay, ay, my lads, let us hate the one and cleave to the other.” (192)

*White-Jacket*’s readers, then or now, rarely explore the recurring, often italicized abstract noun “the people.” In an 1850 review, *Saroni’s Musical Times* glossed “the people” as “authoritative for ‘common sailors’” because Melville had stated that it was the term officers used to refer to unranked seamen (28). In “the nomenclature of the quarter-deck,” “the people” is patronizing and reifies a structure of subordination, but Melville enables sailors to reclaim the phrase as their own—for populist self-identification—by using other synonyms for “the people” not explicitly tied to rank, such as “men,” “sea-
commoners,” and “sea-citizens” (28, 145). These terms elicit associations of “common” with the many, the working classes—and with virtue and righteousness, values that had sustained revolutionaries decades before. Tellingly, Thomas Jefferson himself had used the words “the people” and “a people,” but not “the nation,” in order to declare for colonials both a separate polity and a right to popular sovereignty (Formisano 20). Insisting on “the people,” Melville makes common sailors inheritors of this populist legacy by inspiring identification with his grandfathers’ generation—dissenters who also shared a lack of attachment to the concept of the nation, except as a reminder of former compulsory loyalties. Melville regards the twentieth Article of War, permitting captains to decide punishments for common sailors, as a threat to the liberties won by the “grand sire[s]” of his generation, who “poured out [their] blood at Bunker Hill” (146). His own grandfathers Melvill and Gansvoort were celebrated Revolutionary War heroes (Parker, Herman Melville, 1-2). “Repeatedly struck by the lack of patriotism” in his shipmates, White-Jacket claims of sailors, “we expatriate ourselves to nationalize with the universe” (377–85, 76).

Jack Chase’s status as a ranked sailor (as topmast captain) initially keeps him from identifying the ship as a democratic space. At first, he can only imagine belonging to a public when he is on shore. By using the term “the people,” however—by invoking democratic populism and conceptualizing the ship as a representative space—Lemsford helps Chase imagine a form of social and political belonging that could extend to shipboard. Enfolding a critique of print publics within that imaginary, Lemsford attacks the editors, reviewers, and consumers whose cumulative actions decide—impersonally,

28 See Formisano, p. 45.
monstrously—whom *Song of the Sirens* will reach and what it means. Unlike “the public,” “the people” stands for a critical body of private persons who might challenge and check institutional power as well as the dominant publics, such as print publics, that sustain them. Through their dialogue, Lemsford and Chase come to see themselves as such private citizens. The distinction that these men agree on when they vow to “hate the one and cleave to the other” is that between a print public and an audience, to invoke Michael Warner’s useful distinction. Unlike persons connected by print media, aware of each other only abstractly, members of an audience are present to each other, Warner writes, as in a theater, “bounded by the event or by the shared physical space” (66). And indeed, the *Neversink* is aptly described as a theater. It becomes one when the crew members perform “The Old Wagon Paid Off!,” and yet throughout *White-Jacket*, the *Neversink* serves the same broader social functions as a nineteenth-century theater: a delimited space of co-presence by all ranks. Melville points out the irony of shipboard theatricals: “If ever there was a continual theatre in the world, playing by night and by day, and without intervals between the acts, a man-of-war is that theatre, and her planks are the *boards* indeed” (90–91). In the suggestive image of Lemsford’s fragmented (exploded) poems, Melville develops a pluralistic model for a democratic poetics.

Just two years after *White-Jacket*, Melville again used the trope of damaged poems to represent democratic poetics, in *Pierre* (1852). The young heir of Saddle Meadows is ambivalent about publishing his occasional poems; he doesn’t need to sell his writing for income. He publishes a few in local magazines, but it is enough for him that his poems are well liked by a few reviewers and family members. He becomes
cavalier about his pages of writing, leaving them here and there, or using them for unrelated purposes.

For even at that early time in his authorial life, Pierre, however vain of his fame, was not at all proud of his paper. Not only did he make allumettes of his sonnets when published, but was very careless about his discarded manuscripts; they were to be found lying all round the house; gave a great deal of trouble to the housemaids in sweeping; went for kindlings to the fires; and were forever flitting out of the windows, and under the door-sills, into the faces of people passing the manorial mansion. In this reckless, indifferent way of his, Pierre himself was a sort of publisher. (263)

In Pierre, as in White-Jacket, Melville takes great pleasure in the image of poems acting as projectiles that could hit people in the face, or as the fodder for the fire that animates them. It doesn’t matter if the poems burn up in the process; they are not meant to be read. Their purpose is to state their presence. In both White-Jacket and Pierre, Melville seems to argue that poems should make trouble in the spaces where they circulate. When he reduces poetry to poems, cantos, and eventually paper, we can’t ignore them. In both novels, Melville invests poetry with excessive materiality to imagine how poems might radically disrupt social spheres, ranks, and routines. The fact that he imagines poems themselves doing the work of mass distribution reveals his faith in poetry as a democratizing medium. Further, Melville finds the formal divisibility of poems—one canto or sonnet at a time—useful to the task of representing circulation and pluralism.

Though this moment in Pierre shows the promise of a democratic poetics, such an achievement is not possible in the world of that novel, as it is on shipboard in White-Jacket. The socially destabilizing effects of modernity leave Pierre isolated from his pastoral community. Pierre lacks the landed equivalent of shipboard’s relentlessly public, intimate architecture. On White-Jacket’s Neversink, Lemsford is always visible and audible to others, even when he is posturing as a Romantic type. But at his most isolated,
Pierre disappears completely from others' view. The constant work of writing confines him and punctuates his life like a poetic refrain. Dramatic irony is at a fever pitch in the intricately rhythmical and sonic sentences that catalogue Pierre’s demise, such as in the passage that describes the holidays he will miss: “Nor jingling sleigh-bells at throbbing neck-band, or swinging belly-band; nor glad thanks, and crisp turkeys of Thanksgiving; nor tinted Indian moccasin of Merry Christmas softly stealing through the snows; nor New-Year’s curb-stones, wharves, and piers, over-brimming with bubbling jubilations: —Nor jingling sleigh-bells, nor glad Thanksgiving, nor Merry Christmas, nor New Year’s: —Nor Bell, Thank, Christ, year; —none of these are for Pierre” (304). Pierre is the opposite of Emerson’s and Whitman’s comprehensive, representative man; he fails as a poet because he cannot hear the sounds that could restore him to the social sphere from which he withdrew to animate the world in his writing. He does not hear, as we readers do, the insistent meter culminating in the half-rhyme of “year” and “Pierre.”

Pierre’s character could not have been possible if Melville hadn’t first created Lemsford, the sailor-poet whose peers rescue him from inevitable isolation as he pursues poetry. They can do so because the ship is an audience—one that uses humor to challenge and incorporate threats to its harmony—and not a print public. The uncomfortable intimacy of living in a man-of-war offers Lemsford’s peers the opportunity to teach him how to be a better community member.

Lemsford’s artistic development is the reverse of Pierre’s. Whereas at first he resembles a “sequestered Wordsworth,” eventually he commits himself, as a poet, to “the people” (40, 192).
With Lemsford’s positive transformation, Melville satirizes and critiques a common representation of poets. White-Jacket first describes Lemsford as a comically out-of-place Wordsworth or Shakespeare:

As may readily be imagined, the business of writing verse is a very different thing on the gun-deck of a frigate, from what the gentle and sequestered Wordsworth found it at placid Rydal Mount in Westmoreland. In a frigate, you can not sit down and meander off your sonnets, when the full heart prompts; but only, when more important duties permit: such as bracing round the yards, or reefing top-sails fore and aft. Nevertheless, every fragment of time at his command was religiously devoted by Lemsford to the Nine. At the most unseasonable hours, you would behold him, seated apart, in some corner among the guns—a shot-box before him, pen in hand, and eyes “in a fine frenzy rolling.” (40)

The reference to Wordsworth is an important part of Melville’s critique of Romantic individualism, though not a straightforward one. The allusion points more to a popular misreading of the Romantic poet than it does to Wordsworth’s own poetics. In this passage Melville confronts the question of poetry’s social role by trading in a familiar stereotype. Nevertheless, Wordsworth undeniably serves as an access-point to Romantic thought for Melville.

The Wordsworthian poet of the “Preface” to Lyrical Ballads (1802) is “a man speaking to men” (71). He insists that his poetry “experiment” is not the mechanization of sentiment or of solipsism; rather, “the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling” (64). Such a distinction is important to White-Jacket: Wordsworth actually formulates an outward-directed poetics. The feeling developed within the poem gives importance to the situation of the poem, while at another remove, the poem improves the mental faculty of the

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29 A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 5 Scene 1: “The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,/ Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven” (Theseus).
reading public, elevating them (culturally, spiritually) in turn. In a way Wordsworth had already theorized Lemsford’s type in *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem “Lines (Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree)” is a case-in-point.\(^{31}\) It arrests “travelers” with the cautionary tale of a youth who “turned away” from the world and “with the food of pride sustained his soul/ in solitude,” seated beside a yew-tree:

Fixing his downward eye, he many an hour
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here
An emblem of his own unfruitful life:
And lifting up his head, he then would gaze
On the more distant scene – (113, ll. 27-31)

Ready for death, the youth casts his eyes downward and then up. His “visionary views” are nothing more than the signs of his passivity and submissiveness. Lemsford’s eyes are similarly arresting to his crewmates. The scene of his writing is inscrutable to them except as a bad omen—a vague sign of their own mortality. "What's that 'ere born nat'ral about?" they ask. "He's got a fit, hain't he?" (Melville, *White-Jacket* 41) Wordsworth’s “Lines” portray a failed version of Romantic solitude that he counter-balanced in “The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman”—a poem he felt exemplified the project of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802 Preface, 62). There, the object was to “accompan[y] the last struggles of a human being, at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society” (63). Both *Lyrical Ballads* poems portray Romantic solitude as, ideally, a form of humanism: a means of partaking in society through the contemplation of common humanity.\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) “Lines: Left upon a Seat in a YEW-TREE, which stands near the shore of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the shore, yet commanding a beautiful prospect.”

Melville may not be particularly interested in complicating the stereotype of the “sequestered Wordsworth” in *White-Jacket*, but he banks strongly on readers’ familiarity with the popular poet throughout his writing career—notably, in *Pierre* and in “Cock-A-Doodle-Doo.” It would be a mistake to interpret the reference in *White-Jacket* as a direct response to Wordsworth, as critics have been tempted to do. Rather, the reference is an index to nuanced versions of Romantic individualism familiar to both writers through Coleridge and other interpreters of German Idealism—particularly, for Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Melville may have learned something about how to represent poetry as sociality from Emerson’s “The Poet.” In what is perhaps the most tangible and memorable anecdote of the essay, Emerson recalls witnessing a schoolmate perform lines of original poetry in such a way as to demonstrate his nonownership of his own creation:

> I remember, when I was young, how much I was moved one morning by tidings that genius had appeared in a youth who sat near me at table. He had left his work, and gone rambling none knew whither, and had written hundreds of lines, but could not tell whether that which was in him was therein told: he could tell nothing but that all was changed, --man, beast, heaven, earth, and sea. How gladly we listened! How credulous! Society seemed to be compromised. We sat in the aura of a sunrise which was to put out all the stars. Boston seemed to be at twice the distance it had the night before, or was much farther than that. Rome, —what was Rome? Plutarch and Shakespeare were in the yellow leaf, and Homer no more should be heard of. It is much to know that poetry has been written this very day, under this very roof, by your side. (451)

In an essay that weightily concludes, “I look in vain for the poet I describe,” the anecdote of the child poet is the closest Emerson comes to drawing poetic genius from the flesh (465). It is a story about the sympathy, group pride, and cultural after-shock that follows from an experience of sitting near to poetic creation. For Emerson, presence at an event

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of true poetic making—hearing poetry—is the same thing as poetic creation. From an Emersonian perspective, then, the “loud report” that Song of the Sirens makes when it explodes from the ship canon in White-Jacket represents a momentous event of poetic creation, and not destruction, because of the capacity of the accident-event to stir feelings of mutual sympathy through the sailors’ senses.

Positive social pressures to “have it all in common” aboard ship ultimately undercut external demands, including the pressure to participate in a circum-Atlantic print culture by publishing texts that describe one’s experiences at sea. Although Melville and Dana engaged in such work, it is significant that, in Melville’s novel, no paper survives the Neversink’s voyages except for the playbill for “The Old Wagon Paid Off!” which, “at the earnest entreaties of the seamen, Lemsford, the gun-deck poet, had been prevailed upon to draw up” (92–93). The playbill, an occasional piece of writing designed to be read in public, advertises a future experience that will also be shared. Narratively, the playbill memorializes that event and emmatizes Lemsford’s integration within the community from which he had once been alienated. As the voyage ends, Lemsford, proving that he has truly “cleaved” to “the people,” “offers up a devout ode as a prayer of thanksgiving” instead of a print-ready manuscript (395).

**Playing by Clockwork: The Politics of Labor and Performance in a Man-of-War**

Reading, composing, and performing poetry are leisure activities that would seem impossible considering a ship’s often relentless demands on laborers. The nineteenth-century sailor used time to his advantage amidst an endless succession of “watches,”
typically four-hour shifts on- and off-duty at rotating stations. Watches were designed to allot work fairly, but in practice a call of “all hands on deck” trumped a sailor’s right to physical or spiritual rest. Even in his hammock, he was on the clock. A Sunday off could be laborious, too, as sailors typically used the time for personal care, such as washing and mending clothes. Often there was no time for leisure activity; instead, sailors invented creative methods of incorporating sources of relief and pleasure into their work routines. In *The Nights of Labor* (1981), Jacques Rancière argues that labor can become transformed once a worker understands that his experience is not predetermined. Labor is a structure to which a worker attaches meaning. He may reclaim the experience of his labor by creating a “reversal of his relationship to time,” for instance, as by developing a feeling of home for his workplace. Illustrating Rancière’s point, the historical French floor-layer working in the 1830s, Gabriel Gauny, inhabits each new work site as if it were his home, until the job is done (77, 79, 81). Rancière calls the transformative space within the structure of work an “interruption… in which our characters prepare and dream and already live the impossible: the suspension of the ancestral hierarchy subordinating those dedicated to manual labor to those who have been given the privilege of thinking” (viii).

Both *White-Jacket* and *Two Years Before the Mast* emphasize that shipboard labor is highly changeable; it can only be described subjectively. Dana’s account of the ship mixes metaphors: at times he refers to it as a “society” and at others, a “home” (144, 233). For Dana, a day of “liberty” felt ironically “too much like escaping from prison, or being drawn out of a pit,” and work itself often trod the fine line between skilled craftsmanship (weaving, carpentry) and convict labor (picking oakum) (109). But only

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34 For descriptions of the sailor’s watch, see Dana, pp. 15–17; Melville, *White-Jacket*, pp. 8–12, 82; and Rediker, pp. 88–9.
Melville’s sailors create “reversal[s] of [their] relationship to time” that radically suspend the ship’s social hierarchies (Rancière, _The Nights of Labor_ 79). A very different politics is evident, for instance, in how Melville and Dana portray sailors reciting literature during their work hours. Dana finds structured linguistic forms particularly well-suited to his self-disciplinary preparations for a life of intellectual labor. He describes turning to private recitation when storytelling no longer adequately combats the boredom and the physical discomfort he and his peers endure as their ship is rounding Cape Horn. The usual method failed, Dana speculates, “for we had been so long together that we had heard each other’s stories told over and over again, till we had them by heart; each one knew the whole story of each of the others, and we were fairly and literally talked out.” Through excessive repetition, the sailor’s yarn becomes just as routine as labor itself. Believing that he can no longer rely on his shipmates for diversion, Dana resolves to “commenc[e] a deliberate system of time-killing” modeled on exercises he likely performed as a schoolboy (306). Like a teacher preparing a curriculum, he assigns himself a set of memorization tasks, gradually increasing their length and variety, and finishing with a rewarding swatch of poetry:

As soon as I came on deck, and took my place and regular walk, I began with repeating over to myself a string of matters which I had in my memory, in regular order. First, the multiplication tables and the tables of weights and measures; then the states of the Union, with their capitals; the counties of England, with their shire towns; the kings of England in their order; and a large part of the peerage, which I committed from an almanac that we had on board; and then the Kanaka numerals. This carried me through my facts, and being repeated deliberately, with long intervals, often eked out the two first bells. Then came the ten commandments; the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, and a few other passages from Scripture. The next in the order, that I never varied from, came Cowper’s _Castaway_, which was a great favorite with me… After I had got through these, I allowed myself a more general range among everything that I could remember, both in prose and verse. In this way, with an occasional break by relieving the wheel, heaving the log, and going to the scuttle-butt for a drink of water, the
longest watch was passed away; and I was so regular in my silent recitations, that if there was no interruption by ship’s duty, I could tell very nearly the number of bells by my progress. (306–7)

Dana substitutes here one yarn or form of recitation for another, replacing the more routine communal autobiographical storytelling by silently repeating “string[s] of matters” that he recalls. As he walks the deck, he treads memory’s well-worn paths. From the perspective of rote schooling, he is a model student: the memorized material is there for him when he most needs it, and retrieving it is like drawing water from a well. But from the crew’s perspective, Dana’s behavior must have seemed a deliberate withdrawal. Indeed, the difference between Melville and Dana boils down to the latter’s decision not to cash in on the comedic spectacle of a sailor talking to himself. His recitation is unmistakably a performance, though not for a shipboard audience. Dana takes his “place” as if before an invisible classroom, demonstrating to the abstract reading public his fitness for reinsertion into genteel society. Protecting his professional reputation as an aspiring lawyer, the author demonstrates, through his performance, that he kept his mind alive during a period of time he characterizes as captivity.

Dana’s recitation props up rather than subverts institutions and social hierarchies. His deliberate system ensures that he repeats the language of patriotism and Christian discipline, social privilege and cultural refinement, all in a single run-through. Although Dana insists that two years before the mast is no time at all in the scheme of a long professional career, the system of time killing is really a system of timekeeping, doubling and reinforcing the ship clock or bells—its system of discipline. Catherine Robson has shown that educators intended for recitation to help children learn mental and bodily discipline by performing a memorized poem under threat of corporal punishment should
they fail (91–122). This threat, more common in British than in American public schools, powerfully associated learning “by rote” with learning “by the rod” (101). Recitation regularized a poem so that the poem could regulate the reciter’s body (112, 117). In Dana’s account, recitation introduces yet another measure for sailor productivity, adapting a particular pedagogy of poetic meter that strikingly resembles other forms of corporal discipline. By integrating rote learning into his work—by thoroughly aligning his bodily and mental labors—Dana implicitly defends the practice of corporal discipline on ships. *Two Years before the Mast* provided a platform for Dana to weigh in on issues of maritime reform. In the paratext, he denounced flogging but argued that reform could hamper captains’ ability to protect the safety of the ship and crew.

The *Neversink*’s crew repeatedly correct against such displays of self-directed, private intellectualism as Dana shows in his memoir. Melville’s Jack Chase leads in maintaining the culture of the shipboard commons, reorienting the initially private poet Lemsford toward “the people” of the ship. Chase also promotes this commons through his learning and his activism. He understands the political effectiveness of a well-placed literary reference, exemplifying sailor literacy. A virtuosic reciter of poetry with many fans among his peers, Chase is Melville’s alternative to the antisocial literatus Dana represents in *Two Years before the Mast*.35 At two key moments in *White-Jacket*, Chase helps reverse his fellow sailors’ relationships to time through performance. In one case, he adapts parts of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* in order to persuade the captain and commodore to grant the crew a day of liberty at Rio de Janeiro: “Will Captain Claret vouchsafe one day’s liberty, and so assure himself of eternal felicity, since, in our

flowing cups, he will be ever after freshly remembered?”36 The crew applauds Chase’s performance: “Jack Chase forever!” “Who can talk to Commodores like our matchless Jack!” (214–15). Chase does not simply regurgitate learned lines; rather, he adapts a fictional scene to fit his social reality, realizing the sociopolitical promise of recitation, that “works of literature held within individual minds ha[ve] the power to effect material changes in the world at large” (Robson 13). He assigns himself the part of Henry V addressing an English army that fears defeat by the more numerous French forces. Chase gets away with his interpretation, wherein he promotes himself to king and assigns the captain and commodore to the vanquished side, suggesting either that the officers do not know the play, or that they do know it and rightly interpret Chase’s speech as a threat of mutiny. In his adaptation of Henry V’s speech, he reverses the power relations, temporarily taking charge of the social order on the ship. Chase’s speech further promises that the victors (the crew) will remember their adversaries (the captain and commodore) for years to come in their stories. While appearing to flatter, Chase implicitly warns the captain and commodore that they cannot win a battle against sailor freedoms in the long run, for he is prepared to expose navy abuses.

Jack Chase is the representative man of Melville’s man-of-war-world: he uses his knowledge of poetry to represent his community to the ruling powers. He would have been emboldened to do so by his own catalyzing performance as Percy Royal-Mast in “The Old Wagon Paid Off!” Lawrence Levine describes the nineteenth-century theatre as a space in which actors could take liberties that were not otherwise socially accepted (68). This earlier performance establishes Chase as an actor with such popular appeal as

36 Chase adapts King Henry V’s speech, “This day is called the Feast of Crispian,” in William Shakespeare, Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3, ll. 43-69.
to cause the captain and commodore to fear anarchy. During the play, “uncontrollable bursts of applause” for Chase erupt from the shipboard audience; “all discipline seemed gone forever.” Chase’s performance in fact produces the very “delirium of delight” that the captain had meant to avoid by prohibiting grog on that day, though drinking was customary on July Fourth, because the ship was then passing through dangerous waters (94). Chase’s rousing performance thus threatens the Neversink: the sailors attempt to perform while the ship is underway, and they do so on a day that normally allowed license and indulgence among navy sailors.

Given the revolutionary potential of Chase’s acting for such an audience on this important holiday, Melville’s decision to abort the play before it is over is difficult to account for, though many have suggested that it cites the Astor Place riots, in which Melville played a small part.37 On May 10, 1849, fatal riots erupted at Astor Place when an American theater company cast the British actor William Macready in the role of Macbeth instead of the preferred American actor, Edwin Forrest. Along with forty-six of New York’s “highly respectable citizens,” Melville added his name to a letter printed in the New York Herald on May 9 urging Macready to finish his engagement at Astor Place despite mounting protests. Levine describes the conflict as “a clash over questions of cultural values, over the role of the people in culture” and “a struggle for power and cultural authority within theatrical space” (Levine 66, 68).

If Melville was recasting the Astor Place riots in this scene, his representation is complex: it rejects celebrity individualism, embraces the social space of the theater, and

champions cosmopolitan intellectualism. A storm breaks in the middle of Chase’s big speech, sending players and attendees back to their posts. From the officers’ perspective, the storm conveniently curtails and contains the sailors’ increasingly rowdy merriment, restoring order and muting Chase’s incendiary voice. Yet readers have typically overlooked the fact that Melville frames the play’s end as a series of interruptions in which the storm actually prevents the captain and commodore from stopping the play themselves, as they are about to do. This scene should not make us conclude that Melville is suggesting weather or discipline prohibit collaborative performance onboard ship. On the contrary, the storm offers Melville a way to represent and naturalize Chase’s voice, which fortifies the shipboard commons.

We’ve seen through Lemsford’s characterization that celebrity individualism can threaten the shipboard commons; Chase’s voice, by contrast, evokes something greater than his own individuality. The storm’s wind drowns out his individual voice for the second time that evening. When Chase first appears on stage, it is impossible to hear him over the crowd’s cheers—an inspired multivocal response otherwise impossible due to the rule against singing. Instead of elaborating a well-interpreted persona, Chase’s acting evokes the presence of many sailors watching the same performance in the same space. Later, the wind “howling like a thousand devils in the cordage” replicates this metamorphosis, extending and multiplying Chase’s voice (94). The interrupting storm directs attention away from individual actors and Chase’s own charisma, instead amplifying the shipboard public. Interpreting this scene, Mary Isbel regards the uncontainable element of theatrical performance as riotously unproductive: the wind that the sailor audience all but conjures is a headwind, slowing the ship’s momentum and
delaying the sailors’ liberty (23). Although Chase is not reciting poetry here, understanding poetic language’s social role in White-Jacket enables an alternative reading. Chase’s address resolves itself in the wind, giving the wind a voice—a figurative slippage into rhetorical ventriloquism akin to poetic apostrophe, by which the storm triumphantly pronounces the theatrical performance’s transcendent and uncontainable element. Chase is a more effective poet of “the people” than Lemsford because he holds literature in his head and his voice, rather than storing it in the barrel of a gun. Chase’s literary output, his person, and even his labor coincide. In Melville’s vision, embodied language is highly political and also key to the alternate system of discipline undergirding the shipboard commons—a system that is neither simply liberating nor aligned with idle time.

Poetry gave Melville’s man-of-war world a cultural importance that he would draw on again in Battle-Pieces (1866), John Marr (1888), and in the prose expansion of his poem “Billy in the Darbies,” or Billy Budd (1924). As this list reveals, a naval setting unites works from Melville’s early and late career as well as his experiments in both prose and poetry. My analysis outlines some ways that Melville’s portrayal of the navy frigate requires poetry. In White-Jacket, Melville enfolds poetic sociability within novelistic sociality. Melville’s sailors are keen readers of poetry: poems circulate in their environment as important objects of exchange. Both materially and formally, poetry is seen to alternatively enable, subvert, and restructure social relations. Although Leaves of

38 Barbara Johnson defines apostrophe as a form of ventriloquism in “Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion,” A World of Difference (Johns Hopkins University Press), 1987, 185.
39 In their edited edition of Billy Budd, Sailor: An Inside Narrative, University of Chicago Press, 1962, Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Seals, Jr. argue that the poem that concludes the book, “Billy in the Darbies,” originated as a “short poem of three or four leaves on which [Melville] was working early in 1886…. The novel itself developed out of a brief prose headnote setting the scene and introducing the speaker of this poem” (1).
Grass also envisioned an embodied public sphere, this embodiment occurs via Whitman’s poetic language, rather than, as White-Jacket insists, through relations that the social uses of poetry enable. Tracking poetry in White-Jacket reveals what may strike some readers as a surprising level of social optimism, from Melville—an optimism that the novel’s representation of navy abuses otherwise obscures and complicates. Moving beyond this particular novel, I model and argue for curiosity about poetry’s novelistic functions elsewhere in Melville’s work. Pierre, for instance, raises similarly compelling questions about how these forms and genres interact. The prioritization of verse traditions by a major novelist of the period calls on critics to rethink the formal or generic biases within our field, including the stories we tell about nineteenth-century American authors and literature.

This chapter has raised several questions that will be relevant to subsequent chapters. I’ve asked, how does poetic form interact with labor’s coercions, interruptions, and repetitions? When is poetry liberating, and when is it regulating? Why do laborers read poetry? How do they read it, and when? The answers to these questions entail an understanding of the material context of labor—in particular, the availability of poetic knowledge and poetic authority, which determine a worker’s participation in any literary public.

In my approach, every assumption about how poems operate culturally is open to question. Scholars who adopt the mandate of historical poetics argue for the importance of defamiliarizing nineteenth-century poetry, so as not to hold it accountable to the aesthetic values of a later time. A study of poetry in labor contexts also requires reexamining assumptions about the relationship between labor and art. Defamiliarizing
poetry defamiliarizes labor by complicating a simplistic understanding of unskilled labor as physical but not mental, or of poetry as ornamental rather than practical, productive, and political. We can then question the assumption that art is an escape or liberation from labor, rather than—in some cases—helped by it. Historical poetics has been especially invested in understanding how lyric was just one of a variety of genres employed by nineteenth-century poets, rather than a poetic ideal. Taking Melville’s *Neversink* on its own terms means reckoning with the threat of individualism to sailor sociality, including the threat of poetic individualism, which our term “lyric” evokes. It also means reckoning with the rule against singing. By de-centering song, often presumed to be the vehicle for verse in labor contexts and an imaginary origin for lyric poetry, we further resist both lyric and the utopian caricature of worker cooperation that song conjures.
CHAPTER 2

THE FUNCTION OF ELEGY FOR WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS AT LOWELL

I was not unhappy; this was an affectation of unhappiness.
Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood*

What use was poetry to laborers? What does poetry by laborers tell us about their lives? This first question, introduced in the previous chapter but of continued relevance here, is about poetry’s capacity to serve workers as intellectual, social, or cultural property. It asks how poems function in contexts of labor. The second question is about poetry as an expressive medium. How do poems convey information about an author’s lived experience? I ask both questions about the poetic community of women factory operatives working in the textile mills at Lowell, Massachusetts in the early 1840s. My archive includes factory operatives’ memoirs and the literary writings they published in the *Lowell Offering*, a magazine produced entirely by this community, from 1840-1845. I argue, first, that poetry was both accessible and useful to factory operatives, as it was to many laborers in the mid-nineteenth-century, because of its ubiquity in periodicals. Secondly, poems published by factory operatives in the *Lowell Offering* convey much about what it’s like to be a woman at this moment in labor history; nevertheless, understanding what the poems have to say is entirely dependent on our capacity and willingness to engage with nineteenth-century poetic genres.

Elegiac poetry has primary place in the *Lowell Offering*. The importance of the genre to the magazine is signaled by its earliest epigraph, or motto—lines from Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”—and by the sheer number of poems that are elegiac. My approach to the elegiac poetry of the *Lowell Offering* is to ask what
perspectives about being a laboring woman at Lowell are conveyable through elegy but not, necessarily, other genres, such as in the magazine’s topical prose sketches, which have received the most critical attention. Without elegy, one might not get the impression from the *Lowell Offering* that social progress entailed loss, for women. Elegy in the *Offering* tells of social, cultural losses—the loss of relations and roles—often expressed as personal ones.

It’s important to clarify what I mean by “expression,” since scholars have misread the genre-writing of the *Lowell Offering* as autobiography. Elegy processes losses that are always greater than the persons named. Some modern readers have expected any unhappy writing at Lowell to be about poor factory working conditions. Instead, *Offering* poets wrote about the collapse of domestic origins: dying mothers, children who leave home and are buried elsewhere… Their poetry mourns the loss of a former set of relations unified by the ideals of the domestic home, no longer available by the 1840s—or, differently available—because of Lowell, which revolutionized women’s roles by making it possible for them to lead a more financially and socially independent life in a workplace. Elegy gave factory operatives the tools to express something more than what the sensationalizing public expected to hear from them, such as whether factory labor was degrading or not. They used elegy’s dual functions, of citing a loss and seeking compensation for it, to reconcile the effect on their personal lives of being at the forefront of social-cultural change. Their poems reflect a limbo state that they sought to overcome, as in a common morose example, by positing a future home in a burial plot. Sometimes they sought not to overcome feelings of estrangement at all, resisting the genre’s reconciliatory turn.
Its unique production history makes the *Lowell Offering* an important study of a specific laboring community. Beyond the fact that all magazine contributors hailed from the same community and occupation, a majority of the writings published were first shared at “improvement circle” meetings outside of working hours. More so than with other periodicals, it’s possible to say of the *Lowell Offering* that its authors addressed each other (a peer community) before and in addition to an anonymous print public. This intimate address shifts writers’ motivation somewhat away from representing the factory girl to a critical public and instead towards expressing the pains of transition to sympathetic peers. The *Offering’s* intimate audience enables me to regard the magazine as a vehicle for women’s collective voice and empowerment. Finally, a culture of improvement and aestheticization of women’s labor in the mills clarifies why poetry was an important, and available, outlet.

**Women’s Labor in the Early Nineteenth-Century**

In her memoir of factory life, Harriet Robinson recalls hearing one corporate agent, a retired sea captain, bemoan the non-translatability of shipboard discipline to Lowell, where he otherwise felt at home: “I should like to rule my help as I used to rule my sailors, but so many of them are women I do not dare do it” (72). In my first chapter, I show that Melville’s sailors sought to invert their relationship to time, as Jacques Rancière theorized in *The Nights of Labor* (77, 79): they exploited the ship’s unification of sleep, play, and work in order to make work more like leisure and liberate themselves from its oppressive tendencies. Women factory workers shared with sailors the challenges of living in a workplace and of being objects of social reform, but their experience differed in that they reckoned first and foremost with the assumption that they
did not belong in workplaces at all. When sailors adopted domestic metaphors and routines, they did so because cultivating a home-feeling for their workplace made work feel less oppressive. By contrast, female factory operatives prioritized rationalizing the work that placed them in spaces not yet delimited by the language and the codes of domesticity, justifying their claim to it.

Wendy M. Gordon argues in her comparative study of factory migrants in nineteenth-century Great Britain and the US that employing single women created a “social constraint” and a perceived need for “protection and control” that went beyond general class anxiety. “Studying female migrants in their host communities… gives insight to how nineteenth-century urban populations coped with women who were on their own” (2). The dangers associated with labor for sailors and women alike were political (an issue of rights) and social (of status), with significant differences that, as Gordon argues, “necessitat[e] a gendered historical analysis” (2). As earners, women’s rights were at stake in ways that extended beyond the “wage slavery” of unskilled labor: because women lacked property rights, their wages ultimately belonged to their husband or male heir. In cases where women came to Lowell to earn and hide money from their abusing husbands, factory work at Lowell offered an alternative to traditional domestic living where property rights were more likely to be enforced.41

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40 “Wage slavery” was a popular refrain of nineteenth-century labor reformists. In “‘The White Slave of the North’” (Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers, vol. 16, no. 1, 1999, pp. 11-21), Julie Husband reexamines Harriet Farley’s defense of factory work in the first issue of the Lowell Offering—a response to Orestes Brownson’s denigration of wage labor in “The Laboring Classes” (1840)—in the context of feminist alternatives to masculinist definitions of free labor (11-13). “Following the example of the anti-slavery feminists, the writers [of the Lowell Offering] often evaluated their independence and empowerment by carefully analyzing their domestic economy” (Husband 13).

