

OUR PAPER ALLEGORIES: INTIMACY, PUBLICITY, AND MATERIAL TEXTUALITY  
IN COLONIAL AND ANTEBELLEM AMERICAN LITERATURE

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by

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“Our Paper Allegories” argues that throughout the colonial and antebellum periods in the United States, the artifact of paper frequently operated as an archive of intimate gendered, sexual, racial, and communal relations and histories. Early and nineteenth-century American writers animated these relations in what I call, adapting a phrase from Herman Melville, “paper allegories,” or works that create elaborate constructions of affiliation or subjectivity by drawing attention to the paper-based materiality of the text. The Habermasian model of the public sphere has heavily influenced scholarship on early American print culture. In that model, paper, the “body” of the text, recedes from perception in service to the “soul” of print, ideas. This dissertation, in contrast, shows that because American readers and writers were themselves often part of, or at least conscious of, the papermaking process – until 1867 paper was made from linen and cotton rags often recycled from individual households – they were sensitive the potential for narrative to be embedded within, not solely imprinted upon, paper. These “paper allegories” tended to focus on women’s bodies and the queer qualities of public intimacy. This dissertation analyzes the ways in which Anne Bradstreet, Lydia Sigourney, Herman Melville, William Wells Brown, authors of ephemeral texts, and others wrote about the materiality of print, each emphasizing the meanings embedded within paper. This dissertation advances the study of print culture and the history of the book by showing how studies have tended to privilege printed text or written words in a way that does not fully account for how early American and nineteenth-century U.S. readers cultivated a sense of the page, a sense that the shredded rags within represented their bodies,

identities, labors, and communal and affective ties to one another.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathon [Jonathan] William Senchyne was born in Buffalo, New York on the thirty-first of December 1981. He attended Saints Peter and Paul School in Hamburg, New York and Saint Francis High School in Athol Springs, New York. He completed a B.A. in English with Honors from SUNY Geneseo in 2004 where he was also elected Phi Beta Kappa. This was followed by Master's degrees in English at both Syracuse University (2006) and Cornell University (2009). While completing the Ph.D. in English at Cornell, Jonathan held a Jay and Deborah Last Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society (2009) and was a resident fellow of Carl Becker House (2008-2012). At Cornell University he was awarded the Moses Coit Tyler Prize for best graduate essay in American literature, history, or folklore (2011), the Martin Sampson Teaching Award (2011), and the honor of Ph.D. degree marshal at the university's 144<sup>th</sup> commencement (2012). In 2012, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the field of print and digital culture.

Dedicated to my father, William Senchyne,  
who taught me that behind every printed paper is a story of skilled work and thought.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project is in many ways about acknowledging the resonant presence of others within a text, and so I take great pleasure in acknowledging the friends, family, colleagues, and institutions that assisted me as this dissertation materialized.

My dissertation committee has been supportive of and responsive to this project since I proposed its earliest outline at the examination stage. Shirley Samuels provided guidance, suggestions, and professional advice while also leaving room for my sense of independence and ownership of the project to develop. In addition to the dissertation, Shirley taught me how to navigate professional life both at one's home institution and in the larger profession. Similarly, Eric Cheyfitz's guidance was crucial to this work and my early career, especially his combination of skepticism and generosity. Jason Frank was a late addition to the committee, but the depth of his knowledge of the field's theoretical claims and his probing questions were nonetheless foundational for my writing.

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I was fortunate to become a graduate resident fellow at Carl Becker House during a transitional moment in my personal and professional lives. Becker House quickly became my home and also a site of meaningful engagement with the University at large. My deepest thanks go to Cindy Hazan who hired me, and who, as House Professor, modeled levels of intelligence, graciousness, and hospitality to which I can only aspire. I met Daphna Ram at Becker, and her friendship has been sustaining – if hectic. Becker House provided the context for memorable interactions with Ed Baptist, Richard Boyd, Javier Perez Burgos, Rick Canfield, Robin Davisson, Eileen Hughes, Mary Katzenstein, David Korda, Barbara Koslowski, Bruce Levitt, Judy Levitt, Janet Shortall, and Carmen Gutierrez Solano. During this time I found it significant to be dwelling in the memory of Carl Lotus Becker, historian of the early U.S. and of American higher

education. Becker attributed the value of a university to “a divergence as well as of a community of interests” full of “otherwise-thinking” men and women. Becker House certainly became this kind of community for me. I lived and worked there for four years, and my deep affection for Cindy, Rick, and Daphna especially will keep the place always with me.

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My family and old friends have been important sources of support throughout my graduate education. Though none of my grandparents lived long enough to see me complete a graduate degree, each of them taught me to value knowledge and the process of becoming educated. My parents, William and Mary Ann Senchyne, even more so. My mother, an avid reader, took me to the public library several times a week when I was young and allowed me to become a bookish kid pursuing the pleasures of reading and being among books. I still have the

copy of Webster's Student dictionary that my father gave me when I was learning to read, inscribed from him to me "For Knowledge." My brother, Dennis Watson, has been an example to watch and follow, and more importantly he (and now his wife Faith, too) has been there when I needed him. Jerod Sikorskyj and Tim Quinn, who I have known since high school, have never been more than a phone call away when I needed perspective or advice. None of us knew exactly where college or graduate school would lead, but they were behind me nonetheless, and for that, and them, I am grateful.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Intimacy, Publicity, and Material Textuality

#### *Intimacy and Publicity*

On November 14, 1777, the *North Carolina Gazette* issued a promise to young female readers:

... the young ladies are assured, that by sending to the paper mill an old handkerchief, no longer fit to cover their snowy breasts, there is a possibility of its returning to them again in the more pleasing form of a *billet doux* from their lovers.<sup>1</sup>