41 Robinson describes the realities of property ownership for working women:

The laws relating to women were such, that a husband could claim his wife wherever he found her, and also the children she was trying to shield from his influence; and I have seen more than one poor woman skulk behind her loom or her frame when visitors were approaching the end of
The fact that nineteenth-century urban populations did have to “cop[e] with women who were on their own” at Lowell is partly a consequence of cultural amnesia (Gordon 2), for women who needed to work had long found it outside of the home. Nevertheless, the same social and economic changes that made Lowell possible were also responsible for the arguments against a women’s place there. In her history of nineteenth-century U. S. household service, Fay E. Dudden confirms that “separate spheres” ideology—the assumption that women’s work takes place in the home—arose as a result of nineteenth-century industrialization and urbanization, which created the workplace and seemed to take men’s work definitively outside of the home, thereby feminizing domestic space in popular imagination (46-7, 107, 155). Lowell is a testament to the fact that industrialization also created a workplace for women, but separate spheres ideology made that labor conspicuous. The women who stayed at home when their husbands went to work (those who could afford to) hired domestics in order to absorb the extra household labor previously managed with the help of husbands, family members, and neighbors. The resulting class division in women’s household labor, represented by the labels “domestic” and “madam,” were clear signs of the creation of the American middle class (Dudden 44-9).

The majority of factory operatives at Lowell did not come from cities, but from New England family farms where pre-industrial forms of household labor might still have been operative. Prior to the industrial changes that marked the 1840s and ’50s, ideas about where “home” began and ended were not fixed. Similarly, the terms “working in”
or “working out,” which came to define a class division in women’s labor at mid-century, were not relevant descriptors. Rather, in times of need, as in illness or childbirth, women regularly entered each other’s homes to temporarily help pick up the slack in another’s household labor, while receiving food and lodging (Dudden 15, 31). An important distinction between this practice and later domestic service is that although women fully entered the households of their employers, they were never formally classed as dependents. Census records show that employers tended not to report “help” as residents, unlike the later custom of reporting “domestics” as part of a household (Dudden 77). This practice suggests to Dudden that “help” was an informal kind of work: employer and employee acted more like peers or sometimes-cohabitants sharing resources (35).

Assisting a neighbor in this way would also have eased resource demands on the hired woman’s family.

Remembering that the concept of “separate spheres” was a later ideological development can help to explain why a large number of rural New England farmer’s daughters were empowered to leave their homes for temporary employment at Lowell in the antebellum period. The boardinghouse “households” that they entered, though a new creation for the unprecedented female factory city, nevertheless retained some familiar elements of the mutual “help” model.

The history of women’s household labor also helps to clarify the class position of factory operatives at Lowell. The popular stereotype of the factory operative as a class-crosser who could “pass” for a lady because she had the money to mimic the elite, is a symptom of her tenuous position in the spectrum of class and women’s labor.42 In

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42 The essay, “Gold Watches,” published in *The Offering*, vol. 1, no. 3, Feb 1841, pp. 44-6 shows that Lowell factory women were aware, and critical of, this pernicious characterization.
actuality, her situation was different from that of both the stereotypical “lady”-employer and domestic worker (Dudden 46). Sharing more similarities with pre-industrial, informal household “help,” factory operatives labored mainly among a community of peers. Factory labor was attractive to them because it could be temporary and promised not to be degrading. Many expected to return to their family homes after a few years of employment. In the meantime, the mill boardinghouse stood in. At the boardinghouse, operatives had help in their daily chores—boardinghouse keepers and their staff laundered linens and prepared three daily meals (see fig. 4)—but these workers were hired by mill owners, not by factory operatives. In practice, the relationship between boardinghouse keepers and factory operatives fell somewhere between workplace oversight and a more informal, quasi-maternal-filial relationship.

Though factory workers felt pressure from outside to define their labor against domestic service, prostitution, and other wage labor that involved women going outside of their homes to work, they were not actually destitute on the whole, either before or after working at Lowell. Thomas Dublin contends that young women decided to go to Lowell on their own initiative more often than not, in order to live independently and in some cases to relieve their parents of having to provide for them (Women at Work 33). Likewise, most families did not depend on the wages their daughters earned at Lowell, as

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43 In spite of the explicit occupational hierarchy, Robinson describes feeling a “respectful equality” with her male employers. By her account, male factory agents and overseers were active members of the community, attending church with their families and teaching many of the night classes for factory workers (71). Operatives and perhaps also boardinghouse keepers occupied another rung on the occupational/class ladder, and yet they were not true peers. Boardinghouse keepers were typically older; they sometimes had children, and fulfilled a serving role in the corporate economy. Robinson actually omits boardinghouse keepers from her four-tiered hierarchy of “classes” at Lowell, showing that domestic labor within a corporate paternal structure was difficult to place (13). Finally, stationed well below operatives and boardinghouse keepers were the itinerant, seasonal, typically Irish immigrant laborers who built and maintained the factories (Mitchell).
Lowell Savings Bank records attest, though the industry benefitted from rumors of factory operatives’ virtuous self-sacrifice—rumors, for instance, that women’s wages regularly put male family members through school (Robinson 76-7).

While the women who opted for factory labor in the 1830s and ‘40s saw themselves as working women, they felt they had found an attractive alternative to the household employments they might otherwise have lived by, such as farming or sewing (Dublin, Women at Work 33-40). Furthermore, the factor of relative choice distinguished their situation from that of domestics and prostitutes. Robinson and her peers did not think much of the other contemporary experiments in living and labor whose doctrines crossed their paths: “Lectures on the doctrine of Fourier were read, or listened to, but none of [the factory operatives] were ‘carried away’ with the idea of spending their lives in large ‘phalansteries,’ as they seemed too much like cotton factories to be models for their own future housekeeping” (81).

Factory life was desirable because it was supposed to be a temporary phase in a woman’s trajectory towards an otherwise traditional family life, in theory if not necessarily in practice. Likewise, factory operatives criticized the Brook Farm experiment of the early 1840s: “The fault of this scheme was apparent to the practical ones who foresaw that a few would have to do all

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44 In 1833, the Lowell Institution for Savings reported that factory operatives had deposited a total of about $100,000 (Eisler 16). Unskilled factory laborers typically took home $1.50 - $2.00 a week (Mrozowski, Ziesing, and Beaudry 4). The Lowell mills employed about 7,000 women as factory operatives in 1836 (Eisler 29).

45 Lucy Larcom attests in her memoir, “We did not forget that we were working-girls, wearing coarse aprons suitable to our work, and that there was some danger of our becoming drudges.” Still, she emphasizes, “I was there from choice” (182).

46 Indeed, it was not uncommon for utopian communes and factories to occupy the same grounds and buildings at various times throughout this period. The Northampton Association inhabited the buildings and attempted to resume the labor of a former silk factory in Northampton, MA from 1842 – 1846. See Christopher Clark and Kerry W. Buckley, editors, Letters from an American Utopia: The Stetson Family and the Northampton Association, 1843 – 1847 (University of Massachusetts Press), 2004. In Hopedale: From Commune to Company Town, 1840 – 1920 (Ohio State University Press), 1992, Edward K. Spann explains the interrelationship between the early idealism and later industry at Hopedale, MA.
the manual labor and that an undue share would naturally fall to those who had already contracted the working habit” (Robinson 81). This was also Louisa May Alcott’s critique of her father’s utopian living experiment, Fruitlands. She argued in “Transcendental Wild Oats” (1874) that transcendentalist communitarian experiments ended up replicating rather than liberating women from structures of economic and social oppression, as male idealism rode on the backs of unpaid female domestic labor.

For a large number of working women in the antebellum period, factory labor was thus an agreeable choice among more traditional, established options—including farming, teaching, and domestic labor (Eisler 15-16)—and also more radical ones, such as agrarian-utopian communalism. Operatives’ primary complaint was the long hours—as many as thirteen hours of daily work, six days a week—but farming and domestic labor also entailed long working hours, with less companionship among peers (Robinson 31; Dublin “Seeds of Industry” 16 and Women at Work 12-13; Eisler 16). Teachers and domestics earned far less pay, additionally, while farming typically paid in produce rather than in wages. Factories also offered reliable pay year-round, while farming and teaching were seasonal jobs for women. And none of these options necessarily came with access to the resources of a large town. Harriet Farley, former factory operative and

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47 Robinson reports beginning work at 5am and ending at 7pm, with two half-hour breaks for breakfast and dinner (31). Factory operatives at Lowell petitioned for a ten-hour work day in 1834 and ‘36. Sarah Bagley, a Lowell operative and editor of the activist periodical, The Voice of Industry, founded the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, a leader in the New England Ten-Hour Movement. While it became illegal in 1842 to employ children under the age of twelve in more than ten hours of daily work (Robinson 31), the movement for a universal ten-hour minimum was ultimately unsuccessful in the antebellum period, becoming a politically charged topic because of ideological associations with slavery. By 1850, increasing hours and decreasing pay led more and more New England-born women to opt against factory work. A large Irish immigrant population at Lowell took their place in the ‘50s and ‘60s (Dublin, Women at Work p. 8; Mitchell).

48 Benita Eisler estimates that mill wages were six to seven times higher than the yearly teaching salary for women. Domestic labor paid about 50 cents a week after room and board. By contrast, unskilled mill workers (the majority) took home $1.50 - $2.00 a week (16).
editor of the *Lowell Offering* (1842-1845), reflected that she came to work at Lowell in order to avoid becoming a teacher, as her family had wished. She wanted to lead an intellectual, writerly life on her own terms: “I came to Lowell, determined that if I had my own living to obtain, I would get it in my own way; that I would read, think, and write, when I could, without restraint; that if I did well, I would have the credit of it; if ill, my friends should be relieved from the blame, if not from the stigma” (qtd. in Hale 658, italics original). Farley echoes her peers’ most salient argument in favor of their work at Lowell, that it offered women a range of independence, both economic and spiritual, that they might not have enjoyed otherwise.

Secondary criticism has tended to sensationalize the hardships of factory life—the long hours, meagre pay, indoor air pollution, and noise level—without sufficiently explaining why women would choose to work in these conditions. Such an approach risks victimizing Lowell women. It takes away their agency by obscuring the degree to which factory labor was a better choice among worse options for female employment.

Today, the Boott Cotton Mills Museum at Lowell invites visitors to engage in an important act of empathy when they enter the restored weaving room. Visitors are asked to momentarily remove their earplugs in order to take in the level of mechanical noise when only half of the weaving machines are in operation (see figs. 5-6). While such sensory immersion helps us moderns to put ourselves in the world of nineteenth-century factory workers, it’s crucial that we not expect them to have been able to judge their situation against ours.

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49 For a realistic portrayal of the working conditions and health concerns at Lowell, see Eisler, pp. 26-9.  
50 The Boott Cotton Mills were incorporated in 1835, producing cotton and wool textiles (Mrozowski, Ziesing, and Beaudry).
Characterizing factory work as mere hardship comes close to replicating nineteenth-century anxiety that such labor was degrading to women, when in fact many women took pride in their independence at Lowell. Their numerous collective efforts to improve their labor is a further sign that operatives felt empowered by their position. Orestes Brownson was one of the most prominent nineteenth-century voices in labor reform contradicting any such narratives of empowerment. Ostensibly an advocate for factory women, Brownson ended up being part of their problem, as Julie Husband shows (1999). In “The Laboring Classes” (1840) the then-presidential candidate presented factory work as “wage slavery” according to the Marxist criterion that operatives did not own the products of their labor, as did farmers, craftsmen, and professionals (Husband 11). By this “masculinist” logic, Husband argues, Brownson considered women factory workers doubly “enslaved”: the degrading work also limited their chances in the marriage market, where they might achieve the benefits of their future husband’s property (11, 12). With “The Laboring Classes,” Brownson tapped into popular fears that female economic exploitation entailed sexual exploitation as well (12).

Harriet Farley and the writers of *The Lowell Offering*, for which she served as editor, wrote against such representations, countering Brownson’s masculinist equation of free labor and property ownership with tropes borrowed from anti-slavery feminism. Just as antislavery feminists were more likely to cite slavery’s harm to families rather than to individual persons, emphasizing social values over individual exploitation, Husband argues, so too did the *Lowell Offering* “promote an understanding of wage labor as a positive alternative both to the anti-social independence Brownson represented and to the slavish dependence [of] rural life.” Mill women “refigured their rural lives as lives
of dependence and domestic servitude not unlike slavery” (12). In advocating that wage earners liberate themselves by retreating from cities and adopting farming, Brownson took not only a masculinist and individualist outlook, but also a pastoral, Jeffersonian one that forgot women’s legal and social position (11). Without a plan for the reform of property ownership, women would always be alienated from the products of their labor, whether that labor took place on a farm or in a factory—but at least factories offered weekly wages that could be spent or saved. The difference underscores the need for a gendered history of labor (Gordon). By moving the conversation towards the isolating dependency of household labor, *Lowell Offering* writers showed that they valued the community aspects of labor at Lowell and actively revised the Jeffersonian democratic ideal.

What emerges from the signatures and the testimony of Lowell factory operatives petitioning in 1845 for shorter work days, longer mealtime breaks, and better ventilation in the mills, is the sense that Lowell women were empowered to voice their concerns about the sustainability of the factory experiment in women’s labor—an experiment that had also offered them many advantages—because suddenly, perhaps for the first time in American labor history, they were part of a tangible community of workplace peers.51 They had a collective voice. Harriet Robinson claims that many of the same women involved in the labor movement continued as activists on a variety of issues after leaving

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51 “The First Official Investigation into Labor Conditions by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1845” (MA House Document no. 50, Mar 1845) cites 1,151 signees to petitions from the city of Lowell. Among these, “a very large proportion... are females.” Though the MA legislature also received petitions from other MA factory towns, they were smaller and contained comparatively less signatures by women. The committee decided to investigate only Lowell factory conditions for their report. The report also summarizes the testimony of six women, including Sarah Bagley. Bagley later claimed in *The Voice of Industry* that the committee made significant omissions in order to downplay her grievances (vol. 1, no. 30, 9 Jan 1846, p. 2). The committee ultimately recommended that no legislative action be taken.
Lowell, including antislavery and women’s suffrage. Robinson’s own participation in the earlier 1836 strike against decreased wages, in which she led the “turn out” of workers from her particular factory room, joining the almost fifteen thousand women who deserted their posts that day, gave her a feeling of pride that can only be surpassed, she writes, when the women of her state are granted the right to vote (85).  

The Lowell Factory Experiment in Corporate Paternalism

If the history of women’s labor up to the 1840s helps to explain working women’s desire for the degree of independence offered by factory employment at Lowell, corporate paternalism was the industrial model that made this labor culturally acceptable. Corporate paternalism was the ideological vision for Lowell that touched every aspect of a factory operative’s experience, their leisure as well as their labor time. Understanding the corporate paternalism of Lowell is key to understanding the opportunities and constraints on time, as well as the aesthetic influences associated with a culture of female self-improvement, that shaped the literature produced there.

The deliberate recruitment of single women to Lowell distinguished this experiment from the British factory system (Gordon 60) and also from other nontraditional living and working spaces for women in the nineteenth-century, including communes like Brook Farm. Factory operatives as well as boardinghouse keepers tended to be single women. Lucy Larcom and Harriet Robinson’s mothers, both widows and boardinghouse keepers, are notable examples. The Lowell system filled gaps in women’s

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52 As punishment for Robinson’s leading role in the strike, Robinson’s mother was dismissed from her position as boardinghouse keeper (Robinson 85).
lives at times of transition, offering corporate paternalism in the absence of a family patriarch.

The Boston Associates, or partner investors in cotton manufacture at Lowell, MA,\textsuperscript{53} felt a burden of responsibility to learn from the labor problems of industrial England as they set the terms for American industry. Robinson refers to their comprehensive vision as “the Lowell factory system” in her memoir (7). To avoid creating a “permanent proletariat class” (Eisler 15), the Associates advertised to young, single women from respectable New England farming families.\textsuperscript{54} They took away the need for resettlement by offering the option of short-term work and requiring that factory operatives live in corporate-owned boarding houses. Many women returned to families or future husbands after a period of four years employment, on average (Eisler 16). In the meantime, the Boston Associates kept workers under loose supervision by keeping them within the factory “system.” With competitive wages, they could ideally attract workers who were not destitute, and therefore not from the classes degrading to society.

According to Robinson, the “incentive to labor”—to “earn extra money and to use it in their own way”—was a real one. She argues that it led to the (self-)education of a generation of working women and men who would not have received educations otherwise (40). More accurately, the factories attracted women who were already literate by offering them ways to continue their educations outside of work: by patronizing a

\textsuperscript{53} The Boston Associates were a small group of investors who together owned the mill companies at Lowell, the land they resided on, and waterpower rights. Mills operated much like companies in a large corporation, both in their ownership and in their uniformity. Principal investors included Nathan Appleton, Patrick Tracy Jackson, Abbott Lawrence, and Amos Lawrence. (Dublin, Women at Work, pp. 10, 20-22)

\textsuperscript{54} Benita Eisler explains that advertising on the part of corporations was in fact minimal. Corporations sent agents to more remote New England towns and provided transport for new recruits, but regular communication between mill workers and acquaintances back home was usually advertisement enough (19).
celebrated circulating library, taking night classes, and attending lectures and improvement circle meetings or writing groups. 55 Cultivating the appearance of hiring virtuous workers was important to the Boston Associates’ paternal image; with this reputation, they justified hiring women, whom they could pay half as much as men (Eisler 15). The Boston Associates profited from a moment in the history of women’s labor when offering women half the pay of men was still a significant incentive to labor.

Their business model, known as “corporate paternalism,” required a fully integrated factory-city. 56 From the late 1820s through the 1850s, the Lowell factory system functioned much like a navy frigate, as an institution designed to carry out a single work-like task. In his comprehensive study, Asylums; Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (1961), the twentieth-century sociologist Erving Goffman found navy ships to be especially representative of what he called “the total institution.” Even more compelling, it was Melville’s novel White-Jacket that suggested to Goffman how an institution like a navy ship created “something of a world” for its members, a phrase that echoes Melville’s own microcosmic subtitle for the novel, The World in a Man-of-War (Goffman 4). 57 According to Goffman, total institutions are “totalizing” in that they unite aspects of a person’s social life that are usually experienced as separate: “A basic social arrangement in modern society is that the individual tends to sleep, play, and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, without an over-all rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of

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55 Most operatives had completed common school (Eisler 16).
56 Harriet Robinson defines “corporate paternalism” in Loom and Spindle, pp. 7, 18.
57 See David Alworth’s article on White-Jacket and Goffman’s Asylums.
A unity of authority, place, activity, time, and goals structures the total institution (6).

In Goffman’s taxonomy of total institutions, some institutions serve protective functions for its members (such as institutes for the blind) or for the community at large (prisons), while others enable participants to better carry out a specific purpose, such as an ideological devotion (monasteries, convents) or “work-like task” (5). In this last category, Goffman includes “army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, colonial compounds, and large mansions from the point of view of those who live in the servants’ quarters” (5).

Like the navy ship, the Lowell industrial complex specialized in a single work-like task. But because the workers were women, the factory institution also served a protective function. In the navy, outside philanthropic groups like the Sailor’s Friend Society tended to take charge of sailors’ spiritual and moral care. By contrast, corporations took the role of parental supervisors at Lowell, reassuring the public about the vulnerability of young single women in a marketplace (Gordon 2). A culture of after-hours self-improvement, posted regulations, and city planning all served this aim.58 Such oversight could not be taken for granted, as it could be on a navy ship, where all activities necessarily took place in the sight of intimate others. The boardinghouse was the symbol and modus operandi of corporate paternalism, built just a short walk from factory buildings so that operatives could return to their living spaces during rapid thirty-minute

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58 Regulations posted at boardinghouses required factory operatives to observe a 10pm curfew, follow guidelines for receiving visitors, keep their living and working spaces clean, and attend church on Sundays (“Regulations for the Boarding Houses of the Middlesex Company,” University of Massachusetts Lowell / Tsongas Industrial History Center & Center for Lowell History, uml.edu/tsongas/bringing-history-home/page_01/sba.htm).
meal-time breaks. A bird’s-eye view of Lowell shows highly uniform factory buildings and adjoining boardinghouses encircling spacious courtyards that would have kept operatives visibly under the wing of corporate structures during their off-work “leisure” hours, seen as the most vulnerable time for all workers but particularly so for young single women (Mrozowski, Zeising, and Beandry 70; see figs. 7-15).

Historians regard the sale of boardinghouses towards the end of the nineteenth-century as the end of corporate paternalism (Mrozowski, Zeising, and Beandry 3). The corporate paternalist project began to dissolve in the 1850s and 60s as a result of two trends. Increased hours and declining wages no longer made factory work desirable for the same class of New England women, whose options were increasing in part due to innovations imagined at places like Lowell. At the same time, in spite of intentions to make Lowell a provisional town for a constantly replenishing body of temporary workers, Lowell, MA did become a place of settlement. A large consumer class of factory operatives sustained Lowell’s economy as it grew from a population of 2,500 at the time of its founding in 1826, to that of 33,000 in 1850, when Lowell was the second largest city in Massachusetts (Eisler 16, Dublin, Women at Work 21). By mid-century, Irish immigrants made up the majority of new residents at Lowell. Brian Mitchell explains that Irish incomers tended to settle according to a pattern established by Irish residents earlier in the century, prior to mass-immigration (6). That is, they tended to live in communities apart from factories and boardinghouses, communities sometimes called “Paddy Camps.” Eventually, self-sectioning into clear neighborhoods made the Irish poor easy targets, “symbols of the deteriorating status within American industrialization” as they steadily replaced New England factory operatives in the mills (Mitchell 9).
The Mill as an Aesthetic Space

In spite of its protective functions, corporate paternalism did not foreclose the possibility of intellectual thought and creativity in the mills. To the contrary, it created opportunities for poesis by defining female labor as beauty-making. From the standpoint of virtuous femininity, legitimate labor, for women, was labor that produced beautiful things as an external sign of woman’s ongoing moral self-cultivation. The common euphemism for mechanical operation, “tending” machines, further sought to align women’s paid labor with the virtues of cultivation. Within this system of signs legitimizing women’s work, tending flowers was consummate virtuous labor. For this reason, mill overseers strongly encouraged factory operatives to keep potted plants at their stations. Plant cultivation exemplified a work-related task that both satisfied corporate paternalist ideology and framed the mill for factory operatives as an aesthetic space where they could think and create.

The *Lowell Offering* supported the ideological aestheticization of women’s labor in “Plants and Flowers in the Mills,” an editorial persuading operatives to grow plants at their workstations (see fig. 17). 59 The editorial, printed at the close of the magazine’s first year of publication, in December 1840, has the tone of a workplace memo. It informs operatives that proprietors had donated “large numbers of plants and flowers, with instructions to the Overseers to furnish every facility to the girls for the cultivation thereof” and that superintendents take a “lively interest in this matter.” Similarly exacting in tone, the editors commend operatives in Boott Corporation Dressing-room No. 3 for taking “over 200 pots” into their care, as if the “children of nature” had been actual

59 Rev. Abel Thomas served as lead editor at this time.
children stranded in the cold. They promise that indoor gardening—the cultivation of such child-like beauty—has the power to morally improve the worker in reciprocal fashion, teaching lessons “of the purest and most pleasing character.” Among these children of nature, a transplant brought from home is a special case: “When you look on such as you brought from ‘home,’ remember the love of your kindred and the joys of your childhood; and haply your thoughts will be in harmony with the teachings of flowers as ‘the alphabet of angels.’” In the always potentially corrupting company of machines and wages, the transplant acts as a memento of the worker’s own childhood, that pure time and place of mental retreat during the workday.

In this respect the transplant was useful to factory laborers beyond its displays of virtue: the transplant enabled workers to imagine themselves someplace else—specifically, to negotiate their physical and emotional distance from their childhood homes, a major theme of their Lowell poetry. Henry David Thoreau describes how transplants convey a memory of rootedness in his first-person personification of a flower bouquet, “Sic Vita” (The Dial, July 1841). The poem argues that cut flowers are morally inferior to growing ones because an artificial “law” or “wisp of straw” ties them together “by a chance bond,” rather than an organic or essential one. “With no root in the land,” the bouquet feels fruitlessly adrift, a “parcel of vain strivings” without common cause or purpose, unless that purpose is to “[mimic] life” (81). Purposelessness promotes vanity and, by association, conspicuous consumption—recall that the young Lily Bart of Edith Wharton’s House of Mirth associates the daily display of fresh flowers with her family’s former wealth and reckless spending. Thoreau’s cut flowers regain their virtuous status
by the end of the poem, however, when it becomes clear that they are in fact transplants of a sort,

But by a kind hand brought
Alive
to a strange place. (82, ll. 34-6)

Factory operatives, too, wanted to be seen as transplants flourishing in a new environment, rather than as vulnerable young women morally adrift in a corrupting industrial city. They sought to disprove popular stereotypes about working women, such as their excessive materialism, by associating themselves with the positive growth of flowers. Beyond operatives’ concerns for how their labor was received by the public, however, they longed for a new set of relations suited to factory life. Reimagining their gender and class-specific roles involved remembering their origins and thus periodically escaping the rooms where they monitored machinery through portals for the imagination such as the transplant memento.

The enormous windows that enabled both flower and worker productivity inside the mills—their light source—was the source of worker-poet Lucy Larcom’s mental retreat (see figs. 18-20). Where operatives cultivated plant cuttings or transplants, Larcom brought cuttings of poems from local newspapers: things of beauty that she, too, hoped would improve her working hours. The mill-endorsed custom of cultivating flowers at work stations enabled Larcom to devise the “window gem,” as she referred to her clipped poems—aids for study, memorization, and reflection that illustrated an understanding of
the factory window as a personalizable, aesthetic, creative, transformative space (Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* 175-6).\(^6^0\)

In her memoir, Larcom tracks her evolving relationship to window-sills, a space of wonder in childhood that became a space of work in adulthood while still retaining its transformative power. Describing her daily tasks at a sister’s home when on break from the mill, Larcom concludes that sewing beside an open window is a poet’s ideal work:

> Every kind of work brings its own compensations and attractions. I really began to like plain sewing; I enjoyed sitting down for a whole afternoon of it, fingers flying and thoughts flying faster still,—the motion of the hands seeming to set the mind astir. Such afternoons used to bring me throngs of poetic suggestions, particularly if I sat by an open window and could hear the wind blowing and a bird or two singing. Nature is often very generous in opening her heart to those who must keep their hands employed. Perhaps it is because she is always quietly at work herself, and so sympathizes with her busy human friends. And possibly there is no needful occupation which is wholly unbeautiful. The beauty of work depends upon the way we meet it—whether we arm ourselves each morning to attack it as an enemy that must be vanquished before night comes, or whether we open our eyes with the sunrise to welcome it as an approaching friend who will keep us delightful company all day, and who will make us feel, at evening, that the day was well worth its fatigues. (191-2)

Larcom evokes the twin arts of sewing and writing verses commonly united, though not always as idealistically, by women poets from Anne Bradstreet to Lydia Sigourney and Emily Dickinson. Her primary object is not to portray writing as time intensive labor, à la Bradstreet and Sigourney, but to argue that manual labor is conducive to writing poetry. Beauty, nature, and poetry pay visitations upon the laborer-poet who keeps her mind open and her hands employed. Larcom’s description is extraordinary, additionally, in that she does not oppose the labors of hand and head, as did many participants in the labor conversation of this period (Bromell 7). In her account, manual labor beside a window is

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\(^6^0\) Putzi writes that, “while flowers were commonly associated with poems in nineteenth-century America, this metaphor becomes even more interesting… in light of the fact that many operatives created libraries or scrapbooks of their window seats in the factory, others created small window gardens” (161).
necessary to poetic inspiration. The natural world just beyond a window-pane is a companion to work, not a break from it.

If Larcom’s vision of poetic inspiration seems to celebrate traditional domesticity while yet retaining some distance from it, since she served as an only temporary helpmate in her sister’s home, it’s because the familiar elements of female labor represented norms that she labored with and against as a working-class poet. Potted plants growing indoors beside a large window are staples of nineteenth-century paintings of women sewing—conventional images that can serve as an ideological reference point for the corporate promotion of flowers in the mills. My examples can be seen as on a continuum with mid-century ideals, though they date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. “Clotilde” and “A Moment’s Rest” by American painter Paul Louis Dessar (c. 1890) together narrate a possible scenario where a sewing mother is stationed near a window so that she can look out of it when she has “a moment’s rest,” baby and flowers within arm’s reach of her constant care (see figs. 21-22). Winslow Homer’s watercolor, “Young Woman Sewing” (1876) omits the familiar emblems of window and potted flowers present in Enoch Wood Perry’s “A Month’s Darning” of the same year (see figs. 23-24), but the young woman’s sunlit gaze over her right shoulder evokes them all the same—they are there, just outside the frame. Finally, John William Waterhouse’s Pre-Raphaelite painting of Tennyson’s heroine, “I am Half-Sick of Shadows, said the Lady of Shalott,” (1916; see fig. 25) marks a culmination of the visual representations of women sewing while referencing an important early-nineteenth century poem.

Tennyson’s poem, “The Lady of Shalott” (1832), reverses the factory laborer’s position at Lowell. Forbidden to look out of the window from her place of imprisonment
and coerced labor, the Lady of Shalott is a negative model for women’s labor at Lowell. From the perspective of a worker-poet, however, her story is also paradoxically triumphant. Because she cannot see the outside world, the Lady of Shalott weaves a representation of it that she sees reflected in a mirror near her work station. She is a genteel woman representing her situation with art from a position of labor. Her labor is coterminous with her art. Though she is compelled to labor, she is free to make art with it, giving her a measure of agency within a coercive situation.

Note that if ideal labor is that in which manual and mental activity occur at the same time, as Larcom argues, then the paintings I’ve referenced do not—they cannot—adequately portray this satisfying simultaneity. Those paintings where the laborer appears to be lost in thought are ones in which she has paused working. Nicholas Bromell identifies this fundamental conflict between art and work: work repels representations of itself in process (2-4). Laborers and artists share the challenge of adequately integrating mental and manual labor. In the words of Jacques Rancière remembering Plato, the challenge for the would-be worker-poet is to do more than one thing at a time—61—for Larcom, more than her assigned task of sewing or tending a machine. Illuminating Sartre, Rancière writes that doing more than one’s assigned task was even more difficult after industrialization, when there was less and less available leisure. “In the age of mass production it is less possible than ever for a person to do two things at once”—not by rule of government, as in Plato’s ideal city, but because of the worker’s fatigue. “He cannot

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61 See Rancière, The Philosopher and His Poor. Plato’s The Republic “simply establishes the impossibility of holding more than one job at a time. It knows only one evil, but this is the absolute evil: that two things be in one, two functions in the same place, two qualities in one and the same being. Only one category of people, then, finds itself de facto without employment, those whose specific occupation consists in doing two things in one—the imitators [or, artists]” (8). (My brackets.)
treat himself to the luxury of ‘freedom of thought’ in which the intellectual glorifies the vulgarity of his leisure. An unskilled worker who thinks would ‘damage’ the machine” (*The Philosopher and His Poor* 138). She would damage the very machine she operates, by her distraction at work. But Rancière’s rich phrase also implies that she labors within a system, or machine, that has limited her leisure by design, so that she has no time for the thought that precedes political action, which would damage the machine.

Factory workers assimilated flowers and poems into environments that looked, felt, and sounded quite different from the domestic images I cite above. The factory windowsill was not that of an intimate parlor or nursery, but one of some eighty identical windows lighting a mill floor (see figs. 18-20). Though Lucy Larcom often expresses ambivalence about the noise of the machines and her ability to think in their presence, comparing her description of domestic handiwork with her description of mechanical operation puts us in a position to evaluate her ability to integrate thought in either environment. By her description, handiwork frees the mind for contemplation: “My fondness for this kind of work [here, knitting] was chiefly because it did not require much thought. Except when there was ‘widening’ or ‘narrowing’ to be done, I did not need to keep my eyes upon it at all. So I took a book upon my lap and read, and read, while the needles clicked on” (*A New England Girlhood* 126). Neither Larcom nor Harriet Robinson “read, and read” at work in the mills, even in rooms where books were permitted. Robinson was only able to glance at her book “at intervals” (46). At best, a factory operative’s labor enabled intermittent contemplation when the machines did their work autonomously and predictably. “When the work ‘went well,’” Larcom recalled, “I sat in the window-seat, and let my fancies fly whither they would” (175). Mindless work
enables thought, but minding machines is not mindless, it turns out, even if such oversight doesn’t rise to the status of contemplation. As factory operatives, Larcom and Robinson’s task was to watch their machines for aberrations in smooth, repetitive action; the machine’s unpredictability made lapses in attention risky. Larcom and Robinson’s memoirs correct a misconception that manual labor universally precludes thought for laborers, while also illustrating how “an unskilled worker who thinks would damage the machine.” For them, hands don’t interfere with thought; thought (minding machines) interferes with thought.

Nevertheless, Larcom made the most of her intervals for thought. She liked her work in the spinning room, where she tended only a few frames positioned directly in front of windows overlooking the river. Potted geraniums grew in a window nearby to her station, and when the machines demanded less of her time, she wandered over to the leafy window and imagined she was in a “bowery”—perhaps, like the Lady of Shalott (181). Or, she concentrated on memorizing her window-gems: “The printed regulations forbade us to bring books into the mill, so I made my window-seat into a small library of poetry, pasting its side all over with newspaper clippings” (175-6). Robinson explains that operatives commonly pasted scraps of reading material around their work stations in situations where they were not allowed to bring books, as in the spinning and weaving rooms. Presumably books were prohibited there in order to limit distraction while operating machines—for workers’ safety, but also for their productivity. In such cases, “they brought their favorite pieces of poetry, limns, and extracts, and pasted them up over their looms or frames, so that they could glance at them, and commit them to memory” (Robinson 46). Robinson was only permitted to bring books into the mill when she was
paid by the piece: “If I chose to have a book in my lap, and glance at it at intervals, or
even write a bit, nothing was lost to the ‘corporation’” (46). Robinson describes a work
environment where self-improvement via reading or study during working hours was
generally opposed to corporate gain, though a distinctive element of worker culture at
Lowell.

The value of poetry to antebellum laborers cannot be overstated. Poetry was
among the most accessible of high-cultural forms for workers in this period because they
could access lots of it, inexpensively, in every kind of periodical, from dailies to
monthlylies. Indeed, factory operatives’ memoirs attest that they read poetry in periodical
format rather than in books accessed through the Lowell circulating libraries. In
periodicals, workers found an affordable, transportable, curated selection of canonical
and popular poems. Practical in format and cheap in material, periodical poetry invited
readers to excise it. Larcom and Robinson’s accounts are a reminder that manual labor
favors such short-form, transportable literature—literature that can be easily integrated
into workspaces, as well as into the intervals of work. Prose sketches of boardinghouse
life published in the Lowell Offering suggest that unlike poetry reading, novel reading did
not take place at work, but rather during after hours, in one’s room or parlor. One might
guess that a reason for this was not only the cumbersomeness of turning pages at work,
but that novel-reading required more time for continuous reading, in order to get
absorbed by a plot.