The “young ladies” are being invited to send the handkerchief to the paper mill because, until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, paper was made primarily from cloth rags, and this resource was in near constant shortage. Paper mills needed creative ways of getting what we would today call “post-consumer” materials for their industry. This project examines many of these stories, poems, and images, pulling together an archive of business-oriented texts that are nonetheless literary in nature. But, more significantly, this appeal for rags is prototypical of early American and nineteenth-century U.S. “paper allegories,” works that create elaborate metaphorical constructions of affiliation or subjectivity by drawing attention to the materiality of the text. These paper allegories are not all simply advertisements for rags, but, like calls for rags, works by such recognizable authors as Anne Bradstreet, Lydia Sigourney, and Herman Melville draw on readers’ familiarity (both intellectually and sensorially) with the material makeup of the paper supporting the printed word. This project argues that from the perspective of early

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 310.

American and nineteenth-century U.S. readers, what we have called the print public sphere, could be perceived as a network of personal, even intimate, relations.

The point is readily illustrated in the example above. The young ladies are not simply encouraged to send any rags to the mill so that there will be supplies for papermaking. They are asked to send the soiled handkerchief that has been pressed against their bodies, specifically against their breasts. The snowy whiteness of their breasts, and thus the specifically racial and class character of the call's audience, is registered against the tarnished rag and identified with the whiteness of the paper that it will produce. The handkerchief, which may have absorbed the tears of its owner, moves away from the body and out of the private domestic sphere and to the mill where it is transformed into paper. Once private and pressed to the body, the handkerchief becomes a most public and promiscuous item: a piece of paper on which anything could be printed and which could fall into the hands of anyone. But, the advertisement fantasizes, the public sphere of writing and letters might be organized such that the paper finds its way to the lady's lover who, now holding her undergarment in his hand, writes a lover's note which is returned to her and pressed against her breast once more. The handkerchief absorbs tears, and this, in turn, might make it the perfect material support for a tearjerker.

The ad is self-consciously a fantasy, hinting only that "there is a possibility" that the old handkerchief will be find its way back to the lady as a *billet-doux*. But it is only necessary to hint at the possibility in order to enchant the page with intimate, even erotic, possibility. After all, it is not totally inconceivable that a local paper mill is taking your rags and returning tiny fragments of them to you in the newspaper they print. That hint of possibility is enough to spark the erotic charge of a lover handling one's underclothes and conducting that charge in return as a note. Or, it is equally possible to ponder the strange intimacies that arise when the stranger

handles one's bedclothes or underpants in the newspaper.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when Michael Warner writes that "a public is a relation of strangers," we might include not only writers and addressees in the account of stranger sociability, but also the bodies absorbed into rags. "Strangers come into relationship by [a public's] means," Warner writes, "though the resulting social relationship might be peculiarly indirect and unspecifiable."<sup>3</sup> Peculiarly indirect and unspecifiable characterizes the relation between the lady, the rag, the lover, and the material text.

Whether or not the fantasy of your rag returning to you as paper with a message comes true, readers are encouraged to perceive the material text and its circulation through the public as symbolic. The lover's letter can be read as lovers' bodies touching, the lover's fingers writing sweet notes of courtship on the lady's underthings. Later, for Herman Melville, the narrator of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" will experience the halting realization that the bachelor's shirts are possibly being breathed into the lungs of the maids laboring at the paper mill. The significance of this perception of paper is that it offers a picture of print culture and the print public sphere not, as scholars have held for decades, of a circulation of disembodied, anonymous, rational printed words, but rather as a network of intimate connections, traces of bodies, and vibrant embedded material meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> Marco Mostert argues that a rise in literacy rates during the Medieval period can be directly attributed to the rise in availability of paper – not printing which would come later – and that the availability of paper in the regions he studies is directly related to the development of social norms pertaining to the wearing of undergarments: "As underwear became more popular, so the supply of rags increased significantly. That in turn increased the amount of paper and brought knowledge within reach of a much wider audience. Parchment really was a luxury item. For a few sheets, you had to kill a sheep and cure its skin in the same way as leather, and for a complete book, you'd be talking about quite a few sheep. Now the papermakers found themselves with all the old pants, and they produced a product which has lasted remarkably well." Quoted in Martin Wainwright, "How Discarded Pants Helped to Boost Literacy," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/jul/12/martinwainwright.uknews4>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" *Public Culture* 49.1 (2002): 55-56.

This project advances the study of print culture and the history of the book by showing how we have tended to privilege printed text or written words in a way that does not fully account for how early American and nineteenth-century U.S. readers cultivated a common sense of the page, a sense that the shredded rags within represented their bodies, labors, and communal and affective ties to one another. Jacques Derrida writes that contemporary users of paper freight it with the Cartesian status of the body to print's soul. In his view we "reduce paper to the function of *topos* of an inert surface laid out *beneath* some markings, a substratum meant for sustaining them."<sup>4</sup> This has also defined how scholarship in print culture perceives, or rather tends not to perceive, paper.