Larcom used her work hours for memorizing her window gem poems, in imitation
of pedagogical recitation in the primary and secondary schools that she lacked the time
and money to attend. Larcom recalls, “I was not, of course, much of a critic. I chose my
verses for their sentiment, and because I wanted to commit them to memory; sometimes it was a long poem, sometimes a hymn, sometimes only a stray verse” (A New England Girlhood 176). Larcom’s experience at Lowell led her to ultimately revise the old adage, “time is money,” to “time is education” (228). When she left the factory town, it was for a teaching job that offered her more time for self-improvement, though not more money. Periodicals aided in the education of the poor by regularly reprinting canonical and contemporary verse, so that readers like Larcom didn’t need to be critics—periodical editors made selections for her. Commenting on how factory operative poetry in particular represents an important “relationship between print culture, labor, and the literary,” Jennifer Putzi argues that “poetry was both the most literary of genres and, for nineteenth-century American women, one of the most accessible.” Formal brevity lent itself to long working hours while “the genre’s inherent intertextuality allowed the poets to demonstrate their ‘self culture,’ particularly their familiarity with and mastery of a vast reservoir of poetry, primarily British and American” (156-7). When curating window gems, “the operatives are simultaneously readers, authors, and editors in this process, selecting poems based on their own tastes and preferences, and literalizing the notion of the newspaper’s ‘poet’s corner.’” (160). Of all the kinds of writing featured in the Lowell Offering, Putzi argues, poetry “might productively be seen as central to the project of the periodical” since it “comes to stand, in many ways, as proof of the factory operatives’ desire to engage with print culture,” as demonstrated by their reading habits in the mills (168).

The proximity of poetry to labor at Lowell is significant for many reasons, but I’ll elaborate just one by returning to Nicholas Bromell’s observation, in By the Sweat of the
that labor poses a problem for representation, evident in its relative invisibility in literature and the arts. One finds few representations of work in action, he observes—few obvious windows into how a worker experienced her labor (3 – 4). Is literary representation at a fundamental remove from work? Indeed, one of the goals of this chapter is to reckon with the fact that factory labor is confoundingly undernarrated in the *Lowell Offering*. Yet, the practice of pasting poems around workstations in Lowell factories suggested a privileged status for poetry in this labor context. If factory operatives’ own poems do not straightforwardly represent an experience of embodied labor, the fact that poetry was accessible to them in the mills is nevertheless significant in itself, as it ensured that they had the tools for representing themselves *at all*, with poetry.

**The Boardinghouse as a Salon**

Pasting poems around a workstation makes them available to one’s workmates. An avid reader of such found fragments, Robinson remembers her peer’s clippings as “an incentive to [her] thoughts,” inspiring perhaps several Improvement Circle submissions (46). This example of reading in public nicely illustrates how initiatives for mutual improvement at Lowell tended to attract participants by virtue of their taking place in plain sight. Just as factory operatives were ever on display to middle-class tourists, they were also visible to each other. Factory operatives’ own desire for improvement further fueled educational initiatives that were free and open to the public.

What came to be known as “The Improvement Circle” was never precisely one thing. Rather, I’d argue that the name refers to multiple, concurrent gatherings at Lowell with overlapping and changing members. At these gatherings, factory employees and other Lowell residents met periodically to listen to their original essays, poems, and
stories read aloud by a presiding member—anonymously, if desired. Participants described the meetings as both improving and entertaining. Meetings tended to take place where founding members lived or worshiped; boardinghouses as well as churches were sites of ongoing exchange and improvement (Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* 211).

It’s perhaps unsurprising that, as Lucy Larcom writes, “the place where we worshiped was the place where we came together in other ways,” since churches have historically functioned in this way; what’s more surprising is that boardinghouses sported both the resources and the degree of public accessibility to meet Lowell’s unusual variety of social and educational needs. Larcom recalls taking German and music lessons in the parlor room of a factory boardinghouse that contained a piano, a middle-class luxury (241; see fig. 26). Another luxury of boardinghouse living was the access to ones’ housemates’ belongings. Indeed, the wealth of books that circulated between boarders led both Larcom and Robinson to describe the factory-boardinghouse system a kind of “industrial school” or “literary household” (Larcom 222-3; Robinson 40, 47, 91). Later, when married, Robinson enlisted her husband to bring home books from his employer, in imitation of the kind of workplace book-exchange she had grown accustomed to at Lowell (47). Notably, access to books was not something that came with marriage, for

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Robinson, but was rather a continuation of prior reading habits. Robinson’s husband took
the place of a literary partnership formerly filled by factory peers.

As the staple ingredient of corporate paternalism, boardinghouses nominally
sheltered and protected the women of the mills, but in practice, these spaces could be
quite public. Visitors ranged from intimate friends, to strangers attending a class or
meeting, to middle-class tourists enjoying the marvels of industrial New England. With
the permission of the boardinghouse keeper, boarders received guests in parlors as well as
in their own shared, cramped sleeping quarters (see figs. 26-27). For their social-
educational gatherings, the Larcom sisters took advantage of the “attic” space in their
mother’s boardinghouse, possibly an upper-floor garret that slept multiple women
(Larcom 173; see figs. 28-29). Space and privacy were at a premium: a single four-floor
Boott Corporation boardinghouse housed about three dozen women sharing rooms and
beds. In 1844, Harriet F. Curtis and Harriet Farley hosted improvement circle meetings at
their shared dwelling in nearby Dracut, meetings that they publicly advertised in the
Lowell Offering. Robinson describes this home as “a sort of literary centre to those who
had become interested in The Lowell Offering and its writers’” (140).

The venues for such meetings and the complex array of associations that brought
members together are important features of the Lowell improvement circles. It’s evident,
first, that the plethora of church circles did not prevent boardinghouses from becoming
literary salons—an important example of female autonomy within the framework of
corporate (and also religious) paternalism. Harriet Robinson touts the improvement circle
as the country’s “first known woman’s club” (132). Secondly, patterns of association
show that factory operatives lived in a highly integrated environment that did not
necessarily feel coercive. As Lucy Larcom writes, “work, study, and worship were interblended in our life” to a degree that she desired: “I often think that I knew then what real society is better perhaps than ever since […] It is the best society when people meet sincerely” (224-5). Larcom and Robinson’s memoirs attest that the *Lowell Offering* collaborators tended to know each other already, through either their work place, living place, or place of worship. With this history of association in mind, the tri-part symbolism on the iconic January 1845 cover of the *Lowell Offering*, portraying mill, school, and church, conveys something more than blind allegiance to corporate-paternal ideology, as Lori Merish argues (9; see fig. 30). Rather, the imagery evokes the many institutions that brought collaborators together, presenting a magazine that aspires to the sincerity of in-person association for mutual improvement.

The case of sisters Emmeline (“Emilie”) and Lucy Larcom illustrates just how intricate such networks of association could be for the writers of the *Lowell Offering*. In a letter to Lucy from 1892, in which Emilie responds to Robinson’s request for information about the Improvement Circle for the “biographies” section of her memoir, Emilie claims that the circle began as a set of conversations between herself and the later *Offering* editor Harriet F. Curtis at their work stations in the mill:

> I am very sure indeed that I was an interested and original promoter of [the Improvement Circle]. It seems to me that Harriot [sic] Curtis might have suggested it. She was the most intellectual person in my circle of acquaintance at that time. We worked in the same room, and near each other, long before the Improvement Circle had an existence…. She was a mental stimulus to me, and we freely discussed all subjects that came to hand. (qtd. in Robinson 166)

Seeing the educational benefit for themselves and others, the two women formalized their workplace chatter, drafting a “Constitution and Bylaws” for an Improvement Circle meeting (Larcom 174-5). In her own memoir, Lucy Larcom recalls tagging along with
older sister Emilie to this first meeting at the house of “a family of bright girls, near neighbors of ours.”

The Improvement Circle organized by Emilie Larcom and Harriet F. Curtis eventually moved to the vestry of the Universalist church upon invitation of minister Abel C. Thomas, who had begun attending meetings, Emilie speculates (qtd. in Robinson 166). Thomas likely suggested the idea for the Lowell Offering—but, she emphasizes, “the writers had been developed before he knew them” (167). Around the same time, Emilie and Lucy became involved in a separate “literary society” that met in the church where they attended worship, The First Congregational Church. With the mentorship of Reverend Amos Blanchard, two members (female factory operatives) began editing a second journal of improvement-circle writings at Lowell, the Operatives’ Magazine. This more religiously themed literary magazine operated alongside the Lowell Offering for two years until it merged with it in 1842 (Larcom 209-10; Robinson 173).

Emily Larcom’s account of the Improvement Circle’s origins illustrates how after-hours improvements were a way to continue workplace conversations, but with more deliberateness and freedom. If boardinghouses were adaptable spaces for female association and agency within the corporate structure, work inside the mill was also

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Possibly the Currier sisters, described in Robinson 143-4. Lucy was familiar with the improvement circle format, since for some months she had been composing poems for an intimate youth circle organized by Emilie for the education of youngsters around their mother’s boardinghouse, some of whom were employed in the mills, like Lucy. The group met in the Larcom family’s boardinghouse attic, where Emilie read compositions aloud, made suggestions for revision, and curated a bi-weekly “paper” of their writings called “The Diving Bell” (Larcom, A New England Girlhood 170). Larcom doesn’t say much about the origin of the unusual title, “Diving Bell.” A “diving bell” is used to transport a diver back and forth from the surface of a body of water to an underwater workplace. Perhaps the name was chosen for its metaphorical potential—a way to represent literature as transportive or literary writing as a form of depth-sounding. Or, perhaps the young writers identified with the bell as a specialized piece of workplace technology like the loom. Larcom supposes that Emily had Lydia Maria Child’s Juvenile Miscellany in mind as a model for the paper (170).
intellectually generative. Her story preserves an under-emphasized continuity between work hours and leisure hours that is key to understanding what Harriet Robinson meant when she wrote, “it was natural that such a thoughtful life should bear fruit,” or why Lucy Larcom claimed that her “natural bent towards literature was more encouraged and developed at Lowell than it would probably have been elsewhere” (Robinson 97-8, 164).

In their memoirs, Robinson and Larcom both describe a social need for industrial schools on the model of Lowell, schools that incorporated industrial work with boardinghouse-living—a desire also felt by factory operatives in the 1840s. It’s significant, additionally, that improvement circles generally and the Lowell Offering in particular gained a measure of distance from churches. Improvement circle meetings at the Universalist church welcomed non-parishioners, and the Lowell Offering was always explicitly non-sectarian; nevertheless, the social-educational advantages of secularism, autonomy, and public accessibility made it important that improvement circles could also meet elsewhere.

Venue is not only key to understanding the Lowell experience; it is, as Paula Bernat Bennett emphasizes, the distinguishing factor of the literature in the Lowell Offering (56-7). It matters to our interpretation of this writing that so many of the authors could have broken each other’s anonymity. For young Lucy Larcom, guessing authorship was part of the fun of improvement circles, since the game confirmed her membership in an important literary workplace community (171). In a deliberate effort to retrospectively conjure the community, for the first time for a print public, Harriet Robinson later printed

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the names of sixty-two authors of the *Lowell Offering*, “so far as [she was] able to gather them” (118).

**The Work of Mourning in Elegiac Poetry of The Lowell Offering, 1840-1845**

The *Lowell Offering* was one of many periodicals composed by or about laborers that cropped up around New England factories in the 1830s and ‘40s, and one of two major magazines to come out of Lowell. It earned international recognition as a literary periodical of quality original writing composed, edited, and eventually owned exclusively by female factory operatives. Celebrity writers not limited to Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and John Greenleaf Whittier celebrated the literary improvement circles that produced writings for the journal in their travel memoirs. As former operative and magazine contributor Harriet Robinson details in her 1898 memoir, many of the writers for the *Offering* also went on to have careers in writing and activism (132-201).

The *Offering* began publication in October 1840 under the editorship of Reverend Abel Thomas of the First Universalist Church at Lowell. When Thomas left Lowell in 1842, factory operatives Harriet Farley and Harriet F. Curtis took over editorship, both active writers and participants in local improvement circles (Robinson 99, 104; Eisler 33). In 1843, the two women purchased the periodical from publisher William Schouler (Eisler 33). Curiously, few scholars since Robinson credit Harriet Curtis with co-editing

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65 The other was the labor activist newspaper, the *Voice of Industry* (1845-1848), edited by the head of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, Sarah Bagley.

66 Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation and Pictures from Italy* (London, Chapman & Hall), 1842 and 1913, p. 60; *Mind among the Spindles: A Selection from the Lowell Offering; a Miscellany Wholly Composed by the Factory Girls of an American City, with an Introduction by the English Editor*, edited by Charles Knight and Harriet Martineau (London, Charles Knight & Co.), 1844, archive.org/details/mindamongstspind00loweuct.; Whittier, p. 120. For a more inclusive list, see “Observations of Lowell” at the University of Massachusetts’ Center for Lowell History, library.uml.edu/clh/All/Ob.htm.
and co-ownership of the magazine, though her involvement was crucial. Curtis was a founding member of the Improvement Circle, a novelist and regular contributor to the *Offering* for which she also acted as editor, owner, and business manager from late 1842-1845, traveling the country canvassing for subscribers (Robinson 134). The fact that so many scholars cite Farley as the sole editor of the *Offering*, though both Curtis and Thomas had roles, is a telltale misrepresentation. It forgets the nineteenth-century convention of anonymity and pseudonymy for women writers and also suggests our eagerness to regard the *Offering* as the work of a powerful single editorial hand, rather than a collaboration between workplace peers.

At the time of the *Offering*’s publication, Farley was just as easy a target for criticism and dismissal of the magazine as she is today, since unlike Curtis, she typically signed her name or initials (“H. F.”) to her editorial writings and other contributions. Nevertheless, Curtis’s anonymity is honored in the editorial “we” of these pieces. Thomas also tended to omit his name from the record of the magazine until his final “Editor’s Valedictory” in January 1842, for a different reason: to keep readers’ attention focused on the factory operatives. Farley’s motives were understandably different. Though she and Curtis claim that they did not seek out the position of editor nor did they want it, they came to feel that the project of the *Offering*—to showcase the writings of women who were actively employed in the mills—would ultimately benefit from having editors who were themselves factory operatives. Naming herself was a claim to authenticity for Farley and, more importantly to the *Offering*’s stated mission, it was her way of encouraging other women in her working community to cultivate pride in their workplace peers.

67 Benita Eisler is a noteworthy exception.
abilities so that they too could imagine writing for an audience. Surely any editor shapes a magazine by deciding what does and does not make the cut for publication. Nevertheless, magazines are best understood as multiply authored; in fact, the success of the *Offering*—its success against stereotyping, its editors repeatedly insist—depends upon our ability to see the authors as individuals, rather than as one thing, “the factory girl.”

The shorthand practice of listing Farley as editor enables a particularly trenchant and misleading narrative, that the goals of the *Lowell Offering* can be reduced to Farley’s apparent antagonism with Sarah Bagley, labor activist and editor of the Lowell newspaper, the *Voice of Industry*. Philip Foner features their 1845-6 “debate” in local Lowell papers in his influential collection of factory operative writings, *The Factory Girls* (1977). Indeed, Bagley’s criticisms of Farley and the *Offering* give Foner an organizing rationale for his book, which he divides into two initial parts, “The Genteel Factory Girls” and “The Militant Factory Girls.” Farley and the *Lowell Offering* stand in for the “genteel” or “escapist” writings of the New England factory communities; Bagley and the *Voice of Industry* represent the “militant” group.

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68 Curtis and Farley describe how they came to the position of editors and state their goals for the magazine in their editorials from Oct 1842, pp. 23-4 and Nov 1842, pp. 47-50. All Editorials are signed “H.F.”

69 Abel C. Thomas denied that articles were heavily edited, when serving as acting editor. His was a response to a popular prejudice against the magazine, that factory operatives’ writing could not stand on its own merit (“Editor’s Preface,” Apr 1841). He claimed only to have actively excluded writings that were obviously sectarian (“Editor’s Valedictory,” Jan 1842, p. 379). Harriet Farley and Harriet Curtis expand upon Thomas’s principles in their editorials from October 1842, pp. 23-24; November 1842, pp. 47-50; and September 1843, pp. 282-287. Lucy Larcom remembers the editors welcoming submissions: “My early efforts would not, probably, have found their way into print, however, but for the coincident publication of the two mill-girls’ magazines, just as I entered my teens. I fancy that almost everything any of us offered them was published, though I never was let in to editorial secrets. The editors of both magazines were my seniors, and I felt greatly honored by their approval of my contributions.” She felt she could write what she wanted: “We enjoyed the freedom of writing what we pleased, and seeing how it looked in print” (*A New England Girlhood* 220-1).
Though such a binary does not hold up upon closer reading of the *Offering*, it
nevertheless has had a lingering influence on contemporary scholarship.\(^70\) The “debate”
that Foner references was at best a conversation about the role of periodicals in
representing labor issues; at worst, it was a scapegoating of Farley and the *Lowell
Offering* for grievances against corporations. Foner credits Bagley with breaking the
“silence” about the *Lowell Offering*’s complicity with the corporate agenda (58). Though
the *Offering* was a source of pride for the Boston Associates, they did not own it and they
did not dictate what should be published.\(^71\) Farley and Bagley’s back-and-forth—
consisting of only one response from Farley—represents a limited selection from a larger
conversation that predates Bagley’s public criticisms.

Fortunately we don’t have to speculate about the *Offering*’s goals; its editors
frequently stated them throughout the magazine’s four-year run. More so than Thomas,
Curtis and Farley especially refined their editorial motives with respect to factory
operatives themselves. In their first “Address to Our Patrons” (October 1842), the new
editors boldly state that factory operatives are the first and most important audience of the
magazine, though they recognize that the *Offering* simultaneously represents factory
operatives to a broader audience. Their aim is to encourage factory operatives to elevate
themselves through writing and study by showing *factory girls* what “factory girls had

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\(^70\) See especially Merish.

\(^71\) Eisler explains the *Offering*’s complex circulation as both a symbol of the Lowell system and an
autonomous literary magazine in her Introduction to the 1977 edited collection:
The *Offering* was not born a house organ, nor did it ever actually become one. As such, its value
to the Boston Associates would have been negligible. As Lowell was a showcase mill town and its
women workers were the “most superior operatives,” so their magazine would be a traveling
mirror to reflect an ideal system. During the period when Lowell could still claim with some
credibility to be the “industrial Utopia” Trollope had observed, it all worked. The *Offering*,
uncensored and independent, provided a fortuitous medium for those two expressions of distinctly
American genius: public relations and packaging. (36)
power to do,” thereby increasing their self-respect (“Editorial,” Nov 1842, p. 48). Harriet F. Curtis wrote that the goal to elevate workers is a deliberate rejection of the philosophy of leveling: “we not pull down the superior to the position of the more humble, but would raise the humble to the position of the superior” (qtd. in Hale 659). The Lowell Offering circulated widely, claiming readers in almost every state in the union and some abroad, even though low subscription numbers continually threatened its circulation.

Nevertheless, Paula Bernat Bennett is right to emphasize that The Lowell Offering was always meant to be primarily “a coterie magazine—that is, a magazine put together by a homogenous group of writers, writing for themselves and others like them” (55).

Bennett echoes Curtis and Farley’s own repeated claims. In the editors’ second editorial, they recommit the magazine to the deep-rooted tradition of mutual improvement at Lowell by reminding readers that “Improvement Circles” provided the initial impetus and the material for publication. The Offering simply provided a medium for self-elevation in addition to Improvement Circles. Indeed, Curtis and Farley argue that a periodical is an ideal medium for mutual improvement: unlike a book, which celebrates accomplishments as though they were complete, a periodical mimics the work of improvement circles by establishing a regimen for writing. For this reason, Improvement Circle members elected to publish “articles…written monthly, or semi-monthly, by those who were constantly improving,” rather than a bound collection of their best writings (“Editorial,” Nov 1842, p. 47). Finally, the magazine could do something that the Improvement Circles could not: it could transform informal compositions into print. This transformation is key to elevating factory operatives’ self-respect, according to the editors:
We shall never forget our throb of pleasure when first we saw THE LOWELL OFFERING in a tangible form, with its bright yellow cover; nor our flutterings of delight as we perused its pages. True—we had seen, or heard the articles before; but they seemed so much better in print. They appeared, to us, as good as any body’s writings. They sounded as if written by people who never worked at all. (“Editorial,” Nov 1842, pp. 47-8)

The Lowell Offering offers factory operatives a way of seeing themselves anew through the defamiliarizing transformative medium of print.

In addition to the motive to improve, a second important motive of the magazine—one that tends to get lost in later iterations when the editors were more on the defensive—is the motive to entertain.

We wish to have contributions from the witty and the wise, the serious and the sprightly. We would blend the useful with the pleasing; the virtues of Aunt Letty with the vivacity of Kate. We would do this from principle—we wish to make our little magazine attractive—to gain, as readers, those who would shrink from a periodical devoted merely to the useful. This should have, and shall have, its place; but we wish to reach those who have been accustomed to find their only amusement in silly books, and scurrilous papers. The young crave amusement—the laborious need and deserve it. We are willing and desirous to contribute to innocent pleasure, and if we are ever injurious, it will be because we have been mistaken in our method of doing good. (“Editorial,” Nov 1842, p. 48)

Curtis and Farley define the Offering here as a literary magazine, whose usefulness should be assessed in terms of the usefulness (“the innocent pleasure”) of literature. They anticipate that some might mistake the Offering’s literary investments for mere escapism (Foner). In keeping with other literary magazines of the period, the Offering refrained from publishing partisan writings, including labor activism, claiming that “with wages, board, &c., we have nothing to do” (48). Nevertheless, scholars such as Benita Eisler and Julie Husband consider the Offering to be a significant contribution to nineteenth-century conversations about women’s labor. The politics of the magazine have to be assessed

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72 Curtis and Farley are on the defensive in their editorial from September 1843; they fear the issue may be their last due to low subscription numbers.
case-by-case, taking into consideration the specific kinds of expression that literary
genres both enable and curtail. Bagley evidently felt that a literary magazine was not the
appropriate platform for addressing labor concerns. When assessing the ability of the
*Lowell Offering* to speak to the nineteenth-century factory woman’s situation, scholars
today should ask what kind of political work a literary magazine could do, rather than
what it could not. A consideration of genres should lead us to avoid the unhelpful
opposition of literary magazine and political newspaper writing.

The staying power of Philip Foner’s model, which stages such an opposition, is
evident in Lori Merish’s article, “Factory Labor and Literary Aesthetics” (2012). Merish
takes the perspective that the *Offering*’s literary aesthetic itself was complicit in worker
oppression:

> It is precisely this circumscription of the “literary” that activist Lowell women
> challenged, objecting to the way factory women’s discourse was “aesthetically”
> appropriated and pressed into industrial service: for them, the *Offering* epitomized
> the process through which the “beauty” of their minds (their tasteful literary
> productions) as well as their bodies (the idealized image of the millgirl on the
> frontispiece, the photographs and engravings of millwomen circulated by factory
> recruiters) were utilized to advertise the “humanity” and “progress” of the
> industrial system. (9; see fig. 30)

A community of factory operatives at Lowell were motivated to write in specific literary
genres and to publish their writings for an audience greater than their initial peer group.
Why? To say that they wrote poems or domestic fictional sketches in order to
demonstrate their self-cultivation or their femininity, or to please their employers, is only
a small part of the story. The other part is about the aesthetic tools that fulfilled their
expressive needs. We haven’t yet understood mill workers’ investment in literature, in
literary aesthetics: in other words, how bellettristic writing mattered to them as more than
an empty exercise. Literary scholars can add to the body of historical scholarship on the
Offering by elucidating how literary genres mediate meaning. Among the handful of articles and chapters on Offering poetry, Paula Bernat Bennett’s “Mill Girls and Minstrels” (2007) and Jennifer Putzi’s “Poets of the Loom, Spinners of Verse” (2017) are exemplary models for the kind of approach I’m advocating. These critics emphasize the importance of poetic genres and imitative practice to magazine writing by women poets, elevating Offering poems above the common, dismissive labels of formulaic, genteel, or conventional.

Most readers of the Lowell Offering make the mistake of not sampling widely enough from its pages, limiting themselves to topical prose writings like “A Peep at Factory Life” (Mar 1845) and “The Pleasures of Factory Life” (Dec 1840), whose titles appear to promise an on-the-ground report. It’s important to remember that these writings are also generically construed. The women featured in them tend to be types (the materialist type, the morose type, etc.) whose dialogue performs a kind of mutual moral guidance. It would be misleading to take “A Peep at Factory Life” as a straightforward representation of factory life. Indeed, Jennifer Putzi implies that a simple misreading of genres has hampered the leading critics’ understanding of both the poetry and the prose of the magazine, noting that both Benita Eisler and Lydia C. Cook “clearly prefer the fiction and nonfiction of the Offering to the poetry, claiming that prose work realistically depicts the lives of the factory workers themselves” (158). Broad sampling is needed to see the generic variety of the magazine, which in turn offered factory operatives different kinds of engagements with their lived experience. Indeed, the challenge of reading the Lowell Offering is one of reading literary genres. At the close of my essay, I’ll offer an interpretation about the different perspectives a reader could have
of Lowell life, if they read an elegiac poem, verses a sentimental prose sketch from the *Offering*. The benefit of such a comparative approach is not only to see that critics’ preference for the prose of the *Offering* produces a skewed interpretation of Lowell life, but also to learn something about nineteenth-century genres.

Paula Bernat Bennett and Karen L. Kilcup explain in their introduction to *Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry* that nineteenth-century poetry is steeped in genre traditions: “To a far greater extent than poets today, nineteenth-century poets wrote in distinctive lyric subgenres whose conventions were laid out for them beforehand. Doing so, they subordinated individual expressivity to the expressivity available in and associated with the kind of poem they were writing or the kind of poet they wanted to be recognized as” (9). To say that individual expression is secondary to genre in the poems of the *Lowell Offering* is not to say that the poems, as mere exercises, express nothing about the writer’s situation. Rather, this expression is done through the poet’s employment and awareness of generic norms. It’s true that *Lowell Offering* poets employ generic norms in part to demonstrate that they are aware of them, as a demonstration of their poetic literacy. Genre writing goes hand-in-hand with the improving, pedagogical function of the *Lowell Offering*.

*Offering* poets would have been well acquainted with the norms of contemporary periodical poetry, since they were a laborer’s primary source of reading material at Lowell. Lucy Larcom’s memoir testifies that a factory hand learned how to write poetry at Lowell by reading the poetry in contemporary periodicals. Periodicals were less pricey and more widely available than books, whereas the circulating library would have had limited copies of popular items and limited operational hours. *Grahams’s Magazine* and
Godey’s Lady Book were among the popular reading material that circulated in boardinghouses (Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* 232). Larcom supplemented this fare with that of British literary periodicals such as *Blackwood’s Magazine*, which she acquired from workplace acquaintances (239-40). Larcom’s own “window gems” came from the “poet’s corner” in weekly papers, which she claims was all that was available at the time (175). Improvement circles likewise borrowed themes and ideas from popular contemporary periodicals (176, 170). Women operatives at Lowell would have favored the styles, forms, and genres of popular literary magazines not merely because they were considered overwhelmingly feminine or sentimental, but because this was the reading material that was accessible to them within their constraints of money and time.

Ultimately, the poetry of the *Lowell Offering* is interesting because it does express something. While individual poems are not typically autobiographical in the *Lowell Offering*, they achieve their expression in relation to one another, collectively, through a common set of tropes and themes. As we’ve seen, critics tend to agree that the one thing that the *Lowell Offering* does not sufficiently or at all express is what it’s like to be a factory worker. Susan Alves, one of few critics invested in the poetry of the magazine, marks this conspicuous absence as a failure to engage with one’s present reality:

Poems such as ‘Home’ by A. M. S. and L. L.’s ‘Sabbath Bells’ suggest that these poets focus their attention on an idealized time in the past and in the future, a time in which they more fully participate in upholding such pillars of the American Republic as individual liberty and freedom of religion…. Lowell’s working-class white women shroud their temporal reality, transforming and defining the meaning of their lives in the factories by espousing the behaviors and customs of True Womanhood in their poetry. Such a redefining focus suggests the poet’s denial of her daily working conditions and/or her ability to concentrate on a better future. (151)
I would argue that the anachronisms Alves identifies in the most sentimental poems of the *Lowell Offering* are a feature of elegiac writing, rather than evidence of a poet concealing, avoiding, or repressing her everyday reality. “Home” and “Sabbath Bells,” along with many of the poems of the *Lowell Offering*, are oriented towards death, which, I’ll argue, is a version of sentimentalism’s orientation towards home and hearth— the figurative, literary center of sympathetic feeling.

It is not a new observation about sentimental writing to say that it utilizes death as an impetus to sympathy: readers since Jane Tompkins know that the death of Eva at the end of Uncle Tom’s Cabin is meant to evoke “right feeling,” appropriate emotional-political action. Dana Luciano’s contribution to the body of writing on sentimentalism and grief is particularly helpful when it comes to explaining the relationship between idealized time in literature and an author’s present reality. Luciano argues that the slow, non-linear, anachronistic “time of feeling,” specifically grief, is a reaction to the increasing linearity of modern, industrial time (2). Similarly, I argue that poetry in the *Lowell Offering* is overwhelmingly elegiac because it is written by working women. The *Offering*’s most generically sentimental of poems are in their own way a commentary on what it’s like to live and work in a factory town as a woman in the nineteenth-century.

Luciano and Russ Castronovo, among others, have observed that the nineteenth-century shows a “pronounced attention to grief and mourning” (Luciano 2). According to Luciano, grief is a means of countering industrialization’s effects on time; for Castronovo, the nineteenth-century was obsessed with death because advocacy for the “socially dead” through antislavery challenged the category of citizenship (Castronovo 1). In these same respects, the *Lowell Offering* is a literature of its socially, economically,
and politically tumultuous time. By emulating transatlantic women’s sentimental verse as well as canonical elegiac pastoral locodescriptive poetry, *Offering* poets grapple with large and small-scale change as they also make claims to intellectual, cultural, and personal property. If nineteenth-century writing in general showed a “pronounced attention to grief and mourning,” elegy was one of the most common generic forms for women writers. Because grief was culturally accepted as women’s work, and because elegies were typically authored anonymously, elegy was a practical, socially-acceptable platform for women poets to profit from their writing, as did poets like Lydia Sigourney.

When I take elegiac poetry as my lens, I am responding to appraisals like this one by Benita Eisler: “Poetry was the least happy form of expression for *Offering* talents. Most selections, favoring elegiac subjects and form, are frank pastiches of women poets scarcely more gifted than their acolytes. As soon as they set out to ‘pen verse,’ the spontaneous, freshly observed detail, the felt experience, were abandoned for the dreariest poetic formulas of the day” (Eisler 113). It’s been important for me to respond to Eisler’s critique, not only because it’s representative, but because her anthology, in which this critique appears, is an invaluable resource—the only collected volume of *Lowell Offering* writings (1977). Eisler included only one poem in her collection: an elegy, and not the most interesting one, “The Funeral of Harrison” by “Adelaide” (Lydia S. Hall’s pseudonym, according to Eisler (132)).

I share Eisler’s curiosity about the elegiac subject matter of *Offering* poems, but rather than offer an autobiographical explanation (factory operatives were sad; they saw a lot of death) or the dismissive one (they were imitating better poets), I argue instead that they employed elegy as a genre that enables writers to register, and ideally process, losses
of all kinds. Scholars as diverse as Max Cavitch and Joseph Roach argue that death sets in motion a productive, though nevertheless violent and imperfect process of compensating losses through substitution. Through its dual stages of lament and consolation, elegy gives writers the tools for navigating a difficult transition. This is exactly how I see elegy working in *Offering* poems.

Eisler is not unique in bemoaning how sentimental poetry seems to avoid narrating lived experience by indulging in the placeless, timeless language of grief. Where is Lowell in these poems? Dana Luciano argues that grief functioned in this period as a reaction to industrialization and the linear time of machines and industry. Grief sought to restore writers to the anachronistic time of feeling symbolized by the hearth, the heart’s home. By Luciano’s argument, then, crafting poetic vehicles for grief was an authentic response to factory life.

For these expressive and practical reasons, elegiac poetry is perhaps what one would expect of the *Lowell Offering*. By containing elegiac poems, the magazine is not unlike other nineteenth-century periodicals. Yet, if the fact that Lowell factory operatives wrote lots of elegiac poetry is not in itself surprising—that is, contrary to the nineteenth-century assumption that the poems’ existence is *all* that matters, since factory women were not supposed to be able to write literature)—these elegiac poems are somewhat different from elegies in the popular periodicals of the day, such as *Grahams’s Magazine* and *Godey’s Lady Book*.

One of the primary differences between the *Lowell Offering* and these periodicals is that *Offering* authors considered themselves to be writing for an audience of peers first and for an anonymous print public, second. The double audience, or partial pseudonymy
of the *Lowell Offering*, has consequences for elegy. It means that a poem like “The Death of Emma” (April 1841) had specific meaning for the first audience, even as it may have spoken in general to the hearts of sympathetic subscribers. The author, “Adelaide” indicates that she elegizes a Lowell peer when she writes that death “came not where kindred all gather around.” Rather, “her sister and friend” were left to play the part of the absent mother and priest:

> to stand by
> the bed of the dying, and gaze on her there;
> to watch every smile, and to catch every sigh,
> And to join their petitions to Emma’s last prayer. (211, ll. 21-4)

Adelaide seems to speak of and for a specific audience:

> We mourn that for Emma so early [Death] came,
> While absent ones weep that she died far away. (ll. 25-6)

By using “we” and “us,” she both addresses a collective and indicates that she belongs to it:

> [Death’s] coming, methinks, was to tell us a tale,
> To bid us be ready to yield up our breath;
> For we must lie down, all exhausted and pale,
> And wait the approach of the angel of death!” [ll. 29-32, emphasis hers].