In his influential *Letters of the Republic*, for example, Warner argues that print reflected the ideals of republicanism back to eighteenth-century Americans, guiding a process that Jürgen Habermas describes as, "the training ground for a critical public reflection.... discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself."<sup>5</sup> This discussion of print focuses on the printed words, not of the entire material text which includes paper. Warner argues that print came to be understood as a specialized form of republican discourse that reflected republican ideals of impersonality back at readers. To be in republican discourse, according to Warner, was to make a claim on impersonality. This move resembles Habermas' characterization of the public sphere as a space in which one engages in their public use of reason, which consisted of a bracketing of individual interest. For Warner, however, this impersonality was not a product of print publication and circulation. The anonymity of print did

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor)," *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 29.

not create republicanism, as a technological determinist like Walter Ong would argue. Rather, because impersonality was already understood to be a feature of republican debate, print came to be seen as impersonal because these standards of publicity were already in place when the political pamphlet emerged as an articulation of those standards. Warner illustrates the difference by calling the technology “mechanical duplication” and the recognition of the mechanically duplicated object as a “publication” only when the terms of impersonal publicity are laid over print. Or, in Warner’s words: “mechanical duplication equals publishing precisely insofar as public political discourse is impersonal.”<sup>6</sup> The important feature of all of this is the self-reflexive relationship of republicanism and print. Republicanism posited anonymous and abstract membership (for example, the invocation of the Constitution’s “We the people”), and the aesthetics of print appeared to the republican eye to be anonymous and abstract, thus defining print as the medium of republicanism. Here is how Warner sums the relationship in an abstract of *Letters*: “The public in public address developed as a new way of understanding print, in the context of a republican political language that served as a metalanguage for print.... Reading printed texts in this context, we incorporate an awareness of the indefinite others to whom they are addressed as part of the meaning of their printedness.”<sup>7</sup> Warner writes later in the book:

“Social authority... holds validity not in persons but despite them; it is located not in the virtuous citizen nor in God nor in the king but in the light of day, in the scopic vision of publicity itself. Thus print – not speech – is the ideal and idealized guardian of civic liberty.... Developed in practices of literacy that included the production and consumption of newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets, legal documents, and books, the

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” 94.

republican ideology of print arranged the values of generality over those of the personal. In this cognitive vocabulary the social diffusion of printed artifacts took on the investment of the disinterested virtues of public orientation, as opposed to the corrupting interests and passions of particular and local persons.”<sup>8</sup>

The “scopic vision of publicity itself” is understood in Warner’s work as the sight of print: anonymous, fluid, representational, lacking what Larzer Ziff would call “immanence.”<sup>9</sup> The “mechanical duplication” that is involved in producing print is clearly only that of the printing press itself, not of the paper mill. Yet, part of the “scopic vision of publicity” in the paper allegories this project identifies is scanning the page for some remnant of rag that would tie the paper sheet to the reader’s body, seeking a trace of the personal in the impersonal public circulation of papers. As we will see later in the project when discussing Anne Bradstreet, one can hold a sheet of rag paper to the light and identify large pieces of rag. Print may seem anonymous and impersonal, but there are moments when rags interrupt the reading surface prompting readers to consider whether this is also their handkerchief returning from the paper mill.

Paper allegories also place greater attention on gender in the construction of the public sphere. In *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon parses the degree to which the public use of reason in Habermas and Warner is predicated on a gendered notion of freedom that most discussions of publicity had previously ignored because being public assumed depersonalization and the bracketing of the body in a way that excludes female bodies. Dillon observes that “print produces [feminized]

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<sup>8</sup> Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1991), 15.

privacy” for the very purposes of defining masculinized public liberalism. “The construction of women as the cultural bearers of secrets and privacy occur[s] precisely within the print public sphere.... Print constructs women’s privacy and relies upon this privacy to articulate the narrative emergence of the masculine liberal subject at the same time.” Dillon also provides a strong critique of Warner, arguing that he replicates Ann Douglas’ lament that nineteenth-century domestic literature represented an “unfortunate feminization of a previously rigorous, masculine and Calvinist American culture.”<sup>10</sup> Dillon argues convincingly that in “Warner’s account, the print public sphere of the eighteenth century is comprised largely of white male writers and readers; the advent of a feminized reading public coincides, for Warner, with a turn away from civic-mindedness toward privatized liberal forms of print, including the feminized genre of the novel.”<sup>11</sup> Dillon shows the limits of Warner’s grip on print culture studies for the study of women’s writing, especially women’s writing that theorizes the relationships between gender, print, and publicity. Returning to our paper allegory above, we see that the public sphere of print is dependent on, and originates in, the private sphere of women. In my readings of paper mill advertisement poetry, poetry that calls for women’s undergarments to become novels and letters, I call upon Dillon’s sense of the coeval production of public and private, as well as her sense that the public sphere periodically publically reveals the private sphere in order to reflect its borders back to itself. We will see in chapters one and two how paper allegories are employed, often by women writers, to show how the masculine print public sphere is materially dependent for its existence on the feminine private domestic sphere.

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom*, 36-37.

This project's focus on gender in the public sphere also opens onto questions of sexuality. What is the nature of intimacy within a page: between the strangers whose rags are embedded in the page and its reader? The call for rags above imagines a one-to-one route between the lady and her lover, but what about when the sheet holds the remnants of unknown quantities of anonymous sources? In chapter three, we will see Herman Melville imagining his relation to Hawthorne through this wet-rag-pulp amalgam of comingled rags. In this respect, I think of the page much like Kate Thomas thinks of the Victorian postbag, as a space where populations comingled and letters served as the body's proxy: "the press was full of talk about how dukes and duchesses mingled with illiterate or near-illiterate farmhands—in postbags, that is." Thomas shows how the promiscuity of letters mixing in the mailbag and other forms of stranger sociability "asked everyone to imagine themselves in relations of correspondence with each other" and how queer theory helps explain how networks "simultaneously bind us and also show us divergent pathways, help us understand ourselves as both linked and dispersed, reveal the contrapuntal, often erotic relationships between fiction and counterfiction,"<sup>12</sup> The handkerchief that goes off to the paper mill promises to disperse the self absorbed into it, and also to bind it together again in a new sheet, to bind strangers together within a sheet, and to connect lovers through a letter.