As a rule of rhetoric, words of address speak to any reader. But to a general reader, the command to ready oneself for death is a familiar injunction to devote oneself to Christ. To a peer, it is a reminder of how unready Emma’s peers, family, and possibly also Emma herself were for her death, at which they all played unfamiliar roles, because Emma died outside of her family home.

The coterie composition history of the *Offering* should lead us to imagine that its poets did not necessarily seek to create the universal or international audience of a Felicia
Hemans, even as they emulated her in other ways. An editorial note at the bottom of Lucy Larcom’s melancholic poem, “Complaint of a Nobody” (June 1843), “Y. M. cannot mean to intimate that she is a nobody.—ED.,” is a rare wink to insiders (207). Larcom, writing under the pseudonym “Y. M.,” is not a nobody to the Lowell Offering, because collaborators for the magazine know each other through overlapping circles of association. According to Larcom, who later named herself as the author of this poem in her autobiography, the title of the poem was not intended to be ironic, at least not in the way that the editors found it to be, as a commentary on the young poet’s quasi-pseudonymy at Lowell. Instead, what Larcom remembers about the poem is that she was and is embarrassed by it: “I was not unhappy; this was an affectation of unhappiness; and half conscious that it was, I hid it behind a different signature from my usual one” (213). According to sixty-five-year-old Larcom, young Lucy did not want her peers to discover that she had written “Complaint of a Nobody.” The editorial note is playful, but also chiding. Y. M. does not engage in appropriate mourning. After calling herself “an unsightly weed,” Y. M. concludes her poem by wishing for death: “Unloved and unheeded,” “a vain and useless thing” surrounded by more beautiful, more useful flowers, she will recklessly withstand fierce storms,

Though I’m heedlessly crushed in the strife;  
For surely ‘t were better oblivion were mine,  
Than a worthless, inglorious life.” (207, ll. 22-4)

Susan Wolfson writes that nineteenth-century readers understood Hemans to be “representative” in the sense of “representative of” and also “representing to,” as in, “conveying a conservative gender prescription” (xix).
The editors step in to offer the words of consolation that the poem itself does not or cannot. In this example, which shows some of the seams of publication, co-authorship is needed to fulfill genre expectations for elegiac poetry.

I’m calling this type of poem elegiac to honor its orientation towards death, its investment in the work of mourning and the poetic traditions of elegy, though “Complaint of a Nobody” is perhaps best described as a failed elegy or melancholic poem for the reasons I outline above. In general, I don’t use the noun form, elegy, to characterize the poems I discuss in this chapter, in order to distinguish the majority of my examples from poems that mourn a specific person who has died. The Offering poets did write poems that fit this specific definition—poems on the death of an intimate acquaintance, or to celebrity figures—but these are not the most common, nor are they the most interesting examples. One of the most interesting aspects of the elegiac poetry of the Lowell Offering is that it does not require a prior death: many of the poems in fact anticipate the death of others and of the speaker herself. Other poems are elegiac or, melancholic, without referencing death at all. In the Offering, death is just one kind of exile: physical or emotional separation from one’s home or family serves just as well. I’ve said that poems of the Offering are oriented towards death in the way that sentimental literature is oriented towards the hearth or home. In the many poems that reference burial in the Lowell Offering, the grave substitutes for the childhood home to which one may not be able to return, for various reasons. Poems of burial have the potential, further, to establish

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74 Whereas “The Death of Emma” may have been written for an intimate acquaintance, “The Tomb of Washington” (Oct 1840, p. 9) and “The Funeral of Harrison” (Apr 1841, pp. 84-5) are elegies to US presidents. “To M. M. Davidson” (Aug 1845, pp. 181-2) elegizes a celebrity poet—a popular sub-genre.
Lowell as a second home by ceremoniously sacralizing land, positing a community of future mourners.

Death plays the following roles in the poetry of the *Lowell Offering*. As the ultimate change, death forces one to confront other changes. In the Christian-devotional tradition, death’s inevitability—the transience of all things—is a reminder to praise God for the consolation of resurrection. While many of the elegiac poems in the *Lowell Offering* remark on death in order to express a form of Christian devotion, in many cases consolation is subordinate to the articulation of a complaint: hence the melancholy tone of much of this poetry, which shows the population to have been grappling with the changes that attend growing up, assuming non-traditional gender roles, and relocating in order to earn wages. In this elegiac poetry, death may reunite a separated family by representing a kind of return, a version of the Christian consolation. Alternatively, death may confirm exile as the inescapable modern condition for working women. But death crosses material as well as discursive, ideological terrain (Castronovo 5-6). Since the gravesite, the (final) resting place, acts as a symbolic home, death also provides the industrial worker with an earthly retreat in the rural cemetery. The Lowell Cemetery could represent this *locus amoenus* for the city of Lowell, I argue, because factory operatives wrote and read pastoral-elegiac locodescriptive poetry: in particular, they were in repeated dialogue with Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” By providing an occasion for memorialization, past and future deaths provide an occasion and a justification for poetry.

The benefit of hindsight and success as a published poet led Larcom to chide her younger self for “sentamentaliz[ing]” with her “morbid verses” (*A New England*
Girlhood 213, 215). She reasons that she was not unhealthy or unhappy; why the tendency to “dismalize [her]self,” why “these discontented fits” (213)? We should have the same questions. Earlier I emphasized that factory workers considered employment at Lowell a welcome opportunity for independence, and not mere drudgery with serious health risks. Why so melancholy? Larcom makes the mistake of using autobiography as a framework for understanding and containing her early poetry. She is all the more unsympathetic towards her younger self because she knows that living and working at Lowell turned out to be a fruitful beginning. She comes closest to the truth, rather, when she guesses that her death obsession had something to do with being young: “It is a very youthful weakness to exaggerate passing moods into deep experiences, and if we put them down on paper, we get a fine opportunity of laughing at ourselves, if we live to outgrow them, as many young people do.” (214). But Larcom also knows that “there is a certain kind of poetry that fosters this ideal” of an early death (214). As Edgar Allan Poe theorized in the “Philosophy of Composition” (1846), to make oneself a dying woman is to make oneself a subject for poetry. The young Lucy Larcom might have chosen to portray herself as dying in order to make a factory operative’s perspective worthy of representation in a high literary genre.

Larcom cites her poem “The Early Doomed” (March 1845) as an example of how she formerly romanticized the idea of dying young. What she does not recall is that many Offering poems reflect a fraught relationship to the speaker’s own youth. In these poems melancholic stuckness is an effect of one’s failure to age appropriately, by passing through socially established life stages. One of the effects of the unprecedented labor

75 According to Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia,” (1917), a diminished self-regard and unawareness of the cause of feelings of loss are both characteristics of melancholia (245-6).
opportunity that Lowell offered to young, unmarried women from farming towns whose families could spare their labor, was that the traditional paths to relational fulfillment for women through marriage and motherhood suddenly seemed optional, one of many choices. Even the self-denominated “Old Maids” authoring advice columns for Offering readers wrote from a position of daughterhood, a relational identity that frequently implies youth. In a poem whose title asks, “Shall I Be Old?” (December 1843), an unnamed writer wonders if she will be old when she dies, and whether it would be better to die old or to die young. An advantage of dying young—a kindness, Larcom argues in “The Early Doomed”—is that one would not have had the chance to sin and could then enter heaven with a pure heart (54).

For factory operatives who felt they were living in a state of suspended animation—old enough to live away from home and to earn wages, but perpetually young because unwed—death could represent a fulfillment, rather than a loss. In “The Young Bride” (August 1845), death comes as a life-stage development. It is unclear in the poem whether the “young bride” has in fact married, or whether she is about to marry. It’s likely that she is about to marry when she dies because the bridegroom is absent; he must be called to her home, where her father is already at her side. The dying bride awaits fulfillment by an arrival that, due to ambiguous pronouns, could be either the bridegroom’s or Christ’s:

Mildly she oped her sweet blue eye,
Whispering, “He’s come!—’Tis he! --He’s come!”
Then sweet, as seraphs sing on high,
She sung aloud, “Sweet home, sweet home.” (187, ll. 29-32)
In death, the young bride undergoes the patriarchal transfer of ownership, from earthly father, to bridegroom, to heavenly father/bridegroom. She gets to be a wife in death, in this poem, in spite of dying young.

According to Freud, in cases of normal mourning, the mourner eventually withdraws her libidinous attachment to the love object that no longer exists, after a period of resisting the loss. Eventually the mourner accepts the reality of the loss, freeing her ego and embracing life (244-5). In “The Young Bride,” death is both the reason for the bride’s losses and also her compensation for them. But in less religious poems of the Offering, the kinds of compensation that could complete normal mourning are not readily available. Upon reflection, Lucy Larcom felt that her youth produced melancholy by making it impossible for her to see the future resolution of her complaints. In her thinking, youthfulness is an inability to imagine outcomes. Taking this observation a step further, I would argue that “Complaint of a Nobody” and much of the elegiac poetry of the Lowell Offering is melancholic, rather, because a factory operative’s reality has produced changes/losses that are not easily named—and thus not easily overcome—because they are so new. The unavailability of losses to consciousness is one of Freud’s definitions of melancholy (245). Thus, melancholy for Offering poets is an effect of being part of an experiment in living and working, one that promised to be transitional as well as temporary in the lives of individual workers, but which no one yet quite knew how to make sense of because, for the lower-middle- and working-class groups of the 1840s, this type of livelihood was still in process. Stalled aging in “The Young Bride” is one way of representing an uncertain future.76

76 Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues that age offers an important corrective to cultural analyses predicated on binaries, since age is transitional. Childhood is not bounded by experiences to the same extent as the
For these reasons, “Lines: Addressed to a Brother on his Departure for the Far West” (June 1843) by poet M. A. can be said to indulge in the work of melancholia. The sister’s mournful words to her brother before his departure are partly misdirected. She accuses him of abandoning his kindred by departing for the west (“the fond hearts that love thee [Brother]…plead for thy stay”) but readers know that the author herself has also left her childhood home (199). According to the poem, the first thing that the brother leaves behind are “the graves of thy kindred.” In fact, the grammar of the next two lines make it possible to conclude that her brother’s loved ones reside entirely in graves:

Thou art leaving the graves of thy kindred behind,
The friends of thy childhood, the faithful, the kind. (ll. 9-10)

“Lines: Addressed to a Brother” repeatedly performs the deaths of kindred in order to keep them.

At first, M. A. imagines how the West could be just an extension of home. She recasts the western landscape, “where bright lakes are sleeping like children at rest,” in home’s image, for home is also the place where family members take their eternal rest in graves (l. 6). Ultimately, as is conventional for pastoral elegy, M. A. finds only lack in the landscape:

Thou art gone from the woodland, the vale and the hill,
Thou hast left a lone void which time never can fill (ll. 13-14)

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77 One finds the same conventions in Milton’s “Lycidas” (1638):

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,
Wild with thyme and the gadding vine o’ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn. (ll. 37-41)
The poem desperately seeks the brother’s bodily return: the “void” will be filled when time “restore[s]” him “to the vales of [his] childhood” (l. 16). But by the end of the poem, it’s clear that M. A. can only imagine the brother’s spiritual return. The sister prays to God

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\text{to keep thee from sorrow, from guilt, and from care,}
\text{And at last that thy spirit may tranquilly rest,}
\text{At home, with its GOD, In the realms of the blest. (ll. 26-8)}
\]

Earlier in the poem, M. A. associated “rest” with children and graves. Her speaker finally consoles herself over her brother’s departure by imagining the day when he will be departed in the past tense, because for her, departed persons exist in space. She may locate him when he is dead in a way that she cannot when he is alive.

Taking the long view of women’s labor, Thomas Dublin draws an explicit connection between a brother’s departure for the West and a sister’s departure for Lowell: “Mill workers should not be viewed as simply an extension of the traditional family economy as work for women moved outside the home. Work in the mills functioned for women rather like migration did for young men who could see that their chances of setting up on a farm in an established rural community were rather slim” (Women at Work 40). Lucy Larcom also framed her life as a trajectory westward in A New England Girlhood. In her view, Lowell had groomed women in the trades and the independence that made them valuable missionaries to western churches (248 ff.). Yet, M. A.’s inability to represent her own absence from home through her speaker, in “Lines: Addressed to a Brother,” is another condition of her uncertain future. The same uncertainty drives the question, “Where Shall My Burial Be?” (June 1845) in the title of another Offering poem.
At one point in “Lines: Addressed to a Brother,” M. A. compares the brother to a sailor at sea. But women factory operatives did not have a comparable reference point with which to make their labor understandable to themselves. Only in hindsight can one see that newfound independence at Lowell would make a true return home, to the domestic life of one’s mother, impossible. Karen Sánchez-Eppler explains how the loss and bereavement “inherent to a process of growing up that is also a growing away” was particularly exacerbated in the antebellum period: “Rapid urbanization and westward expansion meant that adulthood brought geographical separations far more frequently than in had in earlier periods…. The child who dies is more stable and hence more easily preserved than the child who lives and leaves, claimed not by Heaven but by the world” (145). We can make sense of M. A.’s desire for the death of family members, then, by Sánchez-Eppler’s logic that “the child who dies, the child who does not grow into the world, figures a resistance to the national enterprise of commerce and expansion, hallowing the emotional intensity of heart and home” (147). In the overwhelming number of elegiac poems about burial in the Lowell Offering, landscape embeds the bodies of loved ones so that they may be visited, granting access to mourning. The sister who cannot visit her brother’s grave cannot properly mourn him. The estrangement is physical, emotional, and threatening to her self-conception as a sympathetic subject—indeed, as a woman.

Studied emulation of Felicia Hemans—to many American women poets, the representative Victorian poet of mournful domestic patriotism—helps one Offering writer find appropriate expression for her estrangement.78 In “The Graves of a Household”

(April 1841), poet “Adelia” figures the irreversible, fragmenting effects of modernity on a family as the unbridgeable distance between their scattered graves. Devoting one stanza to each burial, she maps out six possible burial sites across the Atlantic—some unmappable, such as the burial site of a brother lost at sea and another who never returned from war. Adelia indicates in a note that “the statements in the following lines are facts,” though the poem is inspired and framed by lines from Felicia Hemans’ poem of the same name, beginning:  

They grew in beauty side by side,—
They filled one home with glee,—
Their graves are severed far and wide,
By mount, and stream, and sea. (Offering version, p. 40, ll. 1-4)

Hemans’ opening stanza offers Adelia a subject, a form, and the authority to write (Putzi 159). By creating a fictive compositional scenario of co-authorship, Adelia positions herself as an apprentice to the most influential female poet of her day, cloaking poetic ambition with the rituals of self-improvement. Adelia and Hemans’ poems share much in common, additionally, with balladic, gothic-Romantic poetry. In particular, a comparison with Wordsworth’s “We are Seven” of Lyrical Ballads (1798) helps to clarify the unusual subject-position of Adelia’s speaker. Adelia was motivated by emulation, but her poem ultimately emphasizes her own mobility, revising the Wordsworthian model of the leisured, male, touring bard.

Like the enigmatic rural child of Wordsworth’s “We are Seven,” Adelia counts siblings in “The Graves of a Household” in the manner of Hemans ("The eldest," “The


80 See Putzi on this poem and the importance of imitation for Offering poets.
second,” “And one—,” “Another,” etc. (Adelia)) and insists on the veracity of her statements. The poems count and account for siblings, describing their current locations. But unlike Adelia and Hemans, the child interlocutor of “We are Seven” denies that her family is not complete, though four siblings live away from home and two are buried in a family plot. Rather, it’s the anonymous passerby, the Wordsworth figure, who sees lack in her situation: though the child insists that “we are seven,” the traveler counts only five, since two siblings are dead (128-131). Like many of the poems of *Lyrical Ballads*, “We are Seven” takes the perspective of an outsider visiting a rural place. The child is enigmatic because the poem others her—she represents an ideology that is on its way out, as childhood is itself a state of transition. Adelaide and Hemans’ poems take the position of the leisured, male tourist in “We are Seven”; they see the “household” as “severed” by the distance of death and geography. The siblings of the “Graves of a Household” poems do not rest “side by side” in a family plot like the dead children in “We are Seven,” but Adelaide and Hemans seek to reunify them in the surrogate household of their poems.81

The different philosophies about how death can represent a loss—either a total loss, in the case of “We are Seven,” or just the loss of a life but not, ideally, a body, in “The Graves of a Household”—is implicit in the iterations of “side by side.” The phrase appears in both “We are Seven” and “The Graves of a Household”; in both cases “side” is an important rhyming word. Wordsworth rhymes “side” (l. 40) with “alive” (l. 34), “five” (l. 36), and “replied” (l. 38)—words that bespeak the traveler’s philosophy that only life, and not a body, counts as presence. By contrast Hemans rhymes “side by side” with “sever’d, far and wide” (ll. 1 and 3, 1825 version) foregrounding the factor of physical

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81 Indeed, graves are symbolically domestic for Hemans (Lootens, “Hemans and Home” 247).
distance: where once the household and the homestead unified the siblings, now
geography separates them. Adelaide’s poem is motivated by the additional factor that she
cannot fully account for all of her siblings because she does not know if or where some of
them have died. This is a difference from the Hemans, where each death is confirmed. In
her certainty about where her siblings reside, the speaker of Hemans’ poem actually
shares more in common with the child of “We are Seven.” She is dislocated, but she is
not estranged from her siblings, as is Adelaide’s speaker. Even in a case where the sister
in Hemans’ poem is not sure about the location of a grave, she knows who to ask: “The
Indian knows his place of rest” (l. 11).

Unlike Hemans’, Adelaide’s speaker is plagued by the inability to trace her
siblings. She can only speculate that in one case, “a coral rock his tomb may be” (l. 7). In
other cases, the sister can’t know a sibling’s whereabouts because “there’s none who may
tell” (l. 20). She knows that one sibling resides in “a stranger’s grave,” (l. 12) a
classification that precludes identification or a claim of kinship. A fourth sibling is
socially dead, as a prisoner of war. The sister cannot account for him because his
experience will never be communicable, even should he return home:

    His sufferings in the prison thrall,
    No mortal may ever tell” (ll. 23-24).

In distinction to the “mute inglorious Milton” of Gray’s poem, speechlessness in
Adelaide’s is an effect of estrangement, rather than of illiteracy (Guillory 390).

For Paula Bernat Bennett, the Offering poets are most subversive when adapting
canonical models (56). Adelia learned from Felicia Hemans how to represent the
dissolution of the family and national diaspora through the scattering of siblings’ graves.
If, as Tricia Lootens writes, Hemans’ “Graves of a Household” “signals the end not only
of the possibility but of the memory of living domestic love,” Adelia takes estrangement to another level by making many of the family graves undiscoverable (“Hemans and Home” 250). She also revises Hemans’ poem by omitting the mother figure of Hemans’ second stanza. The “home” that once united siblings lacks from the first its essential maternal-sympathetic core. Adelia thus weakens the prior idealized time of origins that is, according to Dana Luciano, such an important imaginative locus for grief (8).

Further, by adapting Hemans’ poem, Adelia makes an important intervention to the masculine tradition of locodescriptive poetry represented by Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads and Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” One of Adelia’s additions to Hemans’ original is to have the second eldest brother buried in “a stranger’s grave.” The word “stranger” is as important to the Lowell community as it is to the locodescriptive tradition, but in different ways. Locodescriptive writing posits two kinds of strangers: the leisured, male, cultured, traveling stranger from the city, typically the protagonist of the poem, who strikes up a dialogue with a knowledgeable rustic about the history of the remote place; and the stranger of the stranger’s grave, a feature of the landscape of locodescriptive poetry. Being a traveling stranger is a privilege: it includes the privileges of mobility and anonymity, both of which come with class status. The stranger can go slumming; he can both be a voyeur and remain aloof, unsullied and uncompromised by the experience. In the case of the stranger’s grave, by contrast, the stranger’s muteness, or illiteracy, is what makes him strange (Guillory 390).

Recasting Lowell as a destination for city folk, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier cast himself as a stranger in his travelogue, The Stranger in Lowell (1845). Like the elite stranger of Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” Whittier strolls among local
graves. In what follows I’ll explain how, by making his visits to Lowell Cemetery a subject for high literary writing, Whittier participated in the consecration and the romanticization of an important public park. But first, Adelia’s impersonal distance from the subjects of her poem and her reference to “a stranger’s grave” brings her close to inhabiting the position of the traveling stranger of locodescriptive poetry. She is able to inhabit this traditionally masculine position, I’d argue, because of her mobility as a working woman living away from home. The workplace itself, in addition to publication, is a channel to public life. If Adelia’s poem also supports the possibility that she herself is like a stranger in a stranger’s grave, then it corrects assumptions about the literacy of those strangers. Indeed, the Offering’s pages are full of reminders to be kind to strangers by remembering that every factory operative was once herself a stranger. A call to charity entitled “Our Duty to Strangers” (April 1841) asks operatives to revisit the painful moment when they separated from their families so that they may show strangers compassion as kindred “orphans” (351). This prose piece makes its appeal through the frequent quotation of poetry—notably, excerpts from Hemans’ poem, “The Stranger’s Heart.”

**Elegy, Locodescriptive Poetry, and the Rural Cemetery Movement**

Poems about burial reveal Lowell as a community in transition, seeking to provide for a culture in transition. In an important commemorative poem celebrating the “consecration” of Lowell Cemetery on June 20, 1841, poet “Adelaide” proclaims a desire to be buried in the newly “hallowed ground.” Each repetition of the exultant refrain, “‘Tis hallowed,” is an opportunity to explain how the land has been transformed through consecration—indeed, through the performative words of her poem—from “forest wild”
to “a spot enchanted” (186, ll. 1-2). She may have learned how to do this from Felicia Hemans, who taught Americans how to use graves to “sanctify” land, “creating a fully domesticated, spiritualized, and monocultural myth of origin for an economically and politically ambitious multicultural nation-state” in the well-known poem, “Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England” (1825; Lootens, “States of Exile” 23). Hemans’ “sanctifying project” in that poem is to make exile a homecoming (15). True to Lootens’ argument that the American subject is continually rebuilt on a defiled grave (27), the Offering poet similarly departicularizes formerly Indian land. Indeed, what makes Lowell Cemetery a burial ground is the fact that it can be described generically in a commemorative poem. In this way, “Lowell Cemetery” fits Offering poet E. W. J.’s criterion for burial in “Where Shall My Burial Be?” (June 1845, 131). The new cemetery includes both a “streamlet [that] murmurs gently by” and “smiling flowers [that] bend down and love it” (Adelaide ll. 35-6). But instead of asking where her burial place will be, as so many of the burial poems in the Offering do, Adelaide wonders,

Whose ashes first the spot shall grace?
Whose grave shall first of all be measured?
Shall mother weep, in anguish deep,
For prattling first-born early taken?
Or infant creep, to watch the sleep
Of mother who may ne’er awaken? (ll. 27-32)

82 In “Where Shall My Burial Be?” E. W. J. instructs:
By some gentle stream let me pillow my head,
Where the beautiful flowers, which kiss the blue wave,
Their fragrance shall shed o’er their lowly grave. (vol. 5, Jun 1845, p. 131, ll. 20-22).
She wants to be buried in a place that doesn’t seem at all like a cemetery or graveyard:
OH, bury me not with the silent dead,
That people so thickly earth’s lowly bed,
For I could not bear to lay me down
Beneath the shadow, and darker frown
Of those mouldering stones. (ll. 1-5)
In the other poems we’ve seen, the poet’s anxiety about place of burial reflects the degree to which she sees her family as geographically held together. Her project is to work out compensation for that distance from either side of the grave. “Lowell Cemetery” compensates for the losses incurred by separation by declaring Lowell a community for families, reframing the burial poem as a poem about the history of future settlement. Here, the grave is a site for families. “Lowell Cemetery” thus takes on the work of evolving Lowell from a factory town of itinerant laborers to a settled community. It even kills off hypothetical children so that the factory operative may imagine herself in the future role of mother. As of the making of the poem, the cemetery is graveless, and this is just as well. The Boston Associates wanted to keep the laboring population at Lowell fluid and transient. Settlement came with the risk of creating a permanent proletarian urban class. Perhaps for this reason, Lowell Cemetery was celebrated as more than just a burial place: it was first and foremost a public park.

Local readers of “Lowell Cemetery” should have found the poet’s list of “firsts” perplexing, for Lowell already had three cemeteries by 1840. In fact, historians have argued that the town was not lacking for available burial plots, and Lowell Cemetery was not necessarily built to provide them. Rather, Lowell Cemetery was built on the model of Mount Auburn outside Boston (built in 1831) and Père-Lachaise Cemetery of Paris (1804) (see figs. 31-33). Its building was part of the “rural cemetery movement,” a cultural phenomenon that also produced Laurel Hill Cemetery of Philadelphia (1836), New York’s Greenwood Cemetery (1838), and Baltimore’s Green Mount (1839) (Bender 80-3). Urban geography historian Thomas Bender describes the “rural cemetery” as a

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83 See Bender, Norkunas, and Whittier.
“misnomer,” for in every case it referred to cemeteries built on the outskirts of major cities. The adjective “rural” rather indexed a Romantic ideal, a fantasy of a communal, folk past arguably invented by Romantic poetry and popularized by Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.”

Bender argues that the rural cemetery aesthetic emerged from the influence of Gray’s elegy and landscape gardening (Bender 80, 84). Nevertheless, as Paul Gillory explains, it’s the poem’s deviation from locodescriptive poetry, its nonspecific geography, that ultimately makes it universal and transportive—a model for any graveyard, any elegy (390-1). Later in this chapter I’ll elaborate on this poem’s particular significance for the *Lowell Offering*.

Rural cemeteries were popular tourist destinations—places of leisure, romantically charged public parks featuring relatively few actual graves. Thomas Bender argues that rural cemeteries were a specific cultural response to the effects of urbanization on ideas about the American landscape. Cities like Lowell threatened the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian republic. Whereas in the decades prior to 1840 factories might be incorporated into the dominant agrarian vision of the American landscape, later decades saw an increasingly demarcated cityscape and landscape (Bender 79). Bender argues that “the urban generation of the 1840s sought new approaches to the landscape that honestly reflected their urban experiences while also satisfying powerful yearnings to preserve a link with their rural past” (79). Regarded as a moral influence amidst material

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84 Boston’s rural cemetery, Mount Auburn, borrows its name from “Sweet Auburn,” the fictitious Irish village destroyed by enclosure acts in Oliver Goldsmith’s elegiac pastoral poem, “The Deserted Village” (Linden-Warde 302). Elegiac pastoral poetry is at the heart of the rural cemetery movement aesthetic. A Cambridge native, Sarah Orne, explored the connection between the two in a book-length poem, *Sweet Auburn and Mount Auburn* (1844) (302).

85 Rural cemeteries were different in kind from the typical burial grounds of the day, as they were not parish graveyards and they were not built in city centers. There were practical advantages to building outside of a city center, as graves were often dug up for urban expansion and proximity to cemeteries was increasingly seen as a cause of disease (Bender 80, 84 and Norkunas 117).
progress, Rural cemeteries acted to “counterbalance” the potentially corrupting effects of urbanization (82). The popularity of rural cemeteries energized the building of public parks. Shortly after the consecration of Lowell Cemetery, the city purchased land that became the North and South Commons—a new kind of commons in the long history of public land, according to Bender, hemming in a city rather than marking its center (88).

City dwellers were supposed to make periodic visits to natural places like rural cemeteries in order to feel their salutary effects, as Whittier does in The Stranger in Lowell (1845). Reflecting on his visits, Whittier describes Lowell Cemetery as a place of many contrasts. Though the cemetery is “a quiet, peaceful spot,… the contrast of busy life is not wanting. The Lowell and Boston railroad crosses the river within view of the Cemetery; and, standing there in the silence and shadow, one can see the long trains rushing along their iron pathway, thronged with living, breathing humanity” (43). The contrasting presence of the living and the dead is a recurring theme of Whittier’s reflections. The Lowell-Boston railroad is dynamically alive with the crowds it shuffles back and forth. Comparatively less animate, a person who watches the train from the position of the cemetery is silent and shadowy. Unexpectedly, the cemetery is full of young people: “It is not the aged and the sad of heart who make this a place of favorite resort. The young, the buoyant, the lighthearted come, and linger among these flower-sown graves, watching the sunshine falling in broken light upon these cold white marbles, and listening to the songs of birds in these leafy recesses” (43). The supposed buoyancy of these young visitors is difficult to reconcile with Whittier’s conclusion that Lowell Cemetery is a melancholic place, in the sentence that follows: “Beautiful and

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86 For more on the history of leisure at rural cemeteries, see Linden-Ward, “Strange but Genteel Pleasure Grounds” (1992).
sweet to the young heart is the gentle shadow of melancholy which here falls upon it, soothing, yet sad—a sentiment midway between joy and sorrow.” The young visitors to Lowell Cemetery themselves embody contradictions: they are both heavy and lighthearted. Their melancholic beauty seems to confirm a universal truth about young people, for Whittier, represented in lines from Wordsworth’s “Ode to Lycoris” (1817),

In youth we love the darkling lawn,
…Sad fancies do we then affect,
In luxury of disrespect
To our own prodigal excess
Of too familiar happiness. (qtd. in Witter 44)

Constituting a large portion of the town’s population, off-duty factory operatives would have been among the young people that Whittier saw at the cemetery. When read in concert with the writings of the Lowell Offering, which Whittier also praised in The Stranger at Lowell, Wordsworth’s verses suggest an answer to an important set of questions: Were the writers of the Lowell Offering “affecting” sorrow? Were they playing at being older by claiming losses not yet sustained? Was visiting graveyards a way to contemplate and reconcile their youth? Whittier’s word, “prodigal,” is especially relevant to factory operatives’ experience. “Prodigal” generally means “extravagant” or “wastefully lavish.” When applied to a person, as in a “prodigal son” or daughter, “prodigal” means one “that has lived a reckless or extravagant life away from home, but subsequently made a repentant return.” More generally and figuratively, “prodigal” means “[one] that has gone astray” or is “errant,” “wayward,” or “wandering.”

Wordsworth’s poem argues that happiness is wasted on the young: they waste their happiness, perhaps, because they have too much of it. But every adult was one young;

87 “prodigal, adj., n., and adv.,” definitions 2 and 3. OED Online, 31 March 2017.
theirs is a necessary wastefulness. The word “prodigal” includes a necessary straying in its meaning: one leaves so as to return. And just as a prodigal daughter will inevitably makes a repentant return home, Whittier’s logic proceeds, a melancholy young person will rediscover the happiness that was once too familiar. Wordsworth’s poem offers something of a compensation for the dislocation and estrangement factory operatives repeatedly expressed in their elegiac poems. It counsels that there’s no return home except through affect. By cultivating sorrow, one spends the prodigal excesses responsible for a feeling of estrangement from home. Though dearly felt, factory operatives’ youth was of course only part of the problem. The other cause of their melancholy, (trends in labor that prohibited a true return) could not be reversed.

Lowell Cemetery provides for the industrial city by serving both as a park and a place of burial. As a park, the cemetery counterbalances the corrupting influences of industry and commerce. But the park only becomes an ideal place once it is sanctified through burial and poetic speech, which gives meaning to its monuments. The elegiac burial poetry of the Lowell Offering helps to do this affective work, making the rural cemetery legible as a transformative aesthetic space. Arguably, Lowell poets learned how to do this from a crucial poem for the magazine, Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.”

Circling back to the production of the Lowell Offering, perhaps some of the strongest evidence that the magazine defined itself through and with elegy is that the following lines from Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” serve as an epigraph to the first and second volumes of the magazine, printed on its 1841 and 1842 title pages (see fig. 34):

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Taking these lines out of the context of Gray’s poem leaves behind the narrative that solidly frames them as the patronizing observations of a bourgeois elite. Whereas, in John Guillory’s analysis, Gray himself might have scoffed at the *Lowell Offering*’s quotation of his poem—evidence of the poem’s vulgar popularity—*Offering* writers likely saw the lines as representing their culture and claim to intellectual property, just the opposite of what Gray’s narrator means by these puzzling metaphors (389). In Guillory’s explanation, Gray’s narrator “foreground[s]… a literacy unavailable to the peasants who are ambivalently celebrated for their ignorance” (389). In the lines quoted above, “Gray’s narrative scenario of imagining what the ignorant peasant might have been valorizes in its image of the unfound gem the process of mobility or circulation: what cannot move is waste. The poem associates the waste of human life with death itself, but that hyperbole passes over without notice the social structures blocking the realization of human potential in some productive accomplishment” (398). The peasants wasted abilities that they could not have had, because of the uneven division of intellectual and economic property that the bourgeois narrator himself profits from.

The *Lowell Offering* gives the unfathomed gems and unsmelled flowers the reception that they do not have in Gray’s poem. If the gems were once hidden, the magazine now “offers” them to readers. As in Gray’s poem, the second metaphor proves more difficult for its contradictions. Blushing unseen is oxymoronic. In the context of women’s writing, the oxymoron feels intentional: flowers shouldn’t blush unseen, poems are meant to be read, and read widely. Modesty is false in these cases. In this context, the
metaphor reads as an apologia, which would have been an expected gesture for women poets publishing for the first time. The hope is that flowers will not waste their sweetness on desert air and poets will not waste their efforts on an ungenerous audience. The magazine’s epigraph is another occasion for subversively appropriating a high-canonical male-authored poem. As in other examples, adopting a traditionally masculine perspective reflects women’s newfound mobility. When women adapt male canonical elegiac poems, they activate the silent voices of the socially marginalized.

**Why poetry?**

I’ll end by comparing an elegiac poem and a sentimental prose piece from the *Offering*. My argument, that poetry has privileged status at Lowell, necessitates such a weighing of generic options. Why is my focus elegiac poetry and not sentimental fiction? The assumption that prose and poetry are a competitive binary often keeps scholars from asking such questions. But just as the *Lowell Offering* features many kinds of poems, it also features a variety of prose genres, including didactic, moral, or allegorical tales; travel writing; editorial argument; epistolary and novelistic fiction. The *Offering*’s elegiac poetry and sentimental fiction share an investment in grief. And in one example, it’s clear that Adelia, author of the poem “The Graves of a Household,” and S. W. S., author of the prose sketch “My Grandmother’s Fireside” (Feb 1841), adapted the same poem for their purposes: Felicia Hemans’ own “The Graves of a Household” (see fig. 35).

One sees the influence of Hemans’ poem in the list structure that both writers adopt to enumerate siblings’ whereabouts. Adelia’s poem, the more explicit imitation, differs from the Hemans in that her speaker cannot confirm the whereabouts of all of the siblings’ bodies. Sibling estrangement acts as a melancholy, bleak commentary on
modernity’s effects on a family. More like Hemans, S. W. S. can locate each sibling, living and dead. A shared memory of the grandmother’s fireside unites the siblings in S. W. S.’s tale, while both S. W. S. and Hemans suggest that siblings’ souls will also reunite after death.

Adelia’s poem and S. W. S.’s prose adaptation share a common origin in Hemans’ poem, blurring the presumed line between poetry and prose. This particular pairing upholds my argument about poetry’s importance (in particular, Hemans’ “The Graves of a Household”) to periodicals and the Lowell community. At the same time, it is possible to generalize about the different kinds of representations that either genre enables, based on these examples. One could describe the generic differences between elegiac poem and sentimental sketch in terms of the writers’ decisions to depict the family from different sides of the grave. In Hemans’ and Adelia’s poems, the grave substitutes for the hearth, but it’s an imperfect substitution; their families reside in isolated graves separated by great distances, not in family plots. Within the sentimental fiction of S. W. S.’s sketch, sibling memory of the spiritualized hearth ensures the unity of the social family in life and into death. In my reading of how sorrow operates strategically at Lowell, it’s the poem adaptation of “The Graves of a Household” that recognizes distance from one’s family home as an ontological challenge, a difficulty to their self-representation that Lowell women lived with rather than always necessarily overcame.
CHAPTER 3

POETRY AND THE TIME OF LABOR IN UTOPIA

But look: yoked bulls
Pull back the dangling plough as sunset grows the shadows.
And still I burn with love (yet what can limit love?)
Virgil, “Eclogue II”

And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our Dial on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine.
Editors of The Dial, first issue, July 1840

In this chapter, I foreground questions about labor time that were so important to reformers trying to imagine new kinds of labor, to laborers acting as test subjects in labor experiments, and to the poetry that played a large role in formalizing and answering those questions. While this chapter takes a third timespace as its case study—the Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Industry (1841-1843), subsequently called the Association for Industry and Education (1844-1847)—its proper subject is midcentury utopian imagining about what an ideal labor could be by imagining an ideal labor time. “Utopian labor” (an oxymoron in itself, work abolitionists will argue88) describes nineteenth-century attempts to resolve broad social conflicts through labor reform. Utopian labor at Brook Farm can be described as the attempt to achieve social harmony and mutual enrichment through cooperative labor and agrarian idealism. Brook Farm is instructive for its radical aspirations, but also for the ways that it failed to achieve them. By exploring poems of the period that conceptualize an ideal labor time, by elucidating the language of leisure and labor that the pastoral literary mode offered nineteenth-century thinkers about labor, and by reading personal accounts of life at Brook Farm, this chapter argues that nineteenth-

88 See, for examples, Black and Livingston.
century actors believed the time of labor in utopia is a time one doesn’t have to measure. Not having to measure time puts labor outside of capitalist contexts where time is currency. The fantasy of a protracted present achievable with a different orientation to labor and labor time creates openings for new kinds of social attachment: not only sociality between workers or members of the same sex, but beyond the couple and beyond or in addition to the normative family.

Queer attachment was one social possibility at stake in labor reformers’ principal questions about labor time, in the period. Their first question, “What is the time of labor?” encompasses both concerns about the practicality of reforms and the real difficulty of conceptualizing and representing labor as duration or process (Bromell 2-3). Their second question, “What is the present time?” conveys the perceived urgency of labor reform post-1837; the appeal of utopian schemes to effect social change now; and reformers’ sense that they were living in unprecedented times. The two questions were, in some respects, the same question: questions about the present time double as questions about labor in transcendentalist discourse, which valorized labor as presence in the world. For transcendentalists, an important reward of labor was touch—direct access to organic material, nature, and thus to origins, including the origin that is time itself. In touching nature, laborers touched time and, I argue, achieved membership in a social-sexual body greater than their own.

Brook Farm was founded in the 1840s during a wave of utopian communitarianism that historians explain, in part, as an answer to popular distrust of capitalism after the 1837 Panic. Many at the time viewed the market crash as a sign that society needed a total overhaul, and identified labor reform as the vehicle for social
reformation. The 1840s labor radicalism that produced Brook Farm was speculative, devising social plans that did not yet exist. It was also practical, insisting on putting theory into action, and utopian, promising social perfectibility in this world. I argue that the nostalgic turn to small-scale farming was about gaining a more authentic relationship to labor by finding a more authentic relationship to time. Capitalism, religion, and natural philosophy all taught midcentury labor reformers that time limits labor. In the age of artificial lighting, light was no longer a reliable natural limit on labor, making the solar clock all the more important to such reformers.

In the chapter, I show how poetry conceptualized an ideal labor alongside prose, in the current publications important to the Brook Farm community. The literature of agrarian idealism reflects the influence of the pastoral tradition on midcentury representations of leisure and labor. I track pastoral’s influence, first, on the temporal expansiveness of midday in poems exploring options for natural timekeeping or authentic labor; and second, on Hawthorne’s ability to convey the queer erotic social potential of a place like Brook Farm, in *The Blithedale Romance*.

**What was Antebellum Labor Radicalism?**

The Lowell factory system was an important reference point for antebellum labor radicals. In Chapter 2, I argued that Lowell offered transformative advantages for women in the 1840s that resulted from earning wages and living outside of the traditional private household. The ability to earn and save wages without sacrificing one’s moral standing represented a measure of independence that few women enjoyed at this time, outside of factory labor and poorly paying teaching jobs. Additionally, living in a factory boardinghouse with other single working women disrupted predictable pathways to
marriage and motherhood. To see these advantages in the Lowell factory system requires taking up the perspective of women, who still could not legally own or control property in most states. Though Lowell was designed to replicate the patriarchal family in its corporate structure, in practice it enabled antitraditional thought and actions that can be glimpsed through the writings of factory operatives.

Outside commentators did not tend to commend Lowell for the independence it afforded young unmarried women. Rather, they praised its conservatism, claiming that young virtuous women would lose nothing—neither their health, nor their morality, nor their marriageability—by working in the factories. Editors of the radical labor reform magazine, the Harbinger (1845-1849) found this conservatism to be precisely the problem with the Lowell factory doctrine. In August 1845, a Harbinger reviewer chastised Lowell celebrants for not asking the right questions:

We are far from agreeing with Mr. Miles, that “the great questions relating to Lowell are those which concern the health and character of its laboring classes.” Grant that their health is excellent and their morals without a stain; grant even that they are not destitute of intellectual culture, and that they are at an almost infinite remove from the English manufacturing population. What then? Are there no other questions to be asked? (186)\(^89\)

Including working women’s lives in his sense of an urgent need for broad social reforms, the reviewer argues that the question labor commentators need to be asking is, what does “justice to man” (implicitly, justice to men and women) look like and does the Lowell factory system supply it (186)?

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To some degree, the *Harbinger* writer recognizes that to regard Lowell as advantageous to women is to take a sober view of their relative lack of social freedom. Though he does not mention the laws and customs that circumscribed women’s labor, he asks readers to examine their complicity in the popular lie that factory labor at Lowell is voluntary, rather than a choice among worse options. “Every body knows that it is necessity alone, in some form or another, that takes them to Lowell and that keeps them there. Is this freedom?” (186) If no one would wish his wife or sister to “be elevated into the situation of operatives,” then factory labor is not social elevation. The common refrain, “why, they even publish a Magazine there ! ! !” patronizingly masks an underlying problem. “Well enough off” is not the goal of real labor reform, according to this reviewer. He prods, “Do you receive them in your parlors, are they admitted to visit your families, do you raise your hats to them in the street, in a word, are they your equals?” (187). Other reviewers don’t consider how Lowell perpetuates “a system which dooms the many to perpetual toil in order that the few may be free from all toil.”

When challenged by the *New York Daily Tribune*, which had published one of the accounts attacked in the *Harbinger* review, the *Harbinger* editors defended their “design,” saying that they had meant “to arouse the attention of thinking men to the fact, that the best organization of industry which now exists does most grievous wrong to the laborer” (“Labor in Lowell” 267). Their statement is an apt characterization of 1840s labor radicalism. Labor radicals in this period included activists and writers who were not satisfied with even “the best organization of industry which now exists,” but envisioned a total overhaul of the current labor system. While organized workers campaigned for ten hour workdays and the “right to work,” utopian intellectuals influenced by thinkers like
Charles Fourier dreamed of a labor reform that would beget an ideal, harmonious society: the end of competitive industry, class struggle, all forms of servitude and slavery, armed conflict, and environmental waste.90

Nicholas K. Bromell characterizes the antebellum period as one of anxious discussion about “the nature and meaning of work… as new ideological formations were developed to explain and justify new work practices” like the Lowell factory system (1). Though Fourierism was ultimately short-lived, experiencing a heyday of only about twenty years in the US, from about 1840 – 1860, it was a popular ideology that northern intellectuals looked to, to critique and reimagine labor. Indeed, twenty-nine Fourierist phalanxes were founded in the US after the publication of Brisbane’s *The Social Destiny of Man*, from 1840 to the mid-1850s, most lasting only a couple of years (Guarneri 2, Jackson 114).91 And as Holly Jackson writes, the “some 3,800 members occupying thirty thousand acres of land…represented only a small percentage of Associationists….Tens of thousands more read Fourierist pamphlets and newspapers, or attended lectures, or joined

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90 Charles Guarneri cautions against making a false dichotomy between “workers” and “reformers” in this period (293). Brook Farm had many working-class members, and the association did not insulate itself from local working-class organizing. Several Brook Farmers attended the inaugural meeting, in 1844, of the New England Workingmen’s Association in Boston, an organization with close connections to Lowell. The organization published the Lowell-based *Voice of Industry* newspaper (1845-1848), and activist factory operative Sarah Bagley served as corresponding secretary. In 1845, the long-time Brook Farmer Louis Ryckman—a New York shoemaker, leader of industry at Brook Farm, and *Harbinger* contributor (Delano, *Brook Farm* 107, 110) — was elected as the association’s first president. Holly Jackson writes that Ryckman’s “leadership in the group suggests that there was not a hard line dividing the ‘real’ workers in the labor movement from reformer-intellectuals versed in socialist theory, although tensions between these groups shaped labor movements throughout the century” (117). George Ripley served on the executive committee (Delano 183, 186-9, 280). Later, Brook Farmer John Allen took over the struggling *Voice of Industry* (Guarneri 303). Brook Farm orators regularly lectured at Lowell, recognizing its “symbolic place as the entering wedge of the factory system” and arguably, of northern labor reform. Nevertheless, Fourierism and Associationism were never as popular among the working classes as the more modest Ten Hour Movement platform, according to Guarneri (303).

91 The North American Phalanx of Red Bank, NJ lasted over twelve years (1843-1856), thanks in part to the influence and financing of Albert Brisbane and Horace Greeley.
a Fourier Club in places like Pittsburgh, Rochester, Cincinnati, and rural Maine…. [The movement] had 1000,000 members at its peak” (114-15).

Leading scholars on antebellum utopianism, Carl J. Guarneri and Richard Francis, remind us that F. O. Matthiessen believed Fourier was so important to the authors in his *American Renaissance* (1941) canon, that he outlined a book he might have written instead, called *The Age of Fourier*, in his preface (Guarneri 9, Francis ix). Matthiessen wrote that *The Age of Fourier* “could concentrate on how discerning an interpretation our great authors gave of the economic and social forces of the time. The orientation of such a book would not be with the religious and philosophical ramifications of the transcendental movement so much as with its voicing of fresh aspirations for the rise of the common man” (viii). Matthiessen saw Fourierism as of a piece with a broader radicalism in the country at the time:

*The Age of Fourier* could by license be extended to take up a wider subject than Utopian socialism; it could treat all the radical movements of the period; it would stress the fact that 1852 witnessed not only the appearance of *Pierre* but of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; it would stress also what had been largely ignored until recently, the anticipation by Orestes Brownson of some of the Marxist analysis of the class controls of action. (viii–ix)

At the conclusion of his sketch of a road not taken, Matthiessen implies that a Fourierist approach would have meant excluding Emerson and Melville from his canon (ix). Scholars have since shown that Emerson was inescapably influenced by the Fourier fever he met on the lecture circuit and among his transcendentalist colleagues— their influence pushed him to clarify own his thinking, as I’ll show.

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92 Matthiessen wrote, “The double aim, therefore, has been to place these works both in their age and in ours. In avowing that aim, I am aware of the important books I have not written” (vii–viii).
93 Emerson met Albert Brisbane when lecturing on “The Times” in New York City, in March 1842 (Delano, *Brook Farm* 85).
The emergence of new kinds of labor like women’s factory work in the antebellum period was one catalyst for radical ideology; another was the 1837 Panic. Historians point to the sudden economic downturn as a leading cause of anti-capitalism and communitarianism. Fourierism’s community structure appealed to jaded capitalists, Zoltán Haraszti speculates, because it seemed to promise a more stable, planned economy (11). Fourier was also anti-capitalist, arguing that competitive industry was inefficient, wasteful, and a leading cause of social strife. Many Americans at the time blamed rampant speculators for the 1837 Panic. Carl Guarneri argues that from the vantage point of the 1840s, the “free market” capitalism now assumed to be a staple of American democracy was by no means inevitable (5). Fourierists saw themselves as a “third voice in the debate over the social meaning of America”—an alternative to northern industrial capitalism and the southern slave-labor plantation system. According to Fourierists, both economic models were competitive, rather than cooperative, and needed reforming (7). In Guarneri’s view, Fourierism declined in popularity when abolitionists came to more of a consensus that northern industrial capitalism was the free-labor antidote to a slave economy (10-11).

One can witness such a loss of faith in American capitalism in poems delivered at the Boston Mercantile Library Association in 1838 and 1848, written by merchants caught in the crosshairs of economic fluctuation. The Boston Mercantile Library Association was founded in 1820 as the first membership library for merchants and clerks, soon to be followed by Mercantile libraries in New York (1820), Cincinnati (1835), Baltimore (1839), and St. Louis (1846). In 1838, a young James T. Fields, then

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94 Thomas Augst links mercantile libraries to the tradition of social libraries dating back to Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 (162).
working as a publisher’s apprentice at Boston’s Old Country Bookstore, earned acclaim for his poetic address at the library, where he was a member. “Anniversary Poem’s” economic optimism marks the moment it was delivered as perhaps too soon after the 1837 Panic to register any widespread economic retrenchment. Fields celebrates “Traffic” despite its costs, implying that man’s natural attraction to the pursuit of wealth and adventuresome risk will always keep the economy going:

Unmask, bold Traffic! thou art weaving now
Thy golden fancies round the seaman’s brow;
Thou hast at will the magic power to guide
His heart from home and child and cherished bride;
Thou hast a spell he may not rudely break,
That fires his soul and bids each pulse awake,
Nerves every sinew when the whirlwinds fly
In thundering combat through the riven sky;
And as faint hope with storm-rent flag sinks down,
Where raging gulfs her feeble whisperings drown,
Thy charm still broods above the foundering wreck
And smiles triumphant o’er the sea-washed deck. (5-6, ll. 11-22)

Not even the probable drowning of the charmed subject diminishes Traffic’s “charms”;
Traffic triumphs, irreducible to the fortunes or misfortunes of a single person. Though the shipwreck, Fields acknowledges the risks inherent to trade, but he marks such events as setbacks rather than foreshadowings. The poem ends on a similarly carefree note following another tale of financial loss. A speculator loses his investment on a large tract of land that he had intended to develop into a profitable town or city. Though Fields litters the tale with evidence of mismanagement and poor investing, he ultimately attributes the landowner’s demise to something outside of his control—the economic downturn that made it impossible to sell the land and recoup his investment (“the bubble’s burst!” (15)). Fields could not have been too concerned about listeners’ faith in the market at the tale’s conclusion, since the only consolation he offers is a vague truism
about varied weather promising “some cloudless skies” and “changeless hues” (16). When misfortune strikes, Fields says, the best course is business as usual. He ends by celebrating Yankee ships and encouraging female listeners to shop (“extend the fashions, girls, and help the trade”) (17)!

In contrast to Fields’ “Anniversary Poem,” S. A. Dix’s poetic address to the Mercantile Library Association delivered ten years later does not celebrate the excitement of trade but criticizes the deification of speed:

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Progressive spirit of the age, indeed,
That sacrifices every thing to speed!” (7).
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Whereas Trade’s charm fires up the merchant sailor’s soul in Fields’ poem, Dix’s ideal merchant “keep[s] cool,” knowing that

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The secret of success in life
Lies not in haste, excitement, bustle, strife.
This “bolting dinners,” hurrying to and fro;
Keeping up one continued, constant “go” (17).
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“Bolting dinners” evokes the spectacle of the clock-driven factory operative scurrying between boardinghouse and mill for her rapid 30-minute meal. As Rancière argues, anticipating the bells that call one to work may very well have been more “hateful” than the work itself (The Nights of Labor 58). Whereas Fields wants listeners to get caught up in trade’s alluring momentum, hoping, perhaps, to forestall economic recession, Dix builds to the hindsight lesson that “haste makes waste!” (17). Fields’ poem is progressive, sharing the merchant sailor’s horizon-gaze and the land speculator’s enthusiasm. Dix’s is comparatively regressive, spoken partly in the voice of “our fathers” who urge a return to a more authentic time (9-10), but, as the caution against “waste” signals, he’s still interested in economizing one’s time, still using the basic language of the market.
Opposite attitudes towards technology additionally drive the poems’ different relationships to time. For Fields, the railroad is a helper in the acquisition of wealth. For Dix, machines are a corruptor whose negative influence is already glimpsable in the monstrously sped-up younger generation. Sped-up people are a sign that economizing one’s time by doing everything quickly will undo humanity.

The regressive turn signaled in Dix’s poem came with a new appraisal of slow time. The later poetic address expresses the concern that, in prioritizing speed, mechanical innovation harms things that require slow gestation, including humans themselves, the affections and passions, and literature worth reading. According to Dix, the mechanical age brings two principle losses. First is the loss of an important set of pleasures and pains he associates with rugged boyhood, such as the pleasure of falling asleep in your mother’s arms or playing outside.

The infant that, in modest days of yore,
Was wont to lie and kick upon the floor,—
That found its happiness in peaceful nap
In mother’s arms, or nurse’s soothing lap,
That never scorned to vent its rage in squalls,
And try its little lungs in deafening bawls;—
Now, holding such small things its mind beneath,
Learns Calisthenics ere it cuts its teeth,
And while, in quiet, nurse or mother sleeps,
In “Baby Jumper” takes elastic leaps.

…Where are your boys,—your youths of sturdy mien,
That scorned not in short jackets to be seen;
That went to school with satchels on their backs,
And hands impervious to the master’s whacks;
That skated on the Frog Pond and Back Bay,
And took to swimming in a natural way;
Kicked foot-ball on the Common with a will,
And fought unnumbered fights on yon dark hill?—
Have they all gone? Alas, my muse laments
Their transformation into nice “young gents.”
These are the ones all boyish thoughts repress,
And ape the man in passions, tastes, and dress (7-8)

In Dix’s description, the pleasures of infanthood and boyhood require bodily freedom—a surrender to feeling and abandonment of excessive thought or planning. The schoolboy can play because he is unpreoccupied by consequences; his hands are “impervious to the master’s whacks” (8). He does not think about the moment after, but only about the pleasure of fighting in the open air. Similarly, when napping, the infant eludes grooming by adults. To have a proper childhood and subsequent adulthood, Dix argues, children need to be permitted an unawareness of time’s forward motion. This advice is to be taken less as an argument in favor of a ludic life for all than an implied recommendation that mothers, nurses, and teachers properly manage their time so to rear children slowly, rather than quickly. 95 In A Republic of Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America (2008), Thomas M. Allen shows that—in spite of symbolizing an idealized refuge from market cares—the nineteenth-century middle-class home operated as a productive space (seen to be producing character, primarily) aided and shaped by the commodity market and subject to the principles of time economization. Allen explains the difference between an industrial and a domestic economy thusly:

"While industriousness in the world of commerce is only laudable if it actually produces financial gain, in the domestic sphere work acquires value if it leads to the production of 'deep and lasting impressions' upon the characters of the family members." (119) Dix’s advice would seem to be that caregivers allot time for a child’s free play, not too far from an adult’s supervising gaze.

95 For a modern argument in favor of the ludic life, see Bob Black.
If the first loss of the mechanical age is the privilege of being unaware of time as a child, Dix argues, the second loss is of “time for earnest, sober thought” as an adult. Children require an unawareness of time; adults require contemplative time, a slow time that is similarly opposed to the competitive marketplace, for Dix. The loss of time for contemplation results not only in superficial people, but in shallow, unenduring literature.

Dix asks,

What are your books? Go, ask the author there,
With looks that tell of penury and care;
That sits apart, and plies the weary pen,
Heedless of all the haunts and joys of men;
That spends whole weeks and months in servile toil,
Consumes the day, and “burns the midnight oil;”
Surely such merit may bright honors gain,
Such industry its just reward obtain.

Alas! When books are written in a flash;
When men discard old standard works for trash;
…What wonder that our author vainly tries,
By talent, worth, and industry, to rise.
Blame you the publishers that thus refuse?
Sound, sterling works, the public won’t peruse. (11-12)

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96 Contemplation is a Romantic ideal that Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats positively associated with idleness, according to Richard Adelman. No longer simply treating idleness as the negative inverse of labor, they redefined idleness as an active, creative, and indeed productive state. For an intellectual history of idleness from Adam Smith to Coleridge, see Adelman, "Idleness and Creativity: Poetic Disquisitions on Idleness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, edited by Monika Fludernik et al. (Palgrave Macmillan), 2014, pp. 174-194.

97 New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley, a Fourierist and financial backer of the North American Phalanx (1843 – 1856), was also concerned about the mass market for literature creating a professional class of unremarkable writers. In Greeley’s 1844 address to the Literary Societies of Hamilton College, where he broadly argues that physical labor should be taught to the educated elite, he urges aspiring writers not to seek magazine employment right away. Instead, they should do a minim amount of physical labor necessary to support themselves while they continue to hone their craft in after-hours. After such a period of apprenticeship, they may graduate to magazine employment. “Learn to live by the labor of your hands, the sweat of your face, as a necessary step toward the career you contemplate. If you earn but three shillings a day by rugged yet determined toil, learn to live contentedly on two shillings, and so preserve your mental faculties fresh and unworn to read, to observe, to think, thus preparing yourself for the ultimate path you have chosen” (142). Greeley believes an education in physical labor is important to the full development and perfection of man, but that ultimately, labor steals energy away from contemplation. For the intellectual, labor should be a transitional phase—a part of his self improvement or coming of age—on the way to a professional career. Greeley’s bourgeois perspective was a popular one; indeed, many believed that the Brook Farm School’s purpose was precisely this.
Tragically, the writer of merit tries to enter and shape a market that doesn’t value his product and won’t compensate him for his labor. Ironically, Dix’s very audience of Mercantile Library Association members were major consumers in the market he describes—the market for fast literature, which included dime novels and fiction. In his history of the New York Mercantile Library, Thomas Augst explains that for the library to be successful in the increasingly competitive urban marketplace for leisure, its reading room had to be legible to clerks as a leisure space (160, 162-3). According to Augst, this meant stocking the library with books for pleasure reading, rather than the “old standard works” Dix praises (161, 170-2, 193). Library board members developed a critical theory of literacy in order to tailor their catalogue to the tastes of their subscribers (196-7). Their theory hinged on an important distinction between “reading” and “study,” Augst argues. Whereas clerks perceived “study” as a form of work, they regarded “reading”—associated with the reading of fiction—with leisure (159, 163, 192, 203-4). Ironically, Dix calls for a revaluation of the “old standard works” among an audience that never would have been an audience in the first place, if not for the “trash” fiction that he denigrates.

Dix’s poem isn’t entirely out of touch with the mercantile library community. Yes, he wishes for an urbane readership that could create a market for the author’s “just reward,” and Augst’s research shows that mercantile library members were not those kinds of readers. But Dix also makes it possible for listeners to identify with his poem by representing writers as workers. With his excessively long hours, “whole weeks and months in servile toil,” the author depicted in the above stanzas resembles a wage earner or “wage slave,” to use the contemporary parlance for a low-level compensation that
precludes profit ownership or class mobility. Audience members would also have identified with Dix’s own anxiety, expressed at the start of the poem, about

\[
\text{wast[ing] most precious time,}
\]
\[
\text{In making verses, penning doubtful rhyme. (5, ll. 9-10)}
\]

Not until later in the poem is it clear that Dix wants to challenge his own instinct to not waste time by penning verses. By the end of the poem he’s shown that “haste makes waste”—wasted childhoods, wasted talent—whereas the slow-time activity of writing verses is an important corrective to such marketplace wastefulness.

Though Dix enables worker identification with writers by portraying poets as wage laborers and by adopting a formally embellished poetic style that demonstrates his poetic authority, the rhymed pentameter couplets that both he and Fields use in their poems signal their belief in poetry’s aesthetic value, its necessary distance from the marketplace. Further complicating Dix’s celebration of nonproductive time, the mercantile library at which he spoke was firmly rooted in capitalist ideals. Thomas Augst explains that to urban clerks, mercantile library patronage was a reward for hard work. Similarly, one of the New York clerks Augst profiles “claims ownership of his free time as moral capital” by keeping a diary. He well knows that “the hours he spends at work as a dry goods clerk do not belong to him, but his wages enable him to buy the leisure on which the cultivation of character depends” (83).\(^9\) Dix may pity such merchants who were thus driven by a regimented leisure time, but he doesn’t suggest an alternative to free-market capitalism, either.

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\(^9\) Unlike the patrons of the mercantile library, Albert Brisbane made virtually no mention of leisure in *The Social Destiny of Man*. Rather, he emphasized Fourier’s plans for rendering labor “attractive”—Fourier’s solution to social harmony and happiness—and did not address leisure as a separate category.
By condemning speed, Dix criticizes the marketplace equation of time with money that Fields celebrates. His poem reflects a popular skepticism of irresponsible economic speculation, post-1837, that opened the door to anti-capitalism, making the 1840s fertile ground for radical utopianism. But when compared to such radical discourse, Dix’s poem is not yet anticapitalist or thoroughly non-chrononormative. Though Dix wishes for social change, his poem expresses a basic capitalist faith in individual willpower, rather than in institutions, to enact it. Furthermore, his emphasis on character and talent presupposes a middle-class domestic economy that will produce it, one that nineteenth-century domestic advice literature treats as very much connected to the commodity marketplace and its temporalities (Allen 114-145).

What I’m calling conservative, versus radical, labor discourse tracks with the political-economic terms capitalist verses anti-capitalist or socialist. The difference can be understood in terms of what one considers to be the root of social problems and hence the ideal target of social change. The debate then, as now, is over whether social change lies with individuals and their will to change (a conservative, and largely capitalist, position), or whether it lies outside of individuals and in institutions, social arrangements or systems (a more radical, socialist position). Conservative labor discourse commonly displays a reverence for the ways things were and seeks to conserve a past way of life, while the more radical discourses speculate about and project new social arrangements.

Thomas Carlyle’s celebration of individual determination in “Signs of the Times” (1829) captures the conservative argument that would have been deeply familiar to the labor radicals advocating for systemic reforms at midcentury. Carlyle diagnoses his age as “mechanical”—a capacious term, in his usage, that refers not only or especially to
creations of mechanical engineering (machines), but to any kind of system, schema, or arrangement seemingly imposed from the outside. We’ve already seen the influence of such skepticism in S. A. Dix’s Mercantile Library address. For Carlyle and Dix, machines are artificial; for Charles Fourier, they are natural. Fourier believed that all things have an inherent structure for man to discover and that he, in fact, had discovered God’s design for social harmony in the mathematical social arrangements he called Groups and Series (Brisbane 7-8, 20-3). Carlyle, however, bemoans a loss of intuition to deduction, of spiritualism to materialism, and metaphysics to physics: “In short, what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all” (104-5). Setting the stage for George Ripley’s counter-argument in the form of the innovative Brook Farm School, Carlyle celebrates individual geniuses over the educational systems that produced them:

Consider the great elements of human enjoyment, the attainments and possessions that exalt man’s life to its present height, and see what part of these he owes to institutions, to Mechanism of any kind…. Shall we say, for example, that Science and Art are indebted principally to the founders of Schools and Universities? Did not Science originate rather, and gain advancement, in the obscure closets of the Roger Bacons, Keplers, Newtons…? Again, were Homer and Shakespeare members of any beneficed guild, or made Poets by means of it? (108)

Finally, Carlyle advises, “To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on himself” (118). Indeed, a slow reformation is in keeping with Carlyle and Dix’s distrust of speed, which they associate with artificiality and machines.

On the opposite end of the conservative-radical spectrum is Orestes Brownson. Brownson rejects individualist social solutions in his important review essay of Carlyle’s
Chartism, first printed in The Boston Quarterly Review (July 1840) and then published separately as The Laboring Classes (B. H. Greene, 1840). Breaking, too, with William Ellery Channing and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Brownson declares that “self-culture is a good thing, but it cannot abolish inequality, nor restore men to their rights…. The truth is, the evil we have pointed out is not merely individual in its character…. [It] is inherent in all our social arrangements, and cannot be cured without a radical change of those arrangements” (375). The changes Brownson proposes in his essay include abolishing wage labor (373); abolishing the priesthood, which produces false intermediators that stand between believers and God (384); and abolishing banks, freeing government from their control (392). All of Brownson’s plans involve eliminating a false authority or greedy manager that keeps the populace from direct access to their just rewards. Brownson’s point is ethical as well as practical. “Let us not be misinterpreted. We deny not the power of Christianity. Should all men become good Christians, we deny not that all social evils would be cured. But we deny in the outset that a man, who seeks merely to save his own soul, merely to perfect his own individual nature, can be a good Christian.” (376)

With deep misgivings about the exploitative industrial wage labor that many abolitionists upheld as the antithesis to enslaved labor but which slavery apologists invoked as worse than slavery, Brownson leveled a powerful critique of capitalism that, taken to greater extremes, lead modern Marxist theorists like Bob Black and James Livingston to advocate for the abolition of work altogether.99 Black argues, writing in

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99 Livingston’s insight, that the post-recession moment is one for radically reevaluating work, is true of the 840s. Writing in 2016, Livingston contends: “An economic crisis such as the Great Recession is also a moral problem, a spiritual impasse—and an intellectual opportunity. We’ve placed so many bets on the social, cultural and ethical import of work that when the labour market fails, as it so spectacularly has,
1986, “the dynamic of domination intrinsic to work tends over time toward elaboration…. Work makes a mockery of freedom” (19-20). Brownson powerfully and controversially argued in *The Laboring Classes* that the future abolitionists were fighting for was no future at all: “We really believe our Northern system of labor is more oppressive, and even more mischievous to morals, than the Southern. We, however, war against both. We have no toleration for either system. We would see the slave a man, but a free man, not a mere operative at wages” (371).

In his critique of wage labor as a system of dependence and ownership, Brownson shares much in common with the Fourierists. Brownson was sympathetic to aspects of Fourier’s philosophy in the 1840s, even if he did not agree on every point (Guarneri 32, 44, 46, 54). Fourier and Brisbane both argued that slavery must be abolished as a precondition of combined industry (Brisbane 11-12), but that slavery is not the root cause of the problems with labor and abolishing slavery alone will not solve the labor problem, nor will it make society harmonious. Slavery is a symptom of what Brisbane calls, alternatively, “competitive industry” or capitalism; “incoherent industry,” a term that points out the conflict, wastefulness, and inefficiency inherent to capitalism; or simply “civilization” as we know it (98). To attack slavery separately without a complete overhaul of labor as a system would be to engage in the minor struggles of politics, which don’t permanently solve anything (95, 98). In a chapter on American slavery written entirely in his own voice, Brisbane does not advise simply putting northern industry in

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we’re at a loss to explain what happened, or to orient ourselves to a different set of meanings for work and for markets” (4).

100 Brownson published articles by Brisbane in the *Boston Quarterly Review* (Guarneri 32).

101 Brisbane explains his terms, pp. xi – xiii. “Incoherent” industry is the opposite of coherent, or “combined industry,” pp. 24-5.
the place of southern slave-based agriculture. Rather, he proposes putting “agricultural
Association in the place of agricultural incoherence or piece-meal cultivation[, …]
combination of interests, and unity of industrial relations, in the place of the personal
conflicts, which now exist” (95-6). Those “personal conflicts” include those of an
employer and employee, master and slave, as well as of political actors vying for
influence over a failed system.

Brisbane and Brownson both argue that a society’s ability to enact systemic
changes is dependent upon their seeing the ways that capitalism reproduces the coercions,
dependencies, and violations of slavery. A first step, for Brisbane, is to enumerate the
many kinds of modern slavery, beyond American planation slavery, so as to enable
generalization and comparison. “The want of success attending the efforts which have
been made to abolish slavery, is to be attributed to the absence of a true social science on
the part of those who have undertaken it. The first and preparatory step, an enumeration
and definition of the kinds of slavery to be abolished, has not even taken place” (101).
With the following list of kinds of slavery, or servitudes, he reveals a deep history of
exploitation within labor:

SERVITUDES TO BE ABOLISHED.
1. Native slavery.
2. Slavery of prisoners taken in war. (Custom of ancient nations, who drew their
   laborers in part from this source.)
3. Slave trade, and exportation of slaves.
4. Sale and seclusion of women in seraglions.
5. Servitude of the soil or feudal bondage.
7. Perpetual monastic vows.