### *Material Textuality*

By attending to the relations of bodies, labors, and spaces embedded within the page, readers and writers were attuned to the material text as more than a support for what was written on its surface. In a recent special issue of *PMLA* on the topic of "textual materialism," Bill

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<sup>12</sup> Kate Thomas, "Post Sex: On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (Summer 2007): 618.



Brown defines the textual materialist as one who engages in a “mode of analytic objectification that focuses on the physical properties of an embodied text,” while maintaining the difference, articulated by Leah Price, between a book (“material object”) and a text (“sequence of words”).<sup>13</sup>

Brown continues:

For the textual materialist, size matters, style matters, color matters. But despite the fact that readers can only experience a text as it is materialized in one form or another (Chartier), the literary work (like the musical work and unlike a painting or a carved sculpture) can be said to “transcend” the object (Genette 10–11). The experience of Great Expectations is a different experience as mediated by its serial publication in All the Year Round, its illustrated serialization in Harper’s Weekly, its three-volume publication by Chapman and Hall, the six-volume interpoint braille edition, and the most recent Penguin edition, let alone your Kindle, your iPhone, your headphones. But we’re still generally willing to say that each experience is the experience of Great Expectations.<sup>14</sup>

Casting light on the different things we mean when we refer “the text” or “a book,” Brown points to textual materialism’s primary focus on the physical properties of mediation in print culture. In this project, however, the lines are blurry. At times, my discussions of paper and perceptions of paper are about actual, physical, paper and its properties. This is the realm of the textual materialist most clearly outlined above by Brown. Most often, however, I read texts (words) that raise the materiality of print to attention. In my discussion of the rag advertisement, for example, I have not taken the paper of the *North Carolina Gazette* into consideration (or the layout, or what is printed next to the ad). I have chosen, rather, to pay attention to how the advertisement constructs the material text, paper, as an intimate, erotic, and somewhat enchanted object.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Bill Brown, “Introduction: Textual Materialism” *PMLA* 125.1 (January 2010): 25.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, “Introduction: Textual Materialism,” 25.

Sometimes, but much less frequently, these paper allegories go a step further and introduce a deictic phrase that encourages the reader to think of herself holding the paper described in the text. In chapter two, we will see newspapers claiming to be printed on paper made from Egyptian mummy wrappings, adding to the sensation readers were supposed to feel as they held the newspaper in their hands. These instances collapse the distance between the material text as an object and literary writing that draws attention to its very materiality.

In moving between different ways of discussing material textuality – as the study of print objects and as the study of texts concerned with the materiality of print objects – this project suggests new directions for thinking the *culture* in print culture and the *material* in material culture. The material culture of print, I argue, consists not only of the relations between human actors and the objects around them, but also between human actors, objects, and the literary and cultural texts that shape human perception and sensation of texts. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, for instance, Jane Bennett argues that things exert force in open-ended assemblages of relation, enacting uneven and shifting influence within a lively and fluid material world. How are nineteenth-century U.S. readers positioned to understand the page of rag paper as an open-ended assemblage of material remnants traced back to others? How are they to understand their relation to others through the rags they’ve sent off to the mills? What “force” is embedded within paper and what is its effect on the word printed upon it? Does the fact that the rags in paper come from a pillowcase mean that a story revealing the secrets of lovers’ pillowtalk will “seep” out of the fabric? In this posthuman frame where the object has agency, the writer seems secondary to the material object. Yet it is writers who write paper allegories. They walk a fine line between what readers know and sense about paper and how they, as writers, can shape the perception of paper for affect.

Finally, then, *Our Paper Allegories* seeks to shift the field of print culture studies toward new possibilities for thinking perception and sensation, possibilities made available by literature that reveals what early American and nineteenth-century U.S. readers could “read” when they held paper. Warner hints at something similar when in *Letters of the Republic* he writes, “printed objects – which we would commonsensically call ‘publications’ – are intelligible only under very special conditions. To think of them as publications, we must make certain assumptions about texts, speakers, addressees, and the ‘public.’”<sup>15</sup> Print culture and material culture studies are not simply about the physical characteristics of books and the figures pertaining to their circulation. These fields are about, as Warner says, the conditions of common sense and intelligibility.

To this end, even though I continue to use the language of the print public sphere in this project, I suggest that it may be more useful for the field to begin thinking in terms of Jacques Rancière’s idea of the “distribution of the sensible.” Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.”<sup>16</sup> What may have been self evident about paper during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (that it contained ragged cloth, for example) is no longer part of our sense perception, and so it must be recovered through literary texts that trace its outline. These “aesthetic practices,” writes Rancière, are “forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the

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<sup>15</sup> Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, xi.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006), 12.

community.”<sup>17</sup> What, then, would happen if we moved away from thinking of publics as organized by readers of texts (ideas) in common, and instead looked to communities organized around and through sensory experiences of print? As we will see in chapter one, papermakers told women that there would cease to be reading materials like newspapers and bibles to help grow the new nation during the revolution unless they supplied the paper mills with rags. They hoped “the ladies” would act rationally and patriotically. This is in line with standard constructions of print nationalism: liberal national publics are assembled through common reading experiences of key texts like the newspaper, the pamphlet, the religious text. But, on the other hand, the call for rags with which I began this introduction asks the lady to feel. The handkerchief she sends off is somehow marked by her body (perhaps by the proximity to her breast or by the absorption of her sweat and tears which has rendered the cloth “unfit,”) and thus, when it goes off to the paper mill and through the hands of her lover, it will return to her. This requires an understanding of paper, and of the circulation of texts, with room for a certain amount of enchantment, of vibrant matter, and resonant material. These attributes of the material text are sensible at times to the readers and writers of the texts on which this project focuses. And restoring them to the common sense about print and publicity opens up new possibilities of understanding how print organizes subjectivity and affiliation.