X INDIGENCE, OR PASSIVE AND INDIRECT SERVITUDE. (All caps in the
original; 101)
Brisbane’s list shows most injustices to be variations on a kind. It also illuminates the economic incentives behind injustice. By exposing the exploitation inherent to penal systems, he anticipates Black’s comparison of factories, prisons, and slave economies in “The Abolition of Work” (1986): “You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or monastery. In fact, as Foucault and others have shown, prisons and factories came in at about the same time, and their operators consciously borrowed from each other’s control techniques. A worker is a part-time slave” (Black 21). By mentioning “native slavery,” Brisbane may be referencing the practice of native peoples in enslaving each other; given that many of his other examples are of a more systemic form of domination, he may also mean that colonial enslavement of native people is the routine work of empire. Enumerating “seclusion of women” and “perpetual monastic vows” open the way for a critique of other quasi-religious vows, such as marriage, as economic servitude. Indeed, one of the reasons why Fourierism was both so popular and so controversial was that it unified so many causes under one name. Brisbane marks the final item in his list with an “X,” a symbol that he earlier explains “signifies the principal [or pivotal] part or member of a system” (xii). Poverty is servitude. This idea shares some kinship with the popular nineteenth-century term, “wage slavery,” which called attention to the dependent relationship between a worker and the business owner he works for. Orestes Brownson, one of the most outspoken critics of wage slavery, explains in his review of Carlyle that wage labor ensures most of the population will never accumulate wealth or property. “The system of wages must be supplanted by some other system or else one half of the human race must forever be the virtual slaves of the other” (Brownson 372). Provocatively and controversially, for
readers then as now, Brownson claimed that wage slavery was worse than chattel slavery—an argument that resembled pro-slavery ones, but to a very different end.\textsuperscript{102} The rhetorical function of such a claim was to get Americans to imagine a true free-labor future.

For advocates of individual or systemic reforms, the virtue of either solution hinged on its simplicity, or, its radicality in a non-political sense—its ability to isolate and target the root source, the fundamental unit of society, whether that be individuals or systems greater than them. When Carlyle called society “mechanical,” he meant not simple: \textit{overcomplicated}, creating an unnatural distance between man and his actions.

“Nothing follows its spontaneous course, nothing is left to be accomplished by old natural methods. Everything has its cunningly devised implements, its preestablished apparatus; it is not done by hand, but by machinery” (Carlyle 101). Manual labor, then, is virtuous labor—not because of any class solidarity Carlyle may have felt, but because it is direct. It restores man to his proper place as actor in this world. Emerson declares something very similar in a letter to George Ripley, when defending his decision not to join Brook Farm: “It seems to me a circuitous and operose way of relieving myself to put upon your community the emancipation which I ought to take on myself” (“Letter to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{102} Brownson may have meant something like what Jacques Rancière observes, in \textit{The Philosopher and His Poor} (1983, transl. 2003). The artisan’s disenfranchised, liminal position in Plato and Aristotle’s theoretical city, which Rancière characterizes here, resembles that of a nineteenth-century wage laborer. Compared to a slave, the ‘free’ artisan poses a very different problem. He is not a free man sharing in the virtue of the city, but neither is he a slave whose virtues derive from the diligent administration of the domestic economy. A false free man and a part-time slave, the artisan belongs neither to his trade nor to the one who assigns him his work. He cannot derive virtue from his own sphere or from a relationship of dependence…. The free worker of the market economy is a denatured being, an accident of history. Neither included nor excluded, this hybridity is an unpardonable disturbance for the city. (24)
\end{footnotesize}
George Ripley” 315). Brownson’s is also an argument about simplicity. He argues that capitalism creates a distance, not between man and action, but between action (labor) and reward (profit). And although Fourierism is certainly full of “arrangements or combinations,” as Emerson criticized in his letter to Ripley (316), from a Fourierist perspective, association is “coherent,” and capitalism “incoherent.”

This debate over the meaning of simple reveals a pervasive valuation of presence—of an orientation in the world where man can touch roots, origins, or sources of positive social action. Such a desire for presence is legible, too, in the attempt to define the present time. The title of Carlyle’s essay signals such a desire, which he focalizes at the end of his essay when he declares time “sick and out of joint” (117). Carlyle was one of many writers calling attention to the timeliness, the urgency, the extraordinariness of the present time. Other titles that reference the present time, published in The Dial and The Harbinger, include Emerson’s “Lectures on the Times” (The Dial, July and Oct 1842, Jan 1843) and “The Times: A Fragment” (Jan 1844); James Russell Lowell’s abolitionist “Verses, Suggested by the Present Crisis” (Harbinger, 10 Jan 1846); “A Hymn of the Day that is Dawning,” by William D. Gallagher that begins with a “promise of the present” (Harbinger, 6 Feb 1847, p. 130); and an anonymous editorial, “Signs of the Times” (The Harbinger, 1 May 1847). Concurrently with The Dial and The Harbinger, William H. Channing published a short lived NY monthly entitled The Present (1843-1844), which was important to the same community of transcendentalists and Brook Farmers.

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103 The letter is undated, but Sterling Delano claims it was sent on December 15, 1840 (Brook Farm 37).
The Sundial at Noon

Within the landscape of conservative and radical arguments about labor reform, utopian agrarianism is ideologically hybrid and paradoxical. A turn to small-scale farming in the 1840s—a time when farming families were engaging in land speculation, scaling up their production of mono crops to compete in larger markets, or giving up farming altogether for urban employment—was a nostalgic and economically conservative reaction against the kinds of practices believed to have caused the 1837 Panic. It was also counterintuitive. Sarah Burns points out the irony of extolling the virtues of agriculture when farmers were among the avid land speculators whose actions contributed to the Panic (52). Yet, within a utopian framework such as Fourierism, cooperative subsistence farming was not simply economically conservative; it was part of a politically radical movement of social perfection.

Burns defines agrarianism as “a compound of general ideas associating agriculture with good life and good government” (8). She reminds us that the idea of “the good farmer” has origins in European pastoralism and Jeffersonian agrarian politics (3). Part of the goodness of farming, for utopians, was the appearance of a natural set of limits on labor due to agriculture’s dependence on daylight and seasons. I argue that the Ten Hour Movement’s push for legislation to regulate the length of the workday would have invigorated the utopian search for an authentic time for labor. If factory managers could abuse laborers by unnaturally extending their hours, then one needed a law higher that

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104 Sarah Burns provides an overview of US farming at mid-century (53), contrasts idealized portraits of farms and farming with historical photographs (60), and describes general labor trends (79-80).
105 Fourier classifies agriculture as one of three branches of industry in a phalanx, including manufacture and domestic labor (Brisbane xiii), but he elevates it above the others: “as the primary branch of industry, as the principle of riches, [agriculture] is the basis of the social order” (98).
man’s: nature or God’s law. Indeed, within agrarianism one finds language honoring both. The important timescales are the daylight cycles within the twenty-four-hour clock, typically zoned as day, noon, and night; the four seasons; and the seven-day week. The last timescale, the work week, is especially keyed to Sabbatarian arguments about the appropriate time for labor and the appropriate time for rest.

The title of the transcendentalist journal, The Dial, harkens to a pre-mechanical age, referencing one of the oldest forms of timekeeping, the sundial, which was not in fact obsolete in the nineteenth-century. E. P. Thompson explains that the sundial remained in use into the nineteenth-century, in part to set the mechanical clocks, which were less reliable (63). The magazine’s choice in title is consistent with an agrarian valuation of nature’s laws, which provided a standard for modern timekeeping. In the opening pages of the journal, the editors associate themselves with virtuous labor and the good life: “And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our Dial on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine” (“The Editors to the Reader” 4). The editors found their optimism on a specific observation about how a sundial tells time. After sunset, the dial stops measuring time. Later, I’ll look at poems that observe the same effect at noon—another moment when time appears to have stood still, when the sun produces no shadow. The observation creates a conceptual opening that is only possible when a sundial, and not a pocket watch, pendulum parlor clock, factory or ship bells, is one’s timepiece.106 A shift in thinking about time was essential to thinking differently about labor. Though technological, natural, and religious conceptions of time all coexisted in

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106 For a material history of timekeeping in the antebellum US, see Thomas Allen’s chapter on mechanical timepieces (59-113).
the antebellum period, as Thomas Allen shows in A Republic in Time, The Dial editors set up an easy contrast between the qualitative aspects of solar time and technological time when they associate the sundial with human happiness.

To answer a version of the question I posed at the outset of this chapter (how can nineteenth-century poetry theorizing labor time help us to understand Brook Farm’s utopian aspirations?) I look to poetry published during the community’s existence in The Harbinger (1845-1849) and The Dial (1840-1844). The literature and opinion published in these journals was greatly important to the Brook Farm community. The journals were ideologically compatible; they had overlapping writers and readership. Sterling Delano calls The Harbinger a “chief organ of the Transcendentalists,” together with The Western Messenger and Dial (The Harbinger 12). The journal also became the official associationist organ, absorbing Brisbane’s New York monthly, The Phalanx (1843-1845). The Harbinger was published on site at the farm from 1845-7, but The Dial was also eagerly read there, as it was edited by close acquaintances of the original Brook Farm contingent. The Dial published one of the few accounts of Brook Farm during its existence, as well as writings by several Brook Farm members.

Labor poetry of The Harbinger and Dial principally conceive of labor as ideally agrarian and of labor time as a mashup of religious (Sabbatarian) and natural temporalities (solar, planetary, seasonal) that they sometimes conflate, as was common in

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108 In an April 1843 letter to Emerson from Brook Farm, George P. Bradford wrote that “The Dial is read with interest at Brook Farm if nowhere else” (Delano, “Bradford’s Letters” 31). Only July 21, he called the recent issue “the best we have had, mine is borrowed much & faithfully read” (37). Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s “Plan of the West Roxbury Community” (The Dial, Jan 1842) is one of few accounts of Brook Farm published during its existence. Brook Farmers who published in The Dial include Charles A. Dana, John S. Dwight, George Ripley, Sophia Ripley, Caroline Sturgis, and Ellen Sturgis.
the period (Allen, *A Republic in Time* 2). In order to represent an ideal labor, the poems look to God and nature as model laborers. On the whole, the poems agree less about the quality and quantity of nature’s labor than they do about God’s. Is nature busy, like a bee? Or—to cite other common metaphors—are nature’s actions restful, like a “rolling” planet or a flowing brook? When nature appears both at labor and at rest, holding that dualism in suspension, the possibilities for human labor are more open-ended. What I am calling labor poetry is not a generically homogenous thing, but my reading suggests that poems about labor generally serve somewhat different objectives in the two periodicals.

Consistent with the associationist cause, a lot of *Harbinger* labor poetry calls workers to collective action by ennobling their work and representing labor as virtuous. Labor poetry of the *Dial*, by contrast, can be quite experimental in testing the different models of labor that nature offers. It may ultimately be more invested in understanding the nature of labor and hence, nature, than in ennobling laborers, teaching them how to work, or claiming their right to work.

Illustrating some of the special concerns of *The Harbinger*, Edward Youl’s “Labor-Worship” and T. B. Read’s “Labor” (August and March 1847) propose intervals of work and rest based on the presumption that God is a model laborer. “Labor-Worship” argues that work isn’t work; it’s prayer. In fact, the manual laborer assumes an attitude of prayer by default when working, “kneeling late and early.” Kneeling in labor is the proper attitude for prayer, the poem instructs; “folded hands” signal idleness, the “vilest crime.” Work is also prayer in the sense that the laborer mirrors God’s acts of creation when he works, thus adoring him.

> See—Creation never resteth,  
> Ever God creates anew;
To be like Him, is to labor,  
To adore Him, is to DO.” (164, ll. 9-12)

But the poem also departs from strictly Sabbatarian arguments by omitting the concept of a seventh day of rest, as written in *Genesis*. Rather, Youl extorts readers to attend to the newest Gospel,

> There is nothing fixed and still;  
> Constant only in mutation  
> Is God’s law of Good and Ill. (ll. 70-2)

The “newest Gospel” is nature’s:

> Ever working, —ever doing,—  
> Nature’s law in Space and Time;—  
> See thou deed it in thy worship;  
> Build thou up a Life sublime. (ll. 81-4)

God’s law turns out to be the same as nature’s: both never rest. This sermonic mashup of theist and naturalist labor paradigms shows just how closely sacred and scientific discourse track in the *Harbinger*.

T. B. Read’s poem, “Labor,” preserves the concept of a sabbath. The poem’s function is to perform the experience of rest’s arrival on readers by making them wait for it, until the end of the six-stanza poem. The anvil of the first stanza cries, “Labor, labor, until death!” like a sadistic foreman or a weary embittered servant (196, l. 2). After a litany of loud work instruments that all say “Labor, labor!,” God’s promised rest arrives as a relief from noise. The final stanza then offers readers the luxury of watching rather than the duty of saying and hearing. We are invited

> to behold the blacksmith’s embers  
> fade together with the sun, (ll. 33-4)

its beauty a blessing. The symmetry of those symbols of human and natural industry—blacksmith’s embers and sun’s rays—confirms the rightness of God’s plan, the virtue of
labor. Then, like the sundial that measures no hours after dark, the poem’s measures halt after the sixth stanza. There is no seventh. For Read, poetry too is a kind of work that must observe the divine rule, the divinely natural rule of periodic rest.

Scholars of time remind us that humans have long made time comprehensible by conceptualizing it spatially. T. B. Read does this in “Labor” by making his poem a kind of clock that represents labor time by getting a reader to watch their reading time as the poem unfolds across six stanzas. As Thomas Allen argues, “writing and making, along with reading, seeing, employing, and even hearing, are actions lending historical significance to ideas about time” (A Republic in Time 15). Other poems in the Harbinger and Dial spatialize time through metaphor. These poems regularly investigate the sun as both a generator of time and timekeeping, and, intriguingly, as a laborer who practices time-discipline. They are not in agreement about how to interpret the sun’s labor. More astronomically-minded poets contend that the sun continues to “work” while we sleep; it’s always day somewhere. Alternatively, the earth may be a more leisurely kind of worker. If sun’s primary job is, arguably, to stay lit, the earth’s is to rotate. Our poets question whether the Earth’s steady axial movement, often described as “rolling,” is in fact labor. Adding to these arguments about the duration and quality of solar or planetary labor, Edward Youl of “Labor-Worship” makes a rather Fourierist observation that the sun and earth are copartners laboring within a system:

Suns, become the sires of Systems,  
Planets labor as they roll. (164, ll. 25-6)

Allen contends, “Space is often construed as time’s other, yet it also seems to provide the lexicon through which we most often conceptualize time. This irony tells us something important about how we think of time: through its other, as a reflection, a ghost, a trace, a whisper overheard. No wonder literature revels in time; it is the unrepresentable, literature’s cherished horizon” (Time and Literature 2).

Fourier founded his mathematical plan for association—a network of groups and series organized by the laws of “passional attraction”—on an analogy of celestial organization. “We see that God employs Attraction alone to direct and govern the movements of planets and suns…. How can there be UNITY in
In Margaret Fuller’s short erotic poem, “A Dialogue” (*The Dial*, July 1840), the sun’s workaholism makes him a cruel lover. The poem reads,

**DAHLIA.**
My cup already doth with light o’errun.  
Descend, fair sun;  
I am all crimsoned for the bridal hour,  
Come to thy flower.

**THE SUN.**
Ah, if I pause, my work will not be done,  
On I must run,  
The mountains wait. —I love thee, lustrous flower,  
But give to love no hour. (134)

The sun “can give to love no hour,” though the Dahlia flower is sexually available and beckons him to descend. Tragically, their time schedules never sync up. Fuller’s sun doesn’t roll, like a planet; it “run[s],” in clever allusion to Andrew Marvell’s love contest poem, “To His Coy Mistress” (1681), which memorably ends with the suitor’s promise to his mistress that

though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run

by having sex. The fabulous conceit of Marvell’s poem is that by acting on desire, one wins not just love, but a net gain in time. Instead, Fuller makes the female Dahlia the suitor and the sun itself the object of pursuit and in her poem, creating a reversal of traditional gender roles in one respect, while still reproducing the norm of feminine-passive and masculine-penetrative. Building a case, too, against heterosexual love, “A Dialogue” shows how heterosexual desire is met with disappointment and sexual...

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the system of the Divinity, if the lever of universal Harmony,—Attraction,—be not applicable to the human race, as it is to planets and animals,—and if Attraction cannot be introduced into Industry, which is the foundation or pivot of the social mechanism?” (Brisbane 461)
frustration. Further, rather than valorizing industry, Fuller’s poem warns against a ceaseless work that forecloses the possibility of making a relationship. Not a portrait of utopian labor, “A Dialogue” perhaps knowingly contradicts The Dial editors’ association of sunshine with happiness by echoing the “no hour” in their formulation. Whereas they claim that the sundial measures “no hour” but those of happiness; here, the sun gives “no hour” to love. “A Dialogue” shows a version of solar time that cannot accommodate the pauses necessary for human connection.

Complimenting Fuller’s warning that labor is incompatible with utopian living, including the sexual freedom it implied for many familiar with Fourier’s teachings, “The Earth” by Concord poet William Ellery Channing (The Dial, July 1843) seeks a natural model of easeful labor. In Channing’s riddle-like persona poem, the Earth declares:

My highway is unfeatured air,
My consorts are the sleepless stars,
And men, my giant arms upbear,
My arms unstained and free from scars.

I rest forever on my way,
Rolling around the happy sun,
My children love the sunny day,
But noon and night to me are one. (64, ll. 1-8)

Representing the planet earth’s perspective, “The Earth” decenters the human, inverting the usual subjects and objects of labor. Rather than humans acting on the earth, here the earth “upbear[s]” humans. The earth admits that he does not sleep; he consorts with sleepless stars. Presumably he does not need to, since he “rest[s] forever on [his] way.” To untangle this riddle requires a planetary, rather than a human, perspective. Humans experience night and day serially—hence the logic of alternating wake and sleep, labor and rest—but the earth experiences night and day at once. In experiencing night and day
at once, rather than sequentially, the earth of Channing’s poem is the natural counterpart to the sundial at the hour of noon, when the absence of a shadow would seem to indicate that it is night, and yet it is day. Such a collapsing of sequential time makes the earth an important natural clock for imagining utopian labor, since the fantasy of labor in utopia is that it occupies a time for completing worklike tasks that feel like leisure, achieving that elusive satisfaction of night within day. The “unfeatured air” that is the earth’s “highway,” in Channing’s poem, suggests that the earth moves through a time that is also valueless, empty, and ripe with the possibility of a utopian future.\footnote{Allen argues that the Lockean idea of an empty or valueless time, representing an unwritten future, was crucial to early US nationalism (\textit{A Republic in Time}, 5,7).}

The Earth’s round shape is another reason why its work is easeful, according to Channing’s poem. In “The Times: A Fragment” (\textit{The Dial}, Jan 1844), Emerson assigns a spherical, round shape to the abstract concept of a “day”—not, in this case, to promote it as a model laborer, but to dilate on the “day” as a symbol of unity. The poet of “The Times” seeks a relation to nature where

\begin{quote}
I could be a part  
Of the round day, related to the sun  
And planted world. (405, ll. 13-15)
\end{quote}

He argues that one gains this status by really knowing nature—not as “these young scholars who invade our hills” do, identifying plants by their Latin names, but as a witch doctor knows

\begin{quote}
rare and virtuous roots, which in these woods  
Draw untold juices from the common earth,  
…Preferring things to names. (ll. 7-8, 25)
\end{quote}
Though labor is not the primary concern of this poem, Emerson nevertheless describes a scenario where an unnatural relation to nature makes for more arduous work. The elements are withholding; one’s extractions are meagre. Fire, plant, and mineral shove us from them, yield to us Only what to our gripping toil is due. (406, ll. 39-40)

But recall that the goal of an improved relationship to nature is not increased productivity so much as to “be a part of the round day,/ related to the sun/ and planted world.” As of now,

The injured elements say, Not in us;
And night and day, ocean and continent,
Fire, plant, and mineral, say, Not in us,
And haughtily return us stare for stare. (ll. 32-5)

The poem promises that by living inside nature, the poet will also live inside time. The wish to be part of a planetary space and time makes “the round day” a powerful symbol of unity in Emerson’s poem, which calls men to be “unitarians of the united world.” “The Times” is something of an outlier in the above group of five poems. Recognizing its outlier status can clarify why Emerson never signed on to Fourierism and the Brook Farm experiment. Whereas the goal of the other four poems is, arguably, to model labor, Emerson’s “The Times” presents labor—or, if not quite labor, then a deep knowledge of responsive nature—as a means, but not an end. Labor for Emerson is a means of achieving unity with nature, a form of presence. In “Man the Reformer” (1841), he declares the advantages of farming on this basis: “the doctrine of the Farm is merely this, that every man ought to stand in primary relations with the work of the world” (525). By “stand in primary relation,” he means both that men should do their own labor (and not depend on anyone else) and that they should labor closely with God-in-Nature.
Elizabeth Palmer Peabody echoes Emerson in her “Plan of the West Roxbury Community” (*The Dial*, Jan 1842), the first published account of the Brook Farm project, notably written by a non-associate: “They have bought a farm, in order to make agriculture the basis of their life, it being the most direct and simple in relation to nature” (361). Emerson’s avowed commitment to doing things himself meant that he would not join the community at Brook Farm. Recall the objection he penned to Ripley, “It seems to me a circuitous and operose way of relieving myself to put upon your community the emancipation which I ought to take on myself” (“Letter to George Ripley” 315). Indeed, to take Brook Farm as one’s subject is to grapple with Emerson’s marginality respective to this venture. Emerson often figures as an interlocutor with Brook Farmers, though never a coparticipant. George Ripley, not Emerson, is the mind behind radical utopianism within transcendentalism.¹¹²

Not only did *The Dial* publish poems that seek a model laborer in natural clocks (the sun, the earth), spatializing time through metaphor, the magazine also features poems that explore the transformative potential within the noon hour itself. So far I’ve approached the unrecorded hour of noon that the sundial measures theoretically and analogically, suggesting that it’s akin to the planetary time portrayed in Channing’s poem, when sequential time appears to collapse into simultaneity and presence—all hours felt at once—effectively ending time. In the following poems by Ellen Sturgis Hooper and Emily Dickinson, noon is a time for oppositional reversals that link the temporality of this and other noon poems to that of pastoral—a mode that informs these poets’

¹¹² Richard Francis goes so far as to claim that Ripley, and not Emerson, was the “essential figure in the history of American Transcendentalism as a whole,” as “the person who, more than anybody else, gave it coherence and provided it with a succession of institutional manifestations” (39-40).
representation of midday, even if one might not class their poems as pastoral. Hooper’s short poem is as follows:

I slept, and dreamed that life was Beauty;  
I woke, and found that life was Duty.  
Was thy dream then a shadowy lie?  
Toil on, sad heart, courageously,  
And thou shalt find thy dream to be  
A noonday light and truth to thee. (123)

Even if we take the dominant notes of Hooper’s poem to be that hard work is necessary to making dreams a reality, or that beauty is duty, duty beauty (affirming the rightness of duty), her poem also demonstrates through its own reversals (of time, of expectations) that transformations are available within toil, that labor time is transformational—perhaps, that noon holds special meaning for laborers.

If poems in search of a utopian labor model make the noon hour do a lot of representational work, I’d argue that’s because of the importance of midday temporality to pastoral poetry. As Sarah Burns and Leo Marx show, pastoral was the primary mode by which US literature and art represented the agrarian life, well through early industrialization. It’s properly understood as a “mode” because the set of conventions associated with pastoral transcend genre, though they originated in classical poetry.\(^{113}\) Together with its association with a simple way of life (though the best critics of pastoral show that the representation is only apparently simple, that simplicity is an achievement of pastoral’s complexity), pastoral’s layered representation of what one might call being-in-the-middle-of-things would make it temporally appealing to utopian thinkers at midcentury. Paul Alpers argues that the thing that identifies pastoral as such is its “representative anecdote” or “informing idea”: herdsmen in a “characteristic situation”

\(^{113}\) See Paul Alpers on why pastoral is a mode and not a genre, 44-78.
Like most critics, Alpers dates the representation to Virgil’s *Eclogues*, especially “Eclogue I.” Though bucolic poetry originated earlier, the *Eclogues* were the origin point of the European and American pastoral tradition because of the importance of Virgil’s career to poetic self-fashioning in the Anglophone tradition.

An enduring component of the pastoral representative anecdote that critics including Alpers could emphasize more is that the shepherd-types convene at midday. When McKeon says that a “temporal detachment” suffuses pastoral, he isn’t talking about the foundational temporality of the pastoral scene that I point to here—the time when shepherds convene, which I argue, establishes the mode—rather, he’s arguing that temporal detachment is an effect that the mode produces or that shepherds ontologically experience as they invoke an idealized time that they cannot now access (272). But the midday scene is important, I’d argue, not only because it reaffirms what we’ve seen in Chapters 1 and 2: that workers must do their socializing during the day, that a protracted feeling of day extending into night in a total work institution can make time unbearable. I mean to suggest that the pastoral convention of workers convening at midday—because they take their rest under a common shade—is important, further, to utopian ideas about labor because pastoral is metapoetic: pastoral poems represent poetry-making and often produce their own inset poems. So, midday is not only the time for worker sociality, it is also the time for workers to recite and hear verses. Pastoral identifies the midday hour as

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114 McKeon contends that Pastoral’s temporal dimension can be felt as a subtly emotional inflection of spatial detachment, the evocation of an immediacy that is nonetheless elusive, perhaps irreversibly unavailable. Like the *locus amoenus* of unmotivated—and therefore endless—delight, the pastoral countryside and its innocent dramas feel charmed into timelessness by the round of seasons that freeze nature apart from our flux of culture and change. Thus informed in a general way with the aura of a perpetual past “when life was simpler,” pastoral also may render temporal detachment explicit, through a framing retrospection to the time when Daphnis still sang, or to the time before war and trade corrupted the land, or to the Age of Gold or the Garden of Eden. (272)
the time when laborers convene around poetry, briefly, during a pause in the midst of their labors.

Other critics single out properties of the pastoral mode that are, while not especially concerned with time, nevertheless compatible with the idea that pastoral represents a middle-ground temporality. Leo Marx cites another aspect of pastoral’s betweenness when he refers to it as a “middle-place” or “landscape” between wilderness and civilization (20-4). Similarly, Marx explains that from classical antiquity through the Enlightenment, the shepherd stood for an ideal type of civilized man who was neither too primitive nor too cultivated, occupying a “middle state” in human progressivist history (62-3). Making a formalist argument about pastoral as a representational tool, Michael McKeon contends that “pastoral is a cultural mechanism whose poetic and ideological function is to test the dialectical fluidity of dichotomous oppositions,” among them nature and art, labor and leisure (272). Lawrence Buell echoes McKeon’s position when demonstrating that pastoral doesn’t have an inherent politics, in “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised” (1989), an important counter to the critics who wrongly code pastoral as escapist, naïve, conservative, or nostalgic. Buell explains that a “duality was built into American pastoral thinking from the start, for it was conceived as a dream both hostile to the standing order of civilization (decadent Europe, later hypercivilizing America) yet at the same time a model for the civilization in the process of being built. So American pastoral was always both counterinstitutional and institutionally sponsored” (19-20). Though McKeon and Buell’s emphasis is very different from Alpers’, taken

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115 Buell contends that "American pastoral's ideological valence is not so easily specified, that Amer pastoralism is best understood in terms of a set of ideological motifs too complex to permit monolithic categorization of most texts either as consensual or anticonsensual documents” (5-6). McKeon reminds us that ancient pastoral is political, though the direction of its critique is not a given (268).
together they make it possible to see how the middle time of noon or midday may be a
temporal counterpart to the work of dialectical synthesis or the “value reversals” that
pastoral regularly “enacts” (McKeon 268), making the mode very important to
conceptualizing labor time in utopia.

Thoreau’s poem “Stanzas,” of The Dial (Jan 1841), employing associations with
noon, stands apart from all of the poems considered thus far by challenging the
naturalness of solar time or any temporality. Though noon is, paradoxically, a time when
the poet’s inner “sun doth deign to rise” (subverting the hope Sturgis posits there) this
reversal of our expectations is less a feature of noon than a consequence of there being
two rival “suns”—the sun and the poet’s own inner light—competing for the brightest
daylight. As a result of their competition, the two suns keep two different times:

    For when my sun doth deign to rise,
    Though it be her noontide,
    Her fairest field in shadow lies,
    Nor can my light abide. (314, ll. 5-8)

But,

    Sometimes I bask me in her [the sun’s] day,
    Conversing with my mate;
    But if we interchange one ray,
    Forthwith her heats abate.

    Through his discourse I climb and see,
    As from some eastern hill,
    A brighter morrow rise to me
    Than lieth in her skill. (ll. 9-16)

Here, the light of friendly discourse outshines that of the sun. In this rivalrous poem,
homosocial unity wins out and propagates leisure time,

    As ‘t were two summer days in one,
    Two Sundays come together. (ll. 17-18)
Making for a contrast to Emerson’s “The Times: A Fragment,” Thoreau does not wish for unity with the round day; here, he wishes rather for a fraternal unity achieved through discourse that will rival the sun’s command of time.

Though Thoreau mentions noon in his “Stanzas,” the hour lacks transformative potential here; it simply represents an hour of the day when the sun’s rays are strongest. Thomas Allen’s persuasive argument that “morning” is a crucial time in Walden, a time of “morning work,” signifying Thoreau’s economical organization of labor, holds true of “Stanzas” (A Republic in Time 142). Here, as in Walden, Thoreau practices a time economization, conveyed in the concept of “morning work” that makes it possible for Allen to place Walden in the context of domestic advice literature like Catherine Beecher’s A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841). If, in Walden, “simplifying is learning to live with fewer material possessions by economizing, yielding a surplus of time that can be employed for better ends” (Allen 141), those better ends (talking with a friend) are themselves a means of time economization in “Stanzas,” creating a further surplus of time. In Allen’s compelling analysis of temporality in Walden, Thoreau appears somewhat unlike his friends and neighbors at Brook Farm who, I argue, sought a natural clock that could regulate an (apparently) authentic labor. Rather, in Walden as here, Thoreau “portrays time, in any form, as a tool created by human beings.” It is “in the productive power of the ‘morning’ time of this natural market,” Allen argues, that “Thoreau finds the possibility of a modern and morally perfect America inhabiting the territory of a utopian future” (144-5).

Perhaps the poet most invested in representing the hour of noon at mid-century is Emily Dickinson. I count twenty-four poems containing the word “noon.” In Dickinson,
as in the other poems representing a midday temporality (we can include Fuller’s “A Dialogue” here), the hour of noon is a time for eros and stopped time.116 But her poems depart from the others by treating noon as a dangerous time, when one risks injury or death. Presenting an antithetical argument to Hooper’s “I Slept,” Dickinson’s “Have you got a Brook in your little heart” (#94) warns that “your little draught of life” may “some burning noon go dry!”117 For Dickinson, the “burning” sun is life-taking, not life-giving. It’s also not a symbol of enlightenment, as in Thoreau’s portrayal. The “meek members of the Resurrection,”

Untouched by Morning –
And untouched by noon – (ll. 2-3)

are not unenlightened, they are simply “safe” (“Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” #124). Dickinson’s sense of the body as finite and vulnerable makes her cautious of the sun. As shown in “Before I got my eye put out” (#336), she doesn’t believe it is something she can have or harness:

were it told to me, Today,
That I might have the Sky
For mine, I tell you that my Heart
Would split, for size of me –

The Meadows – mine –
The Mountains – mine –
All Forests – Stintless stars –
As much of noon, as I could take –
Between my finite eyes –

…The news would strike me dead –

So safer – guess – with just my soul
Upon the window pane

116 See “I envy Seas, whereon He rides” (#368) and “A Clock stopped” (#259)
Where other creatures put their eyes –
Incautious – of the sun – (ll. 5-13, 17-21)

One of Dickinson’s dominant attitudes towards noon, then, is Icarian.118 In these poems, “noon” describes the solar apex: blinding light and burning heat lethal to the human senses. These poems present a challenge to the utopian agrarian belief in the sun’s goodness and adaptability to human endeavors. In other poems, “noon” is not especially solar, but rather signifies a “degreeless” hour in the day when the Dickinsonian self does have some leverage.119

In a fascinating poem, “I gave myself to Him” (#426), Dickinson represents noon as an hour when one is liberated from debts—from the “Sweet Debt of Life” to another person—so that one is free to voluntarily recommit for another day. The poem reads as follows:

I gave myself to Him –
And took Himself, for Pay,
The solemn contract of a Life
Was ratified, this way –

The Wealth might disappoint –
Myself a poorer prove
Than this great Purchaser suspect,
The Daily Own – of Love

Depreciate the Vision -
But till the Merchant buy -
Still Fable – in the Isles of Spice -
The subtle Cargoes – lie –

At least – ‘tis Mutual – Risk -
Some – found it- Mutual Gain -
Sweet Debt of Life – Each Night to owe -
Insolvent – every Noon –

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118 See also “Two Butterflies went out at Noon” (#561).
119 Noon is “Degreeless” in Dickinson’s poem, “A Clock stopped” (#259).
This poem is many things: erotic (“Sweet Debt of Life – Each Night to owe – ”), feminist (the woman purchases the man, too) and cunning (she won’t disclose whether her “cargo” is “fable” or fact, until “the Merchant buy”). It represents a cooperative, egalitarian economy (they take mutual risks) based on a system of barter, rather than an exchange of capital. The objects of exchange are people, but the contract is not binding beyond a day, allowing each to voluntarily recommit, or not, each noon. Dickinson’s poem is radical, feminist, and utopian. The “solemn contract of a Life” is not a marriage contract. The potential contained within the hour of noon, when all counting stops, enables her to imagine a re-set to commitments of the heart and purse. In her economy, ownership is available to all and backed by mutual risk; but liberty—freedom from contracts—is also available to all. Dickinson invests the noon hour pause with the emancipatory potential labor Ripley saw in the idea of leisure.

Poetry of the *Harbinger* and *Dial* theorized labor time alongside the practical experimentation at Brook Farm. While the poetry pushed labor reformers to think more complexly about symbols of natural timekeeping, reformers like George Ripley affirmed that theorizing a utopian future was not enough. While striving for an ideal labor time, Brook Farm produced less ideal realities that nevertheless resulted in countertheories of leisure and time-discipline or non-discipline, forceful critiques of household labor (still the lot of women, at Brook Farm), and opportunities for homosociality as well as sociality across class and between non-family members.