### *Paper Allegories*

A final example will set these questions in motion in ways that we will see again throughout this project. In 1857, Pastor M. Emory Wright wrote about his tour of the Parsons Paper Mill in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Reflecting on the process of papermaking he writes:

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<sup>17</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

It is indeed a difficult matter for an inexperienced eye to discover any relationship between the tattered contents of the rag-bag in the kitchen closet and the beautiful leaves of a costly gift-book, or between the filthy bundles that weigh down the cart of the country tin peddler and the fanciful packages that adorn the shelves and fill the drawers of the city stationer.

Here, Wright acknowledges that the book requires an experienced eye, a trained sense, in order to perceive the relationship between the rag-bag and the gift book. Such a trained eye might observe a certain continuity between the feminized domestic space of the kitchen and the feminized readership of gift books (and their value as objects of display in another room of the house, the parlor). Wright continues, “Strange as it may appear, the connection is very intimate, and he who will attentively study the curious art of papermaking, will discover many odd companionships and dependencies, of which the world at large never dreamed.” Here, Wright attends to intimacy between the rag-bag and the book, the kitchen, the paper mill, and the parlor. These intimacies and dependencies are characterized as “strange,” “odd,” and “curious.” All ways of saying “queer.” The perceptive eye reads the assemblages within the pages and ponders how the kitchen is linked to the parlor through print, how the body is extended into the page, how bodies (from different class, race, and gender positions) relate to one another in the page, and how the low and the high comeingle. The observer, continues Wright, will:

confess that the individual who disposes, at a fair valuation, of his cast-off linen, is in no mean nor trifling sense, a benefactor to the human race. He may properly ask himself, how long the operations of any Tract or Bible Society or general Publishing House, could be continued, if the supply of even worn out unmentionables should be suddenly cut off? And he will award merited praise to the dusty rag-man, nor utterly despise the poor

*chiffonier* who diligently rakes the gutters with his iron hook, and inspects every dirt heap with the zeal of a pearl-diver; acknowledging that both are of inestimable value to human society, though many a contemptuous finger may be pointed at them, and many a scornful lip curled in their presence.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the experienced eye – along with Wright’s reader of this paper allegory – reveals how paper organizes the social body, the community. The dusty rag-man, or chiffonier, commonly represented as an African American outcast (see Figure 1), is said to be given “inestimable” value to “human society” because without him texts that serve important social functions like the bible will cease to exist. This valuation of the African American rag picker is not in accordance with actual social or legal practice, but by reimagining “human society” along lines of material production, he is thus repositioned. And, again, there are those underpants, crying out to connect sexuality and the body to the sacred text. Paper connects those at the top of society with those at the bottom, even making the top dependent on the bottom for continued existence as a society with learning and communication. Paper also connects the mind to the “bottom” by routing all reading not only through the eyes and into the brain, but also through the underpants.

The argument of this project, then, is that paper is so common to contemporary readers’ senses that it has mostly fallen out of intelligibility, and that we must lay aside that habit of letting paper recede from view if we are to understand more about print culture in colonial American and antebellum U.S. literature and culture. In Derrida’s words, “on this commonsense view, paper would be a body-subject or body-substance, an immobile and impassible surface

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<sup>18</sup> M. Emory Wright, *The Parson’s Paper Mill at Holyoke, Mass. Embracing A Minute Description of the Paper Manufacture in its Various Departments* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Samuel Bowles & Company, Printers, 1857), 19-20.

underlying the traces that may come along and affect it from the outside.”<sup>19</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for different reasons, writers constructed and drew on a different common sense of the page to wage arguments about, or to figure differently, gender, race, affiliation, and intimacy. In order for print culture studies to understand more fully what print communicated, a fuller account of the meaning making, or signifying, apparatus is necessary. Paper allegories can attune us to what earlier readers perceived, or were encouraged to perceive, in the text and the material text – reading words on the page, but also being open to reading what is embedded within the page.

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida, “Paper or Me, You Know...,” 42.



Figure 1: "The Rag Picker" illustration in *City Characters, or, Familiar Scenes in Town* (Philadelphia: Geo. S. Appleton; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1851), p. 80. Courtesy of the Library Company of America.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Paper Nationalism

On the verge of the U.S. Civil War, mere days after the Dred Scott decision, Pastor M. Emory Wright of Holyoke, Massachusetts wished that, for just one day, the disjointed social order of humanity would run more like a paper mill. Wright had visited the Parsons Paper Mill in Holyoke and was writing an account of his tour in the March 1857 *National Magazine*, an account to which he added and reprinted as a pamphlet that same month. Wright was fascinated with the size of the machine and the minute calibrations coordinating different parts so that the elaborate machine produced a single unbroken roll of paper. “In the movements of this wonderful machine,” Wright says, “with its almost infinitude of parts, the least degree of success requires well-nigh a hair-breadth accuracy in the adjustment of every feature.” As he talks to millworkers and observes the machine, Wright’s admiration of the papermaking process heightens as his imagination grants the machine the character of a nation. “In reply to some remark of mine...,” Wright continues, “the operator philosophically observed: ‘We can’t do anything unless all parts of the machine *draw together*.’” Despite the fact that “the machine occupies... eleven hundred square feet,” and that the belt of paper travels “one hundred feet, or six rods” through it, Wright finds that the machine runs with a “completeness and perfect correspondence of all the parts, that, aside from occasional breakages, which are inevitable, and the adjustments which the different varieties of paper always require, no extraordinary interruption may occur for weeks, or even months.” The ability to draw together, to correspond, and to mend inevitable disruptions seemed to Wright an impossible wish for the United States

that Abraham Lincoln would the next summer compare to a “house divided.” “A thousand pities,” Wright concludes, “that the multitudinous wheels, and cranks, and pinions of human society, which so often so ruinously break, or hideously creak, could not, for at least one diurnal revolution, as smoothly and harmoniously move as the complicated machinery of the paper mill.”<sup>20</sup>

For as long as it was made from cloth rags, paper and its production offered writers of everything from advertising copy to poetry and fiction a set of metaphors through which to figure the nation. Wright certainly was not the first to compare the U.S. nation state to a manufactory, but his turning specifically to paper manufacture as a figure of the nation, especially in its federated character, owes to tradition dating to at least 1692.<sup>21</sup> Because a sheet of paper was made from the particles of hundreds, if not thousands, of rags that were shredded, pulped, and reconstituted into a single sheet, and because those rags were often collected from the homes of those living near the mills, the page came to be seen as a concrete manifestation of the body politic. Put simply, one could say of both the nation and the sheet of paper, *out of many, one*. Wright recognizes this in the machine, but also in the sheet of paper itself. He observes: “The floors [of the mill rag room] are piled and littered with rags, of all imaginable sorts, sizes, and colors, mingled in such hopeless confusion as apparently to defy the most patient efforts to classify them. An unpractised [sic] eye would surely not select those torn and filthy fragments as representatives of even a nominal value. But a few hours shall witness the truly marvelous transformation of that unsightly mass of ‘shreds and patches’ into an article of such beauty and

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<sup>20</sup> M. Emory Wright, *The Parson’s Paper Mill at Holyoke, Mass. Embracing A Minute Description of the Paper Manufacture in its Various Departments* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Samuel Bowles & Company, Printers, 1857), 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> On the complementary emergence of industrialism and federalism in the early U.S. see Laura Rival, *The American Manufactory: Art, Labor, and the World of Things in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

utility that the admiration of the nicest critic may be successfully challenged.”<sup>22</sup> The diversity of rags, shreds, patches – all plural nouns – are incorporated into the singular, “article,” and in the process of combination are turned into something of value. Wright does not explicitly link the turning of cloth shreds into a sheet to nation formation in the passage just quoted, but it reads that way when seen as part of the longer tradition of literary writing and visual/material culture that this chapter synthesizes. Papermakers, for example, emblazoned the wrappers that held reams of paper together with the “E Pluribus Unum” motto (see Figure 2). The presence of this motto indicates not only that nation building was linked with commodity production in the early republic, but also that papermaking offered a metaphor, grounded in familiar material practices, for turning the many into the one. Just as the eagle represents the union of federated states, the ream wrapper produces “ONE REAM” out of hundreds of sheets of paper, sheets which are, in turn, the product of many rags.

As I will argue in this chapter, paying attention to narratives like Wright’s provides a key for understanding more fully the role of print, or more specifically the role of the material text, in the production of the nation as both an ideological affiliation and a material practice. Early American studies has been heavily invested in understanding the role of print in the formation of republican government and national culture. Michael Warner, bringing ideas from Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson to bear on early American literature, influentially demonstrated how in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it became “possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading [the impersonal printed object], becoming part of an arena of the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediated imaginings.”

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<sup>22</sup> Wright, *The Parson’s Paper Mill*, 7-8.



Figure 2: Late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century ream wrapper of the Eliphalet Thorp paper mill. Thorp (1738-1812) was a “sergeant at the Lexington Alarm and ensign of Continental infantry” (Lineage Book of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Volume XIV, Washington DC: 1896, 222). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

In the effort to understand how reading practices and the circulation of print developed a print public sphere in which “an individual reads in a manner that implicitly relates him- or herself to the indefinite others of a print public,” such models, I argue, have not paid full attention to how the production of the material text, rather than the circulation and consumption of print, was itself a mediated imagining of self to others in the colony or nation.<sup>23</sup> In essence, I claim that, with a few recent major exceptions, the scholarship largely takes the material existence of texts for granted even though writing of period about print and the nation often focuses on the difficulties and uncertainties of sustaining the production of printed materials.<sup>24</sup>

The paper manufactory represented Pastor Wright’s desire for a union of diverse constituent parts that, with the right negotiation, would correspond. We need to look no further than Wright’s “thousand pities,” or his essay’s simultaneity with the Dred Scott decision, to understand that such a goal was far from reality. Accordingly, the idea of “paper nationalism” that I develop here is not meant to recuperate the nation or nationalism as a meaningful frame narrative for the study of colonial and U.S. culture. Rather, I am interested in how a metaphorical understanding of paper, developed in relation to a technical understanding of paper, recruited communities to both a material practice of papermaking that was beneficial to the private and public interests of the state and an ideological sense of unification.

This chapter, like the rest of this project, negotiates the dialectical relationship between the material reality of papermaking (the Fourdrinier machine *was* large and incorporated many moving parts) and the metaphors of publicity, nation, gender, race, and sexuality that (as in

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Trish Loughran’s *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation-Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) is a notable example.

Wright's longing for a nation on the model of the paper mill) people projected onto paper. They certainly are different things, but at times it becomes difficult to tell them apart. A single sheet of paper really was composed of thousands of shreds of cloth collected from all over, and possibly from within one's own community. Thus it is not unimaginable, if a bit fantastical, to entertain the unlikely possibility of one's own shirt being comingled with the neighbor's in the paper one read. Into the space of that unlikelihood, however, entered a wide range of texts that encouraged and manipulated such identifications.