**What is a Farmer’s Time?**

The goal of easyful labor makes a lot of sense from a social justice perspective if one is already a manual laborer. But the founding contingent of Brook Farmers included
graduates of Harvard Divinity School and other intellectuals. Why would they want to labor? Indeed, one of the more confounding aspects of mid-nineteenth-century agrarianism is that generally those advocating a return to agriculture were not already farmers. George Ripley did not learn how to be a farmer by working on a farm; he learned, or thought he could, by reading agricultural magazines and books on farming at the Boston Athenaeum. Ripley’s bookishness and idealism has been much satirized, too, for the fact that he bought the Ellis farm in West Roxbury because it had been a favorite summer retreat of his and his wife’s—another sign of the simple pastoralism that underlay his early planning. His idea was of a labor layered on top of leisure: labor taken up by intellectuals in a pleasant place (locus amoenus).

The early Brook Farm contingent had several motivations for joining. One was economical. They were generally well-educated people who lacked steady income or inherited wealth. Cooperative labor—labor shared among many—seemed to promise more financial security and leisure time for contemplation than if one were living and working independently, in “isolated households,” as Fourier writes. Ora Gannet Sedgwick, a Brook Farm member, suspects that this was not just a bourgeois aspiration: “Mr. Pratt, a printer, wanted, I imagine, more liberty to labor as he chose, and to find time for reading and study, and took an important part in the farmwork” (395).

Membership also presented an opportunity for investment through joint-stock ownership.

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120 George P. Bradford, Charles A. Dana, John S. Dwight, and George Ripley were all Harvard Divinity School graduates. All taught at the Brook Farm School. Dana, Dwight, and Ripley brought in extra income through lecturing. Firsthand accounts of Brook Farm life in the early years attest that Ripley and Bradford shoveled manure and milked cows along with Hawthorne. Both also assisted with the more laborious aspects of doing laundry for the community (Myerson, “Two Unpublished Reminiscences” 254-6).

121 Ripley read Lowe’s Elements of Agriculture, the Farmer’s Magazine, Laudon’s Encyclopedia of Gardening, and the New England Farmer and Horticultural Register (Delano, Brook Farm 33).
of the farm. Another motive for joining was social and educational. Although Ripley did not intend class exclusivity, most Brook Farmers believed they were creating a superior culture. One of few published accounts of the Brook Farm experiment by Ripley, co-authored with George Bradford in 1880, describes the venture as an opportunity for young people to experience the “broadening and emancipating effects” of “out-of-door life… combined with instruction from many different teachers of diversified character, and bringing them into daily intimacy with persons of various culture and experience, with principles of humanity and brotherhood as the basis of daily life” (312).

Brook Farm appealed, then, to those who were already thinking about how communal living could better their lives by alleviating economic strain and improving their company. Even associates who left Brook Farm in 1844 because of ideological differences after the formal transition to Fourierism continued to like the idea of communal living—though, perhaps, with people of the “right stamp,” to cite one of Emerson’s objections to joining the community. Indeed, many of the original contingent left when Ripley opened membership to more artisans and tradesmen. But

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122 Ripley outlines his plan for joint stock ownership of Brook Farm in his November 9, 1840 letter to Emerson. He believed it essential to their cause that “the sum required” not “come from rich capitalists… it must be obtained from those who sympathize with our ideas, and who are willing to aid their realization with their money, if not by their personal cooperation” (309–10).

123 “Right stamp” is George Ripley’s paraphrase of Emerson. In his November 9, 1840 letter to Emerson, Ripley brings up a former conversation where Emerson had expressed misgivings about the kind of people who might join the community. “I recollect you said that if you were sure of compeers of the right stamp you might embark yourself in the adventure: as to this, let me suggest the inquiry, whether our Association should not be composed of various classes of men?” (312).

124 While longstanding members like Amelia Russell tried to be generous towards the “newcomers” (88), she ultimately could not suppress her class prejudice: they were “a respectable class of persons…though I suspect you might have picked out one or two who thought they would lead an easier life with us than battling with the world” (27). She longed for the aesthetic values of the original Brook Farm crowd. Georgiana Bruce Kirby bluntly declared that “the new-comers were industrious and capable, but nothing more,” reaffirming the old division of mental and manual labor (181).
before leaving the community, George P. Bradford wrote to Emerson about the possibility of living communally again, with a group of good friends:

There is much temptation to me in the thought of passing the afternoon with a friend with whom I have brushed away some of its early dews[?]…. As I talk here sometimes with a few persons as if we might unite, a few tried friends of use, and form an association mutually helping materially & spiritually, I know not why [I] may not try the experiment with an older friend, and find thus space in the world to be not an appendage but cooperator and helper. (Delano, “George P. Bradford’s Letters” 36-7)

A third motive for joining Brook Farm was societal perfection via labor. Ripley wrote to Emerson on November 9, 1840, in what many historians regard as the most important statement of his intentions,

I believe in the divinity of labor; I wish to ‘harvest my flesh and blood from the land;’ but to do this, I must either be insulated and work to disadvantage, or avail myself of the services of hirelings, who are not of my order, and whom I can scarce make friends; for I must have another to drive the plough, which I hold. I cannot empty a cask of lime upon my grass alone. I wish to see a society of educated friends, working, thinking, and living together, with no strife, except that of each to contribute the most to the benefit of all. (“Letter to Emerson” 310)

Ripley expresses several utopian ideas here. First, that he is made better by laboring but he cannot successfully labor alone. Second, that society is improved by labor, for labor is ideally social. Laborers have the potential to constitute a model collective, a society. But, third, labor cannot be properly social if laborers are divided from each other by a class hierarchy. Ripley imagines the Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education doing the work of leveling up, by teaching the labor of the hands as well as of the head, to cite a popular nineteenth-century division (Bromell 7). In his own words, “our objects… are to insure [sic] a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor than now exists;

125 Ripley uses “divinity” in a nondenominational sense. Having recently resigned from his position as unitarian minister, he sought a community united by higher ideals but not limited by religious exclusivity. This made Fourierism appealing. It also meant that he would decline to join forces with Adin Ballou, who founded the Hopedale Community in 1842 (Delano, Brook Farm 27-8).
to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as possible, in the same individual….

Thought would preside over the operations of labor, and labor would contribute to the expansion of thought” (“Letter to Emerson” 307-8).

The most persuasive accounts of the two phases of Brook Farm life, before and after the formal adoption of Fourierism, note not only the financial reasons to adopt a popular ideological platform, but also the compatibility of Fourierism and transcendentalism. Fourierism spoke to transcendentalism’s goal of universal unity on the micro and macro scale. It argued that the current social order was fragmented, or “incoherent.” Incoherent industry—the current system of unorganized, unassociated industry, Fourier argued—is piecemeal, “a system which is pursued by individuals operating separately and isolatedly [sic]” (Brisbane xii). The individual himself is also fragmented within an incoherent system. In a passage of *The Social Destiny of Man* that surely attracted Ripley’s attention, Brisbane writes that “the mind, with its higher aspirations and delights, has been sacrificed to procure the necessaries of life” (30). If, as Nicholas Bromell argues, “work was understood primarily by way of a distinction between manual and mental labor” in the antebellum period—a “dichotomy of mind (and soul) and body” (7)—then transcendentalists like Ripley sought to combine both halves into a fully incorporated person and coherent society. Arguably, the perceived personal and social benefits of combining mental and manual stimulation was Ripley’s primary aim in founding Brook Farm (Haraszti 12, Bromell 11).

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126 See Guarneri for a nuanced account of transcendentalism and Fourierism, and the transition from community to phalanx (44-59). Jackson’s concise description of the philosophical restructuring at Brook Farm is useful (pp. 111 – 122).
Where is the utopian dream of leisure within labor, in Ripley’s vision? Though he does not use the words “leisure,” “rest” or “ease,” he promises “a more simple and wholesome life, than can be led amidst the pressure of our competitive institutions” (308). He also leans on concepts of spiritual or mental emancipation. An important goal is “to guarantee the highest mental freedom, by providing all with labor, adapted to their tastes and talents, and securing them the fruits of their industry” (307-8). Here Ripley adopts both Fourier’s concept of “attractive industry,” a labor based on one’s natural inclinations or “passional attractions,” and Brisbane’s insight that indigence is an indirect servitude. The route to mental freedom is through labor. It’s not simply that one may find greater meaning in a labor “adapted to their tastes and talents,” but that, more importantly, not having to worry about indigence frees the mind for thoughts about things other than labor or money.

The categories of “leisure” and “time,” respective to the labor of farming, require further refining. Jacques Rancière distinguishes between different kinds of time relevant to labor in *The Philosopher and His Poor* (1983). Before exposing the lie behind the rule of Plato’s *The Republic*—the rule that each person must labor at only one thing at a time, a rule that any nineteenth-century labor reformer knew well—Rancière clarifies the kind of time that Plato means.

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127 According to Fourier, attractive industry is a remedy for social evils. It will “relieve the mass from those harassing cares and physical wants, which deaden the intellect, and smother or pervert all the higher sympathies and feelings”; give opportunities for man’s genius and ambition; employ man’s passions, and act as a cure for monotony (Brisbane vii). The passions, or “fundamental actions… implanted by the Creator in man to direct him rightly in the Social order pre-composed for him, and to which those passions are adapted,” will determine what industry each person finds attractive (158). Brisbane outlines the twelve human passions on p. 160 and defines “passional” on p. xii.

128 “Plato’s lie” is that nature, rather than power, chooses a person’s occupation (Rancière 1, 18). By lying—by such two-facedness and duplicity—the philosopher implicitly violates the city’s rule against occupying oneself with more than one thing.
The time of which Plato is speaking here is not that of physical necessity, the time of generation, growth, and death. It is that more ambiguous entity—half philosophical and half popular, half natural and half social—which determines one’s availability for a task or the right moment for supply to meet demand. It is not the time needed to accomplish a task (ergon) but the time that permits or prohibits a pastime (parergon)—i.e., the fact of being beside the necessity of work. It is not the time measured by water clocks but the time that compels some people to its measure and exempts others from it. It is leisure (scholē) or its absence (ascholia). (6)

In other words, the reason to labor at only one thing at a time is not because labor consists of a succession of tasks that each take a specific amount of time. The time of completing tasks constitutes only a portion of total labor time. Rather, the reason why laborers can do only one thing at a time is because they are on standby: they must be available to meet demand with supply. Standby time is not free time, pastime, or leisure time. It is readiness: alert inaction. Parergon is the time of ship hands who experience nothing outside of the ship when at sea, thereby knowing no outside to their labor. They must always be ready for a call of all hands. The system of sailor’s “watches,” detailed in my first chapter, is an illusion of shift work. In reality sailors must always be watchful. Like ship hands, farmers are never exempt from minding time. According to Rancière, Xenophon argued that farmers had the “least absence of leisure,” a formulation of parergon. Xenophon held that unlike artisans, whose “indoor life…leaves them no leisure to concern themselves with anything but work and family,” farmers, “out in the open air and bright sunshine, are the best defenders of the city because they have… not the most leisure but the least absence of leisure” (7). For Plato, citizenship was neither a trade nor a status; one belonged to the community as a matter of fact, no matter one’s occupation (7). What was not allowed was precisely what many Brook Farm intellectuals wanted: the ability to multitask, to have more than one occupation, to be both a farmer
and a philosopher. To wit, they sought to occupy roles on different rungs on the vocational ladder.

A more precise definition of labor time in utopia, then, is that it is a time the laborer doesn’t have to measure. Intriguingly, this is an insight that emerges both in poems representing noon, the daylight hour the sundial appears not to measure, and in the writings of Brook Farm women bemoaning the arduousness of domestic labor on the farm, but not in the meagre writings of George Ripley or the copious social theory authored by Charles Fourier and Albert Brisbane.

Memoirs by Brook Farmers give varied accounts of the labor performed and whether it permitted leisure. Early on in his stay at Brook Farm and early in the venture itself, Nathaniel Hawthorne became famously disillusioned with agrarian life. He chronicled that disillusionment in letters to his wife Sophia Peabody, who remained in Boston. The first sign that “a rural life is not one of unbroken quiet and serenity” was his discovery of a wasp’s nest in his room (28 Apr 1841, *Love Letters* 14). By his fifth letter to Peabody, after months shoveling manure and haying, Hawthorne abandoned all qualifications, declaring that “labor is the curse of the world, and nobody can meddle with it, without becoming proportionally brutified” (25). The following passage from *Blithedale Romance* is based on this August 13, 1841 letter.

> The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish. Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening. Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise. The yeoman and the scholar…are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance. (48)

Through Miles Coverdale, Hawthorne pronounces Ripley’s experiment a philosophical failure. Labor is neither dignified nor divine. Indeed, Hawthorne repeatedly tells his wife
that his soul remains pure in spite of the hours he spent raking manure: “Thank God, my soul is not utterly buried under a dung-heap” (Love Letters 25). He is weary in proportion to the number of hours worked: “Belovedest, I am very well, and not at all weary; for yesterday’s rain gave us a holyday; and moreover the labors of the farm are not as pressing as they have been.” Nature is a capricious manager. Hawthorne would rather try his luck with a human overseer: “Even my Custom-House experience was not such a thraldom and weariness; my mind and heart were freer.” His biggest gripe is that contemplation and the urge to write never return, even in the hours apart from labor: “in the midst of toil, or after a hard day's work in the gold mine, my soul obstinately refuses to be poured out on paper” (1 June 1841, p. 20). Reaffirming the popular division between mental and manual labor, Hawthorne concludes that labor ruins one for thinking.

There is no leisure to be found within labor either, according to Hawthorne. In The Blithedale Romance, Zenobia teases Coverdale, “I am afraid you did not make a song, to-day, while loading the hay-cart…as Burns did, when he was reaping Barley” (48). She knows he harbors a secret wish that farming will inspire poetry, that Blithedale will be his writer’s retreat. Nursing some embarrassment for believing in the pastoral dream, Coverdale counters: “Burns never made a song in haying-time…. He was no poet while a farmer, and no farmer while a poet.” Farming settled the matter for Hawthorne: leisure is a time distinct from labor, and one needs leisure to write. In his last letter to Peabody from Brook Farm, dated August 22, 1841, Hawthorne reflected, “It will be a long time… before I shall know how to make a good use of leisure, either as regards enjoyment or literary occupation” (30).
In addition to asserting that literary occupation and enjoyment are both the province of leisure, Hawthorne presents himself as a type that Henry David Thoreau roundly criticizes in *Walden* (1855). He is, perhaps, precisely one of “those who would not know what to do with more leisure than they now enjoy,” as Thoreau writes in “Economy” (67). Thoreau advises this type of person to “work till they pay for themselves, and get their free papers,” employing the enslavement metaphors common to radical labor discourse. In Thoreau’s inversion of the usual assumption, leisure is slavery and work a pathway to self-emancipation. But, lest one assume that work is Thoreau’s end-goal, he represents work as a means of buying the free papers that will return one to leisure. Further, Thoreau argues that men are enslaved by their assumption that leisure is an empty time one “know[s] what to do with,” filling with activity, like the urban clerks who buy and spend their leisure at the Mercantile Library Reading Room. Leisure isn’t simply what one does, it’s also a status (being free, or not).

The literary critic Richard H. Millington identifies Hawthorne as a formative writer in the creation of the mid-nineteenth-century marketplace for leisure. Through an analysis of *The Marble Faun* (1860), he argues that Hawthorne participates in the “cultural space” of leisure both “as a member of the class that invents and presides over this territory, and as a writer who produces work designed to be consumed in this sphere” (13). Hawthornian leisure is a “place of significance” set apart from a “place of postponement (workaday life),” but which may “reanimate or restore one’s ability to live meaningfully outside of it” (12).

This comparison of theories of leisure from the period—Ripley and Thoreau’s idea of leisure as emancipation, versus Hawthorne’s concept of leisure as a place and
time for genteel self-fashioning, include writing—shows both that Ripley and Thoreau’s ideas of leisure went against the grain of the emergent consumerist model and that experiments in living and labor such as Brook Farm and Walden were crucial testing grounds for theories of leisure, as well as labor. Scholars of utopian transcendentalism regularly relate Thoreau’s Walden Pond experiment to Brook Farm by classifying it as a utopian “community of one” (Newman 517). In some respects, however, Thoreau does not resemble other labor radicals from the period. In proposing to take experimental action on his philosophies, Thoreau is radical. Yet, he argues that the individual is the basic unit of social change. Very unlike Brownson, additionally, he advocates for hired (on contract) labor, believing he can work it to his advantage. True leisure does not require capital, he argues; it requires ingenuity, time, and asceticism. He likes day labor for the same reason that agrarians liked farming: daylight is a welcome constraint on his labor (Walden 67-8). But owning his time is more important than owning much property. His answer for self-emancipation, expressed most forcefully in the “Baker Farm” chapter, is to do with less. “I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely” (68). Though the charge to emancipate oneself through work subordinates the durational element of leisure time in favor of its qualitative aspects (the quality of being free, rather than of having free time), Thoreau is very much invested in marking time elsewhere in Walden. He extols day labor on the basis that he could support himself on “only thirty or forty days in a year” (67). Although Thoreau also explores how labor can be leisurely—notably, through the figure of Alec Therien, who “was never tired in [his] life” (142)—at its most basic, his plan advocates for minimal labor and maximal leisure, appearing at
times to preserve the leisure/labor binary. At another moment Thoreau makes a finer
distinction, between the time necessary to complete a task and the quality of time that
surrounds the time of tasks: “The really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his
day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure.
There will be a wide margin for relaxation to his day” (108). Rancière might say that the
walk to work is *parergon*; for Thoreau, who has conceptually limited labor to only the
duration of tasks, this time is leisure. Furthermore, if one limits his needs, he doesn’t
always have to be available to meet demand with supply. With contract work,
presumably, the demand comes from the worker himself, rather than from an employer.
Nevertheless, there still needs to be a market demand for one’s trade, as Thoreau well
knew in his efforts to farm and sell beans, and in his surveying.

George Bradford, who milked cows and slung manure alongside Hawthorne in
addition to teaching at the Brook Farm school, gives a different account than his peer. He
found that community life surprisingly afforded leisure for reading. He may have found
more success than Hawthorne because of his willingness to read communally, adapting
the idea of “cooperative labor” to his studies. Bradford was more social than the
reportedly reserved Hawthorne.129 He wrote to Emerson on April 11, 1843, “I am having
one pleasure which I had reckoned generally among things not to be expected of me: viz
reading Dante in the original by the external help of regular days & association” (Delano,
“Bradford’s Letters” 31). It’s not clear what the external factor is that made his days

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129 Ripley and Bradford comment on the famous writer’s reserved manner in “Philosophic Thought in
Boston” (318). Ora Gannet Sedgwick found him shy (395, 397). But Georgiana Bruce Kirby delivers the
most cutting critique: “No one could have been more out-of-place than he, in a mixed company, no matter
how cultivated, worthy, and individualized each member of it might be. He was morbidly shy and reserved,
needing to be shielded from his fellows, and obtaining the fruits of observation at second-hand. He was
therefore not amenable to the Democratic influences at the community” (102).
regular, whether the routine of teaching, predictable seasonal agriculture, or good weather. Nevertheless, “external help” bespeaks Bradford’s belief that he could not have read Dante through internal volition alone. Reading groups were common at Brook Farm; Bradford also read Plato on Sundays with John S. Dwight and Charles A. Dana, and Amelia Russell attended group readings of Fourier and Swedenborg (Delano, “Bradford’s Letters” 31 and Russell 93-4). Brook Farmers also kept up with the current literature by Brook Farm members, fellow Associationists, and transcendentalists. As for literary output by full members, Charles A. Dana, John S. Dwight, and George Ripley—all prolific publishers during this period—may have taken hiatuses from farming to write, as they did for their lecture touring.

Recalling his time as a pupil who labored for his board at Brook Farm, John Codman describes Brook Farmers as “busy” people who nevertheless had a great deal of “fun,” devoting a whole chapter to their recreations (89, 172-185). Brook Farmers were indeed fanatical about fun. Their play was physical, theatrical, and intellectual. Examples include outdoor recreation (sledding, picnics, outdoor pageants), parlor games (tableaux, charades) and intellectual entertainments (theatrical adaptations, readings and recitations, punning). Accounts of these can be found in every Brook Fam memoir and are well archived in Rosemary Bank’s article, “Brook Farm and the Performance of Heterotopia” (1998). While many of these entertainments were evening affairs or the impromptu...
improvements of periods of rest during work (Charles A. Dana, a dinner waiter, read in between courses (Sedgwick 396)), word play suffused all social interactions. George Ripley apparently took the lead in encouraging punning. Residents playfully dubbed him the “King of Puns” or “Pumpkin,” alternatively (a pun on Pun King) (Codman 155).

This kind of play and intellectualism might be explained by the boarding school environment, but Rosemary Bank compellingly links such theatricality to Fourierism. She notes a formalization of theatrical amusement after the philosophical transition: Brook Farmers organized a Festal Series cluster of recreational groups, including an Amusement Group. They built a stage in the carpenter’s workshop (10-13). Bank argues that such developments can be understood as outgrowths of Fourier’s representation of labor as roleplay. Like Plato, Fourier believed that individuals are naturally inclined to certain kinds of occupations over others. He called this passional attraction. But he also believed that individuals require variety for happiness. Therefore, his labor theory accommodates an assumption that individuals will find more than one kind of occupation attractive. In a strictly Fourierist phalanx, associates will occupy themselves with only one kind of work at a time, but only for about two hours, to avoid monotony. Then they will switch to another occupation. One could say that if Plato’s theory is of natures, Fourier’s is of flexible natures. Bank’s term, roleplay, seems apropos. A Fourierist wears many hats in a single day. Plato himself anticipated that theatricality would inevitably

(Brook Farm 102); Kirby may reference the same in her reminiscence (151). Codman describes the Corsair performance, as well as that of Pizarro (139-40), punning (155, 172, 175, 183), entertainments by the poet Christopher P. Cranch (171), and dancing (186-9). Russell mentions costume parties and balls (15-17); a visit from the Hutchinson family singers, Frances Ostinelli (Signora Biscaccianti) (29-30) and other musical performances (42). She details dancing, tableaux, charades and theatrical readings (43-4, 48, 90); sledding (50); and making the carpenter shop into a theater (89).

133 Bank builds on Richard Francis, who “connects masquerading to Fourierism’s emphasis on playing multiple roles as a means of cementing a society together” (Bank 12, paraphrasing Francis 571-3).
result, disastrously, from citizens pursuing more than one occupation. He called these people imitators or, poets: disrupters of the social order, a threat to the city.

The young, genteel Marianne Dwight (Orvis) may have felt she was roleplaying when she performed table service during communal dinner, in Spring 1844. Her giddy tone in the following excerpt from a letter to Boston friend Anna Parsons shows some self-consciousness about her class-crossing: “Have been in the refectory—had a grand time setting table. Mary Ann R[ipley] said it was set uncommonly well. After tea washed all the cups and saucers, Fred C[abol] wiped them—Had a grand time—To night will be a meeting in our parlor for rustic amusements—and tomorrow morning, what think you, I am to wait on the table” (Orvis 4, italics original). Referencing the meeting for rustic amusements in the same sentence where she describes her new serving role, Dwight’s prose performs a kind of flow between work and play, identifying both as theatrical. Bank notes "the ease with which activities flowed from the social to the artistic to the industrial to the educational in an enviable integration of life and art" at Brook Farm (11). But Dwight’s experience waiting tables is only destabilizing to the class order if it leads her to believe that her own class is performed, too. Dwight may have been able to gain more class awareness through her efforts to make some income at Brook Farm—something that she began to feel was essential to women’s independence — by forming a “fancy group” that made women’s articles of dress to sell in Boston. She tells Anna Parsons,

134 See Dwight Orvis’s letter to Anna Parsons from August 20, 1844, “And now I must interest you in our fancy group, for which and from which I hope great things, --nothing less than the elevation of woman to independence, and an acknowledged equality with man. Many thoughts on this subject have been struggling in my mind ever since I came to Brook Farm, and now, I think I see how it will all be accomplished” (32).
I belong to a group for making fancy articles for sale in Boston…. We have been very busy at it of late, and Amelia Russell and I are often much amused at the idea of our having turned milliners and makers of cap-tabs. Our manufacture is quite workmanlike. I assure you, we realize considerable money (!!) from this, and hope, women tho’ we be, to have by and by the credit of doing some productive labor. (24-5)

Theatricality extends to opportunities for gender-crossing, at Brook Farm. Bank reminds us that “despite discriminations apparent to us, ridicule of Brook Farm in its day had in part to do with its women members voting and participating in community governance, wearing a version of Bloomer trousered dress, studying and discussing ‘male’ subjects, and socializing freely” (7). Dwight’s experience made her even more committed to women’s causes—a devotion and growing politicism that she expressed in her letters, and also enacted by forming a Women’s Associative Union in Boston with pen pal Anna Parsons in 1847 (Guarneri 246).

Bank argues that believing one’s labor to be roleplay makes for an “enviable integration of life and art,” suggesting that labor contained the potential for play, at Brook Farm. But she overlooks the fact that Fourier’s plan for avoiding monotony essentially required workers to mind the clock.¹³⁵ In any case, this was the effect on Brook Farm labor, of adopting Fourierism. Ripley began keeping detailed notes of everyone’s hours and employments, asking them to do so, too.¹³⁶ And keeping track of time is a

¹³⁵ Brisbane wrote, “The Series are Connected or linked together by the effect of Short occupations; this necessary condition can only take place by the Groups changing frequently their occupations, say every two hours.” He added in a note, however, that this was up to the desires of the worker. “A man, for example, may be at five o’clock in the morning in a Group of shepherds; at seven o’clock in a Group of gardeners; at nine o’clock in a Group of fishermen” (183). If at least some Series exchanged members, then all would benefit from variety of company as well as of occupations, expanding the networks of association (183-4). Fourier planned so that “their days would be structured to gratify a catalog of desires, with special attention to sensual enjoyment, fulfilling work, and near-constant socializing, including sex of every imaginable variety, interrupted only by four and a half hours of sleep” (Jackson 113).

compulsion that, Rancière argues, creates an “absence of” leisure. It was also a departure from the transcendentalist idea of unity—that, for instance, agricultural labor was also educational labor (“out-of-door-life, with its broadening and emancipating effects… instruction from many different teachers of diversified character”). The difficulty of keeping track of the time of labor, under a truly transcendentalist system, was that labor was not supposed to be all that distinct from other modes of contact with the world. The new requirement put a burden on workers to determine what kind of labor they were doing (which “Group” and “Series” they belonged to), and how long they were doing it. Quantifying labor is at cross-purposes with qualitative ideas about labor in both transcendentalist and Fourierist thought.

Ironically it was Fourier who, in projecting a mathematically perfectible society and seeking to make his utopian plan implementable, quantified the time of labor, thereby returning workers to the experience of capitalist oversight. He also envisioned a longer workday than Ten Hour advocates were then calling for. Fourier estimated about an hour-and-a-half to two-hour allotment per occupation and that individuals would rotate between seven to eight different occupations in a day (Brisbane 152). Amelia Russell became dissatisfied with the new Fourierist labor system at Brook Farm, attributing the loss of original members to the requirement to keep track of one’s time.

One by one they dropped away, the new organization being distasteful to them, and the aesthetic view of life which was their one bright vision having resolved itself into the Dutchman’s wooden leg, a compound of clockwork and steam. Instead of the voluntary labor we had before enjoyed, there was now a compulsory feeling which gave you a sensation of not belonging to yourself. We kept an account of our hours of labor, and in imagination were rewarded for all over ten. (81)
Part of what Russell objects to, here, is the reduction of her time to the duration of tasks, a time-discipline that Russell associates with the dehumanizing labor of factories, evoked in her grotesque metaphor of the Dutchman’s wooden leg. E. P. Thompson explains that household labor was never (and still isn’t) “wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock” or the logic of dividing labor by task, one task at a time. Rather, women’s work is attuned to the rhythms of human need, which are unpredictable. In this way, Thompson argues, the woman who does housework and cares for children “has not yet altogether moved out of the conventions of ‘pre-industrial’ society” (79). The imposition of a time-discipline customary to wage labor, where time is money, appears even more exploitative when one considers that domestic labor is unpaid.

When Russell says that the “compulsory feeling…gave you a sensation of not belonging to yourself,” she means both that she no longer believed her labor was voluntary, which made her time the property of her managers, rather than herself, and that she now belonged to something greater than herself, a “new organization” that was alienating in a different way. To take the first meaning, Thompson instructs that although domestic labor was “the most arduous and prolonged work of all,” in a rural economy, “such hours were endurable only because one part of the work, with the children and in the home, disclosed itself as necessary and inevitable, rather than as an external imposition” (79). By requiring community members to log their labor hours, Ripley had effectively created an external imposition.

But when Russell refers to “the new organization,” “a compound of clockwork and steam” that “gave you a sensation of not belonging to yourself,” she is also expressing what Elizabeth Freeman calls a “sense method,” or “way of feeling and


organizing the world through and with the individual body, often in concert with other bodies,” here an effect of both the newly imposed time-discipline and a more thoroughly articulated communitarianism at Brook Farm (Beside You in Time 8). Ripley had imposed two aspects of Fourier’s organization of labor that Freeman identifies with “sense method”: synchronization, or working side-by-side in concert, and turn-taking, “wherein the cultural and the biological meet one another” (Freeman 11). Russell and others had begun to feel the collective coercions of the timetable in their bodies, which made their bodies legible to themselves and also available to others in a new aggregate social-sexual body—a historical queer becoming that is the subject of Freeman’s most recent book, Beside You in Time: Sense Methods & Queer Sociabilities in the American Nineteenth-Century (2019).

In addition to querying the new social body she belonged to, Russell aims to draw a distinction between domestic labor and farming—a labor that women typically did not do, aside from weeding and harvesting. While the women of Brook Farm cleaned, cared for children, washed laundry, and made beds, the agrarian experiment in good living was primarily enjoyed (or not) by the men. I’d argue that the difference in their labor explains women’s greater preoccupation with it, in their recollections of Brook Farm life, than in those by men. The natural limits on farming promised some variety in the kind of labor one might do; seasonal respites brightened even Hawthorne’s gloomy spirits. But domestic labor was daily, ongoing, and monotonous, Russell writes. “I cannot invest with poetry our domestic life which was, of course monotonous, for we could not carve out any very original way of making beds, cooking and washing dishes, all of which fell to our [women’s] lot” (58-9). Russell takes Fourier to task here for his failed promise. Some
labors could not be reinvented or made attractive. Though Fourier believed the positive effects on women’s labor was a primary advantage of combined households, Marianne Dwight complained in letters to Anna Parson that there were not enough women to shoulder the combined domestic work. "We need more leisure, or rather, we should like it. There are so many, and so few women to do the work, that we have to be nearly all the time about it. I can't find time to write till it comes to evening, and then we generally assemble in little bands somewhere for a little talk or amusement” (8-9). Social pressures to join in communal amusements, too, would have left Dwight with few unscheduled hours in which she might think or write. This theme recurs again and again in her letters.

Louisa May Alcott’s satirical portrait of life in a utopian agrarian commune, Transcendental Wild Oats (1874), based on her experience at her father’s Fruitlands community as a young girl (1843-1844), powerfully pulls the curtain back on utopian idealism, revealing the women’s labor that supports it. She does this by demonstrating the irony and hypocrisy of the Fruitlands founders’ strict vegetarianism. “Cotton, silk, and wool were forbidden as the product of slave-labor, worm-slaughter, and sheep-robbery,” but when the community fails, “Sister” Hope Lamb (a stand-in for Alcott’s mother) mourns, “Who is to pay us for what we have lost? I gave all I had—furniture, time, strength, six months of my children’s lives—and all are wasted…. You talk much about justice. Let us have a little, since there is nothing else left” (374, 376). In fact, the community broke its own rules repeatedly in order to survive. The heroic Sister Hope kept a private lamp fueled by animal fat because “evening was the only time she had to herself” and she needed light for “mending” or, alternatively, “forg[etting her] burden in a book” (370). But she had joined the community as a devoted wife, not a believer in the
new spiritual purity (366). Far more sharp-witted and witty than the self-serious Timon and Abel (figures for Charles Lane and Bronson Alcott), Sister Hope recognizes that it was the community leaders who were breaking their own vows not to be cruel to animals by treating her as a beast of burden. “To the question, ‘Are there any beasts of burden on the place?’ Mrs. Lamb answered, with a face that told its own tale, ‘Only one woman!’” (373). Later, Mrs. Lamb must drive her own “team” of children, the only hands available when a storm threatens to ruin the community’s crop yield (375). The men were then absent, “so busy discussing and defining great duties that they forgot to perform the small ones” (372).

Ultimately it’s sister Hope’s good humor and ingenuity that saves the Lamb (Alcott) family from the slaughter, as it were. When Abel despairs over his failed experiment, she reminds him, “I can sew and you can chop wood.... While there is work and love in the world we shall not suffer” (378-9). Louise May Alcott’s faith lies with work, and not with “play,” which she associates with male privilege, passivity, and exploitative labor. Villain-like, Timon abandons the community when it begins to fail, joining the Shakers, where he receives a moral correction. There, “he soon found that the order of things was reversed, and it was all work and no play” (376). Through the cunning perspective of Sister Hope, who knows she is being exploited yet stays around to be a salvation to her husband and children, Alcott honors the sacrifices of women to falsely liberating causes. The tale shines a light on the fact that the presumed goodness of a farmer’s life—whether or not it was truly easeful, virtuous, or an access point to nature and origins—was left for men to test and decide.
Pastoral and Queer Sociality in *Blithedale*

The search for the time of labor is, in the bourgeois writing that does much of this thinking, a desire to see or touch laborer’s bodies. In an 1844 Commencement Address at Hamilton College, Horace Greeley, a Fourierist, told the Literary Societies that cross-class sociality benefits both classes through the transfer of culture down the class tiers and healthful physicality back up it. One finds here a typical glorification of the laborer’s body which, once noticed, is easy to spot. In thinking about Nicholas Bromell’s important provocation that labor operates as a blank in nineteenth-century American culture—seemingly happening everywhere, but visible nowhere (2)—I began to wonder if his is not only an insight into the instability of labor at the time and how scholars haven’t learned to recognize labor where it was present, as he rightly claims (4), but also an insight into Bromell’s (indeed, every bourgeois person’s) desire for contact with laborers.