### *Nation as Material Text*

A piece of paper is an archive of social relations. So asserts Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* on May 1, 1712. "When I trace in my Mind a Bundle of Rags to a Quire of Spectators, I find so many Hands employ'd in every Step they take thro their whole Progress, that while I am writing a Spectator, I fancy my self providing Bread for a Multitude." Addison's observation fashions *The Spectator* as the connective tissue of the English public through the "Material and the Formal.... Benefits which accrue to the Publick from these my Speculations." Included in the "formal" benefits of *The Spectator* – what Addison describes as "those Advantages which my Readers receive, as their Minds are either improv'd or delighted by these my daily Labours" – is what Jürgen Habermas and others have theorized as the rise of a public sphere comprised of private individuals using reason. Addison puts the formal benefits of the publication on equal footing with the material, and then spends the rest of his column expounding upon them. "By the Word Material" Addison says he means "those Benefits which arise to the Publick from these my Speculations, as they consume a considerable quantity of our Paper Manufacture, employ our Artisans in Printing, and find Business for great Numbers of Indigent Persons." In other words, if

a lot of people read *The Spectator* and benefit the public, it's equally important that a lot of people work to make the *The Spectator* as a material object. But if Addison pays attention to the construction of the public through the material text, scholars of the public sphere, except when citing circulation numbers of printed materials, have not.

Although Addison does take interest in how printed texts are circulated (or how they “fly thro' the Town in Post-Men, Post-Boys, Daily-Courants, Reviews, Medleys, and Examiners. Men, Women, and Children contend who shall be the first Bearers of them, and get their daily Sustenance by spreading them”) his point is to focus on how *The Spectator*'s need for paper, and the production of it, draws together everyone from the “Prince” to “Indigent Persons.” Reading and discussing content is an important aspect of *The Spectator*'s service to the public, but it cannot happen without the production of paper, a process that “takes into it several mean Materials which could be put to no other use, and affords Work for several Hands in the collecting of them.”<sup>25</sup> Mr. Spectator says:

Our Paper-Manufacture takes into it several mean Materials which could be put to no other use, and affords Work for several Hands in the collecting of them, which are incapable of any other Employment. Those poor Retailers, whom we see so busy in every Street, deliver in their respective Gleanings to the Merchant. The Merchant carries them in Loads to the Paper-Mill, where they pass thro' a fresh Set of Hands, and give life to another Trade. Those who have Mills on their Estates, by this means considerably raise their Rents, and the whole Nation is in a great measure supply'd with a Manufacture, for which formerly she was obliged to her Neighbours.

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 367, May 1, 1712, 193.

Producing *The Spectator* requires so many workers in different sectors of the economy that papermaking links the rag picker, the merchant, the industrialist, and the landlord. Further, the domestic supply protects the nation from dependence on foreign sources. Congratulating himself, Mr. Spectator writes, “In short, when I trace in my Mind a Bundle of Rags to a Quire of Spectators, I find so many Hands employ'd in every Step they take thro their whole Progress, that while I am writing a Spectator, I fancy my self providing Bread for a Multitude.”<sup>26</sup> What links Britain together in this narrative is not a national character, race, or culture: it is having had physical contact with rag or paper somewhere in the process of producing and using *The Spectator*. And, as I discussed in the introduction, circulations of rags and paper create material links between people and across the social body. “It is pleasant enough to consider the Changes that a Linnen Fragment undergoes, by passing thro' the several Hands above mentioned,” Mr. Spectator muses. Dutch linens come into the country as cloth and leave as letters in the post: “The finest pieces of Holland, when worn to Tatters, assume a new Whiteness more beautiful than their first, and often return in the shape of Letters to their Native Country.” This installment of *The Spectator* is also the origin of the handkerchief turned billet doux story examined in the introduction: “A Lady's Shift may be metamorphosed into Billet-doux, and come into her Possession a second time. A Beau may peruse his Cravat after it is worn out, with greater Pleasure and Advantage than ever he did in a Glass.” In this material world of print, the text links together the chiffonier picking rags in the dung hill with the royal family: “In a word, a Piece of Cloth, after having officiated for some Years as a Towel or a Napkin, may by this means be

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<sup>26</sup> Addison, *The Spectator*, 193.



raised from a Dung-hill, and become the most valuable Piece of Furniture in a Prince's Cabinet.”<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Spectator’s reflection on paper is not the only construction of a public through the material construction of a text. In 1779, the *London Magazine* ran a serialized it-narrative called *The Adventures of a Quire of Paper* which, like Mr. Spectator’s reflections, draws all of London together through the production and circulation of pieces of paper that originate from a single flax plant/piece of linen. Gifted with speech from an individual speaker who can be in more than one place at a time as the cloth is torn or the quire of paper divided, the narrative is able to look upon the whole of London at once:

I was at one moment in the following strange and contradictory situations. In a fast-day prayer at the bottom of some mince piece, in all the torments of the oven; and in a Panegyrick on the Cardinal Virtues, in the hands of a scolding cook fingering a Norfolk turkey, which had been a private bribe from a bawd to a greedy city justice. In the form of a pastoral I was rubbing the grease off a gridiron in an eating house; and as A Kind Warning to Christians, clapped under a pot of porter just taken from the fire, over which a chairman and drayman were quarrelling, and damning each other with all their might. Here, as A Picture of delicate Tenderness, I was pinned round the fat of a haunch of venison, in an alderman’s kitchen; and there, An Essay on the Powers of Harmony, strained over half an old comb, out of which a chimney sweeper’s imp twanged something like the Black Joke. In all the flames and sufferings of a fop’s love letter, I was in one place pressed tenderly to a snowy bosom, and in another, in the form of an elegant definition of the graces, thrust full of Scotch snuff between the dirty leathern stays of a