A desire to see laborers’ bodies in action and thereby to know their labor seems to drive, at least in part, Bromell’s yearning for the time of labor in this passage from *By the Sweat of the Brow*:

Even when we are shown workers working… we seem as much excluded from as allowed into a full comprehension of their work. In Lewis Hine’s *Men at Work* (1932) and *Women at Work* (1981), for example, the photographs cut into and disrupt the flow of the work activity, presenting it as an isolated moment, as a tableau; the very essence of work as a continuous activity, as motion, seems missing…. And even in the few images (most of them in *Women at Work*) when we sense that we really are seeing work, not a posed simulation of work, we are unprepared to unpack what we see. (3)

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Rancière notes that the desire is in ways mutual. In *The Nights of Labor*, he is interested in the moment “when the discourse of laborers in love with the night of intellectuals encounters the discourse of intellectuals in love with the toilsome and glorious days of the laboring people” (x-xi). More critical of the bourgeois intellectual, he asks, “Isn’t there some sort of dodge in this fascination with the mute truth of the popular body?” arguing that critics are quick “to disqualify the verbiage of every proffered message” by working people (11).
Of the mediums available to nineteenth-century artists, poetry may be the best suited to representing labor in action, since poetic time can be linear as well as repetitious. T. B. Read’s “Labor,” with its stanzas that represent a weekly cycle of labor followed by rest, is a good example of how a poem might perform time in labor. But as Bromell points out, nineteenth-century art, including poetry, usually did not represent labor this way. It usually represented labor—paradoxically—as a pause in work.

Of Hine’s photographs, and all representations of work, Bromell wants to know, “how many minutes at a time did the women bend over each jacket without looking up? how many jackets did they sew in a day? how often did they stand up? did they eat lunch—or dinner, or breakfast—at their seats?” (3). He wants to know them and their labor by knowing the time of their labor. He wants presence with laborers, across historical time. But Bromell’s questions also identify time as a key “formal characteristic” of work that, when known, will presumably enable outsiders to stop “circling around, rather than gaining access to, the work itself” (3). He has epistemological reasons for wanting to access labor time, in addition to affective ones.

Why is the time of labor so difficult to access? An uncharitable explanation is that it is the province of laborers who may be unequipped with the tools to convey their experience. A better answer is that nineteenth-century laborers represented their work all the time, but not with a modernist-realist sensibility (a style preference that came later), and it’s on scholars to learn how to read nineteenth-century genres. This is the argument I make in Chapter 2. A possibility I’d like to pursue here is that even when those doing the labor had the means to convey a fuller portrait of their work as action over time, as Bromell desires, they may have chosen not to. In Chapter 2, I highlight the pressure that
women factory workers felt to improve their minds while keeping their hands busy, occupying their thoughts with beautifully instructive things rather than their work. At Brook Farm, losing track of time—and hence, one’s work—was necessary to maintaining the feeling or illusion of utopia, as Amelia Russell wrote.

The bourgeois desire to see laborers’ bodies in action is a component of the desire for intimacy across class and a desire to see labor time unfold. When, as in the last case, that desire takes the form of wishing to witness labor as duration, it reproduces a capitalist ethic of time-discipline. By contrast, the time of labor in utopia is a queer time, in the sense of not capitalist—not measurable according to a system of value where time is exchanged at marketplace—and also in the sense of belonging to the queerness of nineteenth-century laborers themselves.

By working against market time, utopian time, defined as time one doesn’t have to mind, is not productive and thus neither capitalist nor normative. Elizabeth Freeman’s *Time Binds* (2010) helps to clarify what may and may not be queer about utopian temporality. She explains that “the discipline of ‘timing’ engenders a sense of being and belonging that feels natural” (18). Hence, when Prince Hamlet—and Thomas Carlyle, echoing him in “Signs of the Times”—declares that “time is sick and out of joint” (Act I, Scene 5, l. 190), he recognizes that “time as body and ‘the times,’ or the sphere of official politics and national history, form a joint: the body and the state are, rather than metaphors for each other, mutually constructing” (14-15). And the nineteenth-century US state is capitalist: “In the eyes of the state, [a] sequence of socioeconomically ‘productive’ moments is what it means to have a life at all” (5). If, as Bourdieu theorizes, “subjectivity emerges in part through mastering the cultural norms of withholding, delay,
surprise, and knowing when to stop—through mastery over certain forms of time,” then Freeman argues that acquiring this mastery is a sign that one belongs to the state. Further, “nations and other public forms of engroupment depend not only on progressive, linear time and the cyclical time that buttresses it but also on the illusion that time can be suspended” (4, 6).

Freeman’s insights have consequences for my analysis of time in utopian labor. First, she reveals that the cyclical solar and planetary time agrarians revered as more natural or authentic is just as normative (in the sense of, believing itself to be “natural”) as clock time or linear progress. Further, suspended time is an illusion, but I would add, it’s an illusion that utopians believed in— an illusion produced by a trick of light, such as the fantasy that a shadowless world is one suspended in time. By contrast to these normative or illusionary temporalities, Freeman argues, “queer becoming-collective-across-time [is] predicated upon injury—separations, injuries, spatial displacements, preclusions, and other negative and negating forms of bodily experience—or traumas that precede and determine bodiliness itself, that make matter into bodies” (11). We saw injury at play in Dickinson’s noon poems.

One of the ways that the nineteenth-century laborer can be understood as queer is by the invention of the workplace such as the factory, which created opportunities for sociality among non-family members, often members of the same sex, in spaces that temporarily replaced that of the normative domestic family. Elizabeth Freeman says of her own work on this community, “There was certainly a sexual angle to my work on factory women: I was interested in this new, extrafamilial site of female-female
socialization, and the erotics therein (“Still After” 28). The pressures these farmers daughters felt “to pass as members of the urban middle class” may also express a desire for relief from queerness, “for the privilege of being ordinary,” Freeman suggests (29).

Brook Farm differs in important ways from the Lowell factories: principally, by inviting bourgeois people to labor, rather than creating an opening in the labor market for members of the working class. Ripley did welcome actual farmers and tradesmen to take part in associative labor, only partly so they could teach the bourgeois how to do it. The primary similarity between factories and phalanxes was the opportunity for communal living and intimacy between non-family members. Recognizing factories’ desirable layout, the Northampton Association took up residence in former industrial buildings. Fourier included in his writings a detailed plan for the architecture of a phalanstery, the single-roofed dwelling that housed a phalanx. His design prioritized maximal contact between a diverse group of people. Creating a building where people had to use outdoor courtyards to move between wings was just as important as encouraging workers to shift their occupations throughout the day so that they might mingle with different groups. Fourier was so committed to the idea of diverse contact, he believed that even class difference was part of the novel variety of life in a phalanx and key to building attractive ties between people. Brisbane writes,

In this new order, the passions and all inequalities of fortune and character, so far from opposing [sic] difficulties to Association, form its very machinery, since all contrasts here become useful: thus our prejudices present to us as obstacles, what on the contrary are the means of Association…. It would be impossible to

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140 Brisbane describes the architecture of a phalanx or phalanstery in chapters 27 and 28.
associate a hundred families of equal fortune, and of similar tastes and characters: the mechanism of Groups and Series is incompatible with equality. (38)

This belief that social harmony is not social equality is one of the more counterintuitive aspects of Fourier’s theory. (Since property is held through joint-stock ownership, and not communally, class continues to mean something in a phalanx.) Just the right amount of difference among and between groups avoids discord or rivalry and instead creates emulative activation, where one admires and seeks to emulate another’s behavior (150-1).

Had the planned phalanstery at Brook Farm not burned down in March 1846, some of the ways that the community did experience a more diversified social contact might have disappeared. For, in the new phalanstery families would have dined in their own private quarters, rather than communally—a change that would have eliminated the feature of Brook Farm that was most different from normative domesticity: communal dining. The dining room was a crucial site for mingling genders and classes and inverting roles. Persons from different class backgrounds sat together; those who had formerly enjoyed paid help served dinner for the first time; men assisted with the domestic chores of waiting tables and washing dishes.

Sleeping could be communal, too. While Ripley tried to accommodate families’ desire for privacy wherever possible, space was limited. Multiple families took residence under the same roof and often had to shuffle around to accommodate new community members. Single men and women were easier to house. Codman describes an attic space, termed “Attica,” where single men slept dormitory-style (51). Brook Farm architecture tended to disrupt both the private family and social class divisions by favoring an economic use of space and resources. Should the phalanstery not have burned down,
there would have been added pressure on labor arrangements to carry out social diversification.

Critical theory of georgic and pastoral can help us to understand the sexual and temporal queerness of utopian labor. First, a few words about my approach to these closely related literary modes. Georgic and pastoral are different and differently serve my project, but they are not a binary. The binary is important to some versions of eco criticism that champions georgic as the literary mode of responsible land use. In strawman arguments, pastoral then represents environmental irresponsibility and escapism. Michael McKeon argues by contrast that ideas of leisure and labor are important to both modes. Both operate within the same basic schema of oppositions, and each may periodically enact a value reversal (268). "For these reasons, it seems to me important to recognize that the Eclogues and the Georgics are opposed to each other in a way that is not dichotomous but continuous and dialectical," reminding us that Virgil’s Georgics end where the Eclogues begin (269). Pastoral is for McKeon “a cultural mechanism whose poetic and ideological function is to test the dialectical fluidity of dichotomous opposition,” including that of leisure and labor (272).

Georgic and pastoral both offer potentially queer temporalities. They are also apt modes for investigating time in labor. They are instruments, in fact: they test things. If pastoral is a mechanism for testing the dialectical fluidity of oppositions (McKeon), georgic, according to Kevis Goodman, is a mode that “obsessively tests its mediating

\[141\] Within eco criticism, Laurence Buell does a better job of characterizing the political complexity of pastoral in “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised” (1989) than Timothy Sweet gives him credit for in the Introduction to American Georgic. According to Sweet, Buell argues that pastoral can only mature as social critique when "pastoral aesthetics overcomes its instinctive reluctance to face head-on the practical obstacles to the green utopia it seeks to realize" (quoting from Buell, The Environmental Imagination 307). Sweet wagers that "recovering the georgic tradition of environmental writing can help guide this maturation process" (5).
power” (9)—classically, by representing labor as a mechanism for feeling time (history). Goodman upends traditional arguments that georgic buries history in nature, arguing instead that the georgic versus in fact turns up social experience/history “in solution,” as unpleasurable feeling or sensory discomfort (3-4)—that “compulsory feeling which gave you a sensation of not belonging to yourself,” according to Amelia Russell. The negative feeling that is history making itself present is a temporal eruption or “injury,” a non-normative temporality that interests Freeman, who, like Goodman, looks to Raymond Williams’s Structures of Feeling and Jameson’s The Political Unconscious to conceptualize time as affect. Recall that for Freeman, “queer becoming-collective-across-time [is] predicated upon injury—separations, injuries, spatial displacements, preclusions, and other negative and negating forms of bodily experience—or traumas that precede and determine bodiliness itself, that make matter into bodies” (Time Binds 11).

Given that one of the crucial questions of this moment in US labor history was, What is the Present time?—which is, I have argued, a desire to feel time and, in some cases, by touching laborer’s bodies—one might expect to see georgic mediating this very question, in antebellum US literature. But within agrarianism and writing about utopian labor, pastoral continues to be the dominant mode due to its association with the good life and, I’d argue, the pastoral anecdote’s characteristic representation of worker sociality. Although Alpers claims that the representative anecdote of pastoral is herdsmen and their lives, he also explains that the “representative shepherd” is a role has been filled by “shepherd equivalents” since Shakespeare (186). Thus one finds the husbandman standing in for the shepherd in eighteenth-century pastoral as enlightenment agrarian
values associating farming with the good life were on the rise (Marx 61). According to Alpers, “the poet need not represent himself as a shepherd in order to sustain the pastoral mode. The characteristic figure then becomes what we will call a pastoral speaker. A pastoral speaker is one whose mode of utterance and strength relative to world derive from the literary shepherd, but who is not represented as a herdsman or similar humble figure” (Alpers 185).

Pastoral provides a set of conventions for midcentury writers to represent the queerness of the scene of utopian labor and the queerness of its time. Utopian labor happens, paradoxically, in the pause—the time of leisure within labor, or the “illusion” of suspended time (Freeman). In literature, these are the components of the pastoral scene. During the pause for midday rest, usually solitary shepherds are able to convene because they have stopped their herding. This is the time when they chat and sing. In Virgil’s *Eclogues*, their dialogue becomes the text of the poems that we read. In pastoral, the midday pause is a time of poesis. And one of the songs that shepherds conventionally sing is their love for other shepherds. Indeed, Margaret Fuller’s poem about a missed opportunity for eros between the sun and a dahlia flower at midday can be read as an elegy to the romantic love poetry of Renaissance pastoral epitomized by Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” (1599) (“Come live with me and be my love/ and we shall all the pleasures prove”), though unrequited love is also part of this tradition. But perhaps a better touchstone for the queer sociality possible at Brook Farm is Virgil’s “Eclogue II.”

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142 See also Sarah Burns.
“Eclogue II” begins, “The shepherd Corydon was burning for Alexis.”

We saw Emily Dickinson associate the same two senses of the word “burning” as Virgil implies here: the figurative sense of burning hot with desire and the literal sense of burning under solar heat. Corydon, a male shepherd, both burns “for” Alexis and “beneath that sun,” since he spends his midday break pursuing the boy in the fields, rather than enjoying the “cool shade…sought by herded throngs” (l. 8, 12). With emotionally manipulative warnings not to

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{count on that fine face too much.} \\
\text{Dark hyacinths get plucked; white flowers die untouched, (ll. 17-18)} \\
\end{array}
\]

Corydon offers Alexis the enjoyment of all that he owns:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
giant herds; white milk-jars free of curds; \\
A thousand lambs that range the hills of Sicily; \\
Fresh snow-white milk that’s there in summer and in winter. (ll. 20-22) \\
\end{array}
\]

Corydon doesn’t simply hold out these things in return for sexual favors; he wants a life with Alexis, a home:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
Oh, it would be so good to have you live with me \\
In just a rustic hut. (ll. 28-9) \\
\end{array}
\]

Readers might find the idea that pastoral is invested in imagining domesticity surprising—the outdoor setting and itinerant nature of shepherding might seem to preclude domestic possibility—but the same representation of love as the creation of a household is there in Marlowe and in Hawthorne’s fictional pastoral representation of Brook Farm, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).

Just as Thoreau’s “Stanzas” produce a second sun in competition with the one in nature, Corydon confesses that his love for Alexis has created an eternal noon or

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\[143\] Translation by Len Krisak (University of Pennsylvania Press), 2010.
countertemporality that puts him out of sync with the animal kingdom and nature, who all
retreat from pursuing their desires at sunset.

The savage lioness goes hunting, springs
Upon the wolf, the wolf, the goat, the goat on buds
Of clover. Corydon, like them, pursues Alexis.
So each is drawn by desire. But look: yoked bulls
Pull back the dangling plough as sunset grows the shadows.
And still I burn with love (yet what can limit love?) (ll. 63-8)

The question, “yet what can limit love?” both affirms the sun as a natural limit on one’s
usual labors and posits that love creates a new temporality within labor.

Virgil’s Eclogues depict a queer sociality among laborers that doesn’t go away in
nineteenth-century versions. To look at an example that has relevance for Brook Farm,
Hawthorne’s Miles Coverdale understands his experience of Blithedale, Hawthorne’s
fictional Brook Farm, primarily through the lens of pastoral. It is a source of both his
queer desire and his perpetual social bewilderment. Coverdale is sure of one thing, in The
Blithedale Romance: that he is a player in a pastoral drama. In a scene of male
tenderness, Hollingsworth asks Coverdale, who is very sick, to state what he has to live
for. Coverdale replies, “Nothing, that I know of, unless to make pretty verses, and play a
part with Zenobia and the rest of the amateurs, in our pastoral” (32). At another moment
he feels like a character in Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village,” a popular
eighteenth-century poem composed of pastoral, elegiac, and georgic elements (54).

Coverdale attempts to play pastoral with Hollingsworth when they build a stone
fence together in the chapter entitled “A Crisis.” He wants Hollingsworth to take part in
storytelling as they pile rocks, and increases the fancifulness of his prose as if to incite a
quasi-song-contest—imagining their lives becoming the subjects of a future epic poem—
but Hollingsworth won’t engage (90). Hollingsworth’s perennial frustration with
Coverdale, that he is all affectation and ornament, suggests that poetry is the only epistemological and representational tool Coverdale has: “You seem to be trying how much nonsense you can pour out in a breath,” Hollingsworth accuses, believing that Coverdale is merely seeking a theme for poetry (90). Blithedale isn’t the writer’s retreat that Coverdale hoped for—Zenobia notices that he’s stopped writing poetry—but by the end of the first summer, he’s adjusted to daily labor and found intervals for rest and reflection, which he spends voyeuristically observing his peers and musing about a new kind of domesticity. His musings take the same form as the story he tells when fence-mending with Hollingsworth: in such instances, his thoughts turn to imagining a future with Hollingsworth. While fence-mending, he’s eager “for the cottages to be built, that the creeping plants may begin to run over them, and the moss to gather on the walls, and the trees,” musing: “When we come to be old men, they will call us Uncles, or Fathers—Father Hollingsworth and Uncle Coverdale” (90-1).

If pastoral gives Coverdale a language for projecting a domestic future within a scene of social labor, Fourierism validates Coverdale’s queer longing for a new kind of household not structured by marriage or consanguine kinship. Hawthorne’s familiarity with Fourier’s teachings, which were studiously read at Brook Farm, informs the queer sociality he represents in The Blithedale Romance, along with pastoral. In claiming that Blithedale offers Coverdale opportunities to act on queer desire, my take on the novel tracks closely with Peter Coviello’s in Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America (2013). Coviello reads the novel as a portrait of socially emergent modern sexualities before they were codified: "the problem of sexuality…in a moment of social flux.” Coviello’s argument includes the important qualification that
Blithedale records the “unripeness” of this moment for acting on Coverdale’s queer desire; the novel is best understood, he argues, as “a novel about [Coverdale’s] homophobia” (148). In emphasizing that the homophobia is Coverdale’s and not Hawthorne’s, Coviello importantly distinguishes between the author and his protagonist, as, he notes, few readers of The Blithedale Romance have done (150).

While recognizing, as Coviello does, that Coverdale’s homophobia and ultimate conformity with traditional courtship is not a sign of Hawthorne’s conservatism but just the opposite—a sign of Hawthorne’s interest in exploring non-normative sexuality—I disagree with Coviello’s argument that disarticulating the two also entails taking Hawthorne strictly at his word, in the Preface. Coviello takes Hawthorne’s disavowal of any political intent, in the Preface, as an invitation to bracket and ultimately not address “the book's complex views with respect to agrarian reform, communal living, nineteenth-century philanthropy, or transcendentalist-commutopian politics” (147). Though Coviello’s uncommon approach to Blithedale is noteworthy for the ways that he steers clear of symptomatic reading, and though he’s right to agree with Hawthorne that the novel does not “put forward the slightest pretensions to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialisms,” Brook Farm is still an important context for Blithedale (Hawthorne 3). While Coviello is able to intuit Coverdale’s queer desire through his frankly sexual conversations with Zenobia and Hollingsworth, he takes these missed opportunities one at a time, conveying the impression that what Coverdale desires is free queer coupling, rather than polyamory. In order to see the larger queer social belonging that Coverdale is arguably also after, in Blithedale, one must understand the
social utopian philosophy that informs it and the real historical spaces where nonfamilial queer collective attachment seemed possible.

By the time Coverdale is perched in his pastoral retreat, in *The Blithedale Romance*—a tree that he calls his “hermitage”—he has added two others to his portrait of a domestic future, in addition to Hollingsworth (69). He conceptualizes the vantage point as a home by calling it a hermitage and referring to it as his single possession or property at Blithedale. The home is founded on a metaphor for polygamous marriage suggested to him by the shape of four interweaving branches: “A wild grape-vine, of unusual size and luxuriance, had twined and twisted itself up into the tree, and, after wreathing the entanglement of its tendrils around almost every bough, had caught hold of three or four neighboring trees, and married the whole clump with a perfectly inextricable knot of polygamy” (70). In a parallel scene later on, Coverdale’s gaze from the window of an upper-story city apartment falls on the apartment building where Zenobia and Priscilla are residing, which consists of repeatable compartments over a unified roof—a figure for the Fourierist phalanx (104).

Coverdale’s Blithedale experience awakens a polyamorous desire first felt, arguably, when reading Fourier to Hollingsworth during his recovery from illness. An image that Fourier paints, of oceans turning to lemonade when “the globe shall arrive at its final perfection” as “a consequence of human improvement,” speaks to Coverdale’s poetic imagination and his attraction to hedonistic pleasures (39). Coverdale later fancies enacting a similar hedonism by carrying bunches of grapes from his hermitage to the community, his own face stained with their juices (70). Hollingsworth is most offended by “the selfish principle” in Fourier, the idea that man’s passionate desires should be the
organizing basis for society (38). Like Hollingsworth, American disciples of Fourier
minimized the Frenchman’s celebration of free sex. Brisbane omits these sections from
_The Social Destiny of Man_ (Jackson 113). But Coverdale and Hawthorne know that
one is always talking about human passion when talking about Fourier’s theory of
passional attraction. Indeed, Coverdale’s difficulty in “modestly” relating the “beautiful
particularities” of Fourier, followed by Hollingsworth’s unwillingness to hear any more
of it, and his association of the “selfish principle” with “the portion of ourselves which
we shudder at, and which it is the whole aim of spiritual discipline to eradicate,” with all
that is “vile, petty, sordid, filthy, bestial, and abominable,” indicates that the two friends
speak of carnal pleasures (39). Coverdale continues to provoke Hollingsworth’s disgust
by associating the “promised delights” of Fourier’s system with the author’s
Frenchness—another coded allusion to social, sexual taboo. Of all the authors that
Coverdale reads while sick, Fourier is the only one that he discusses with Hollingsworth,
taking great pains to facilitate Hollingsworth’s understanding (38-9).

Our disbelief at Coverdale’s declaration, at the end of _the Blithedale Romance_,
that he is and had always been in love with (only) Priscilla, is the precise result of all of
these pages where Coverdale woos and spies on Hollingsworth, as well as Zenobia (169).
Coviello interprets the ending thusly:

> The famous stammering last line of the novel ("I—I myself—was—in love—with—Priscilla") [is where] Miles assures us that, no, he was never passionately
> attached to any of the magnetic, beautiful, gender nonconforming figures he has
> paraded across the stage, but was always, in truth, in secret, in love with the very
> most tame, the very most conventional, the very most submissive and utterly
> normative character in the whole of the narrative. (164).

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144 Michael Moon’s article, "Solitude, Singularity, Seriality: Whitman Vis-À-Vis Fourier," _English Literary History_, vol. 73, no. 2, 2006, pp. 303-323 illustrates some of the erotics we’re missing in Brisbane’s translation. Moon explores the influence of Fourier’s theory of free association on Whitman’s queer erotic seriality.
But I think we can also give Hawthorne some credit for this turn of events. Another way of making sense of the ending of *Blithedale* is to say that it performs the convention of an ending: in other words, it confirms the unity of the heterosexual couple, as nineteenth-century novels are supposed to do. Such an ending is, arguably, a formal requirement. Without reaffirming the couple, one would have no ending at all. A queer temporality eschews endings: its business is with middles.

Hawthorne’s presentation of pastoral in *Blithedale* is complex and contradictory: on the one hand, it is presented as the source of Coverdale’s misunderstanding of his world. This comes close to Paul Alpers’ definition of pastoral as a representation of shepherd-types, “whose lives are determined by the actions of powerful men or by events and circumstances over which they have no control” (162). Though Coverdale’s bourgeois class position might seem to discount this reading, pastoral is best understood as an urbane writer’s sophisticated representation of shepherds’ conventional simplicity. On the one hand, then, Coverdale’s pastoralism serves to represent his limited understanding—in this respect, Hawthorne’s is a critique of pastoral. On the other hand, pastoral is a vehicle by which Coverdale imagines queer sociality at Blithedale and a reason why Fourier’s theories are so appealing to him. By this reading, Coverdale has a privileged understanding of the erotics of the Blithedale project.

Chapters 1 and 2 showed the burden that time was to laborers in coercive, capitalist work environments, establishing the stakes of reformers’ ability to imagine a more humane and sustainable kind of labor. The most radical of these formulations, encoded in Amelia Russell’s wish to abolish timekeeping altogether, raises the question
of whether the word “labor” is an appropriate signifier of what she envisions, or whether
it still carries capitalist notions of time-discipline. In the introduction to this project, I
defined “labor” as tasks plus a particular relationship to time. Russell, arguably, wants
not to feel time passing at all; she wants, perhaps, no relationship with time. If durational
time is no longer a component of labor, is it labor or something else: voluntary
cooperative action? Does abolishing time abolish labor as such?

Though a true fluidity between duty and play may never have been fully realized
at Brook Farm, or, not by everyone, the attempt to imagine and articulate it produced
innovations in literary form: a novel (Hawthorne’s) exploring queer plural desire and
setting up readers’ ability to imagine an alternate ending or non-ending centered around
the formation of a different kind of household than is possible through heteronormative
coupling. Additionally, I’ve looked at poetry informed by pastoral temporality, but which
extends the radical potential in the midday noon hour well beyond the container of the
pastoral anecdote in order to query natural timekeeping. This chapter makes it possible to
reflect back on the ways that a keen understanding of poetic genres and traditions gave
laborers more of a command of their own experience than scholars might otherwise
realize.
Fig. 1. Sailors reading. [Unknown source.]

Fig. 2. Revered Thomas Streatfeild, *Four sailors relaxing on deck, one reading*, 1820, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA-3.0 license.
Fig. 3. Frontispiece and title page from U. P. (Uriah Pierson) James, *The United States Songster: A Choice Selection of About One Hundred and Seventy of the Most Popular Songs: Including Nearly All the Songs Contained in the American Songster... To Which Is Added the Pizing Sarpent, Settin on a Rail; Jim Brown, and a Number of New and Original Songs, Written Expressly for This Work* (Cincinnati, U. P. James), 1863. Hathi Trust, catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009407374/Cite.
CHAPTER 2

Fig. 4. Boardinghouse keepers provided three hearty meals daily. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of “Foodways,” Mill Girls and Immigrants Exhibit, Morgan Cultural Center, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 5. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the weaving room exhibit, Boott Cotton Mills Museum, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept, 2017.
Fig. 6. Weaving room exhibit.
Fig. 7. Weaving room exhibit.
Fig. 8. Lowell City Atlas, Base Map, 1879. UMass Lowell Center for Lowell History
digital map collection, UMass Lowell Library.
Fig. 9. Plate B of Lowell City Atlas, 1879.
Fig. 10. Plate D of Lowell City Atlas, 1879.
Fig. 11. Layout of boardinghouses (#16) adjacent to Appleton and Hamilton Manufacturing Companies along the branches of the Pawtucket Canal. Benjamin Mather, “Plan of the Town of Lowell and Belvidere Village,” 1832, UMass Lowell Center for Lowell History digital map collection, UMass Lowell Library.
Fig. 13. Boott Boardinghouse #52. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Boott Cotton Mills Boardinghouse Morgan Cultural Center Exhibit (right) and the Boott Cotton Mills Museum (left), Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 15. Engraving of Boott Cotton Mills buildings and yard. [Unknown source.]

Fig. 16. Engraving of the Boott Cotton Mills building and yard, 1852. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of Boott Cotton Mills Museum exhibit, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
EDITORIAL CORNER.

PLANTS AND FLOWERS IN THE MILLS.

In the article entitled “Pleasures of a Factory Life,” mention is made of the cultivation of flowers in the Mills.

We have been greatly pleased with the taste and care displayed in the introduction and culture of plants and flowers, on all the Corporations. These children of nature, whether growing wild or receiving the fostering attention of man, are “apt to teach;” and the lessons they inculcate are of the purest and most pleasing character. And it is highly gratifying to see them exalted to companionship in the sitting-room and parlor, when they most need shelter from the blighting frost. It is especially gratifying to behold them thriving beneath the kindly care of the female operatives in our factories. In the dressing-room of No. 3 on the Boot Corporation, we counted over 200 pots of plants and flowers! This is probably the largest number congregated in any apartment in the city; and some rooms, in consequence of an entirely northern exposure, or inconvenience in other respects, are without any; nevertheless a larger or smaller collection may be found in the apartments generally.

The Superintendents manifest a lively interest in this matter; and some of them have furnished large numbers of plants and flowers, with instructions to the Overseers to furnish every facility to the girls for the cultivation thereof; and several proprietors have displayed commendable liberality in sending floral contributions, in rich variety, to ornament the mills.

A few suggestions may not be considered out of place. We design them for every manufacturing district.

1. Proprietors, owners of stock, and others, would confer a favor upon the factory population, and indirectly benefit themselves, by sending a few pots of plants and flowers to the mills. Let every room be generously supplied. The expense and trouble would be trifling.

2. Persons employed in the mills usually visit their kindred at least once in a year. On these occasions, let them select a few fine cuttings or roots; and when they return to their stations, mention the fact to an Overseer. Pots or boxes would, without doubt, be furnished to any reasonable extent at the expense of the Corporation.

3. Let the flowers and plants be carefully attended to. Lessons of wisdom, purity, and holy trust, will thence be derived. And when you look on such as you brought from “home,” remember the love of your kindred and the joys of your childhood; and haply your thoughts will be in harmony with the teachings of flowers as “the alphabet of angels.”

Fig. 17. “Plants and Flowers in the Mills,” Lowell Offering, Dec 1840. American Periodicals Series.
Fig. 20. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Boott Mills Factory building along the Eastern Canal, Boott Cotton Mills Museum, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 21. Paul Louis Dessar, *Clotilde*, c. 1890. (American)
Fig. 22. Paul Louis Dessar, *A Moment’s Rest*, c. 1890. (American)
Fig. 23. Winslow Homer, *Young Woman Sewing*, 1876. (American)
Fig. 24. Enoch Wood Perry, *A Month’s Darning*, 1876. (American)
Fig. 25. John William Waterhouse, *I am Half-Sick of Shadows, said the Lady of Shalott*, 1916. (British)
Fig. 26. Dining Parlor in Boott Boardinghouse #52. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Mill Girls and Immigrants Exhibit, Morgan Cultural Center, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept, 2017.
Fig. 27. Bedroom in Boott Boardinghouse #52. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Mill Girls and Immigrants Exhibit, Morgan Cultural Center, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 28. “The Boardinghouse Unit.” Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Mill Girls and Immigrants Exhibit, Morgan Cultural Center, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 29. Uniformity in Design. Plans of Boott Boardinghouse #52. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of the Mill Girls and Immigrants Exhibit, Morgan Cultural Center, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 30. Cover of *The Lowell Offering*, Jan 1845. “The Lowell Offering Masthead.” *Mill Girls in Nineteenth-Century Print*, americanantiquarian.org
Fig. 31. Lauren Kimball, Photograph of Lowell Cemetery, Lowell, MA, 24 Sept 2017.
Fig. 32. Lowell Cemetery Lawrence Street gate, 11 Sept 2011. [Unknown Source]

Fig. 33. Postcard. “Gateway to Lowell Cemetery. Lowell, Mass,” postdated 20 Apr 1907.
Fig. 34. Cover of the *Lowell Offering*, Feb 1841. American Periodical Series.
"THE GRAVES OF A HOUSEHOLD."

The statements in the following lines are facts; but they were
gested by that beautiful little poem of Mrs. Hemans, from which the
verse and the last two verses are extracted.

"They grew in beauty side by side,—
They filled one home with glee,—
Their graves are severed far and wide,
By mount, and stream, and sea."

The eldest lies where the tumbling sea
Rolls over his lowly bed,—
And a coral rock his tomb may be,
Where the sea-nymphs watch the dead.

The second rests in a lovely isle,
Far in the Atlantic wave;—
Where the orange blossoms, and bright suns smile,
They made a stranger's grave.

And one—a being of life and light—
She went where an arctic sky
Too soon, alas! brings wasting and blight,
In her loneliness there to die.

Another went forth on the deep blue sea,
The treacherous wave to dare;—
He never returned;— O where is he?
There's none who may tell us where.

And one, the least and "the loved of all,"
To warfare a victim fell:
His sufferings in the prison thrill,
No mortal may ever tell.

One lies alone in her native land,—
It never was her lot to roam,—
She, only she, of that fate band,
Sleeps her last sleep at home.

"And parted thus they rest, who played
Beneath the same green tree;
Whose voices mingled, as they prayed
Around one parent knee.

"They who with smiles sit up the hall,
And cheered with song the hearth,—
Alas for love! if thou went all,
And nought beyond, O Earth!"

As we listened to the long catalogue of
eries they endured, our young hearts thrill
with emotions of gratitude and veneration
those noble patriots, who had so freely shed their
blood in the struggle for liberty, and trans
sud so rich a legacy to their descendants.

My grandmother is at rest; but her grand
children love and revere her memory; and not
will her instructions he forgotten, while one he
shall beat that gathered around her fireside.

Where, O where is now that happy bower
All are scattered. One has made her home in
side a western lake; and more luxuriant trees
will meet her eye, and soother breezes fan her
brow, and kind friends will press around her,
yet will her thoughts come back to those we
watched her infancy and childhood, and the jo
ces once that met around that fireside. One he
sought classic halls; and as he sits beside an
midnight lamp, his mind will wander from his
book, and "home, sweet home," and loved on
there, will take its place. One roams the for
and the prairie, and at night rests his head wi
strangers, and sometimes in the red man's hut
but the long legendary tale he heard around the
dear familiar fireside, flits at times across his
memory, and the bitter tear starts for those he
never more may greet.

All have sought new homes, and some or
with the dead. One fell the victim of consum
ption. Day after day, he faded like the wither
ing flower, and at last calmly sank to his res
And he, that favorite one, O where is he? God
forever gone! We saw him growing up to
manhood, all that our love could wish him; he
suddenly we saw him robed for the grave, an
placed within its narrow limits. In agony of
soul we wept and mourned, and never more ca
our stricken hearts know the joyousness of to
mer days.

Strangers now crowd around that fireside.—
Not again shall gather there that happy group: yet do the living hope again to meet each oth
er and the departed, where parting is no more, an
where death is unknown.

S. W. S.

Fig. 35. Adelia, "The Graves of a Household," Lowell Offering, Apr 1841 and S. W. S.

[Sarah Shedd?], "My Grandmother's Fireside," Lowell Offering, Feb 1941. American

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