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<sup>27</sup> Addison, *The Spectator*, 194.

washerwoman and her dirtier bosom. Here, as a Birth Day Ode, Miss Fondler made me serve a shroud to her dead kitten, and there in the character of An Elegy on a much lamented Friend, I was carved into a pattern for Master Wealthy's christening cap.... In short, the scenes I have passed through have been as various as human nature, and as opposite to each other, as the vengeance breathing discourse in your hand is, to the gospel of meekness, humility, and universal good-will.<sup>28</sup>

The it-narrative provides a unique form through which to imagine the construction of community through the material of paper. It is not that everyone around London is reading the same text as one another, it is that they are using paper from the same quire. Sometimes the paper is used to transmit writing (odes, panegyrics, letters) and at other times it is used for cooking or burying the dead. Paper from the same quire touches the breast of the lady at the same time that it touches the breast of the baud. Mr. Spectator shows us how paper manufacture especially links the public together, and the talking quire of paper shows how the circulation of itself (for reading and use as a thing) does the same. They also show us that work in print culture and public sphere theory must attend to how the material text arranges publics outside of reading the use of reason. The lady and baud are linked not through reading and discussing a tract, but through their shared proximity to a piece of paper that originated in a single flax plant. In the rest of this chapter I focus on how the state is figured through the materiality of paper, paying special attention to how concerns over the availability of rags and paper converge with concerns over the preservation of the state.

### **Continentials and Confederates: Imagining Community on Paper**

#### *Continentials*

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<sup>28</sup> "The Adventures of a Quire of Paper," *The London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* Volume XLVIII (October 1779): 451.

The importance of paper for the material survival of the nation is evident in stories about the needs of the Continental army. One Providence newspaper connects the availability of rags and paper to the success of the Army during the war: “As paper is now much wanted for the army, and other necessary purposes (which cannot be manufactured without rags) it is hoped every friend of America will encourage the saving and collecting them.”<sup>29</sup> A popular legend about Benjamin Franklin’s attic warehouse further illustrates this situation. Before the Battle of Monmouth in 1778, soldiers searched Philadelphia for paper that could be used to make cartridges and wadding for rifles. 2500 copies of the Rev. Gilbert Tennent’s *Late Association for Defence Farther Encouraged: Or, Defensive War Defended, with True Christianity* are said to have been held for nonpayment in the “garret” attic of Benjamin Franklin’s print shop. These were then torn up and used for cartridges and wadding at Monmouth. When this story is retold, emphasis is placed on the relation of the content of the printed matter, on defensive war, and its use in the world not as something to be read, but as weaponry. An early-twentieth century history of papermaking retells the story under the heading “A sermon effectively delivered,” playing, of course, on the “delivery” of the sermon at the end of a rifle. “These [pamphlets] were used for musket cartridges and ‘wadding,’” begins the retelling before going further in connecting the author and the scene of war. “The battle... raged about old Tenant church, where fought representatives from every one of the thirteen colonies, mingling their patriotic blood upon the historic field, the sermon proved one of the most effective ever delivered. The Rev. Mr. Tenant, when he penned his discourse, probably had no idea that it would ever be delivered in so forceful a manner, just outside the doors of his church.”<sup>30</sup> Prioritizing the materiality of paper itself in the

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<sup>29</sup> *The Providence Gazette; and Country Journal*, March 22, 1777, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Frank O. Butler, *The Story of Paper-Making, an Account of Paper-Making from Its Earliest Known Record Down to the Present Time* (Chicago: J.W. Paper Company, 1901), 37-38. This

defense of the nation over the circulation of ideas about defense, the Franklin story emphasizes the value of paper as a thing over its value as a support for writing and reading in the public sphere. Paper functions similarly, however, even when it serves as reading material.

And yet, to use a term of Jacques Derrida's, there is a very real sense in which the state is a "paper machine." Paper, Derrida points out, "hold[s] a sacred power. It has the force of law, it gives accreditation, it incorporates, it even embodies the soul of the law, its letter and its spirit." Paper is "indissociable from the Ministry of Justice... from the rituals of legalization and legitimation, from the archive of charters and constitutions for what we call, in the double sense of the word, *acts*."<sup>31</sup> We need look no further than "undocumented persons," or in the French the *sans-papiers*, paperless persons, to understand how paper and its metaphors actually and figuratively constitute the state and its imaginary. For it is still through "the legitimating authority of paper" that we are (or are not) accredited as citizens, workers, visitors, and bearers of rights. "Here I am," Derrida writes, "this is my body, see this signature on this paper – it's me, it's mine, it's me so-and-so, I sign before you, I present myself here; this paper that remains represents me."<sup>32</sup> In these moments we find neither the simple fact of paper documents nor a simple metaphor for paper, but an act, or a performative of paper. The dialectic described above between the material facts of paper and papermaking and the metaphorical and ideological work for which paper is recruited produces this tension. "Indeterminate matter but already virtuality,

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story may be apocryphal; Tennent's "Defensive War" was printed by Franklin in 1748, and thirty years seems a long time to keep 2500 sermon pamphlets pending payment. As with most stories about Franklin, however, the persistence of its circulation and the value of the story for those who retell it seems more significant than its veracity. Another version of this story is told about the pacifist *Martyr's Mirror* being used at wadding. See David Luthy, "The Ephrata Martyrs' Mirror: Shot From Patriots' Muskets," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 9.1 (1986): 2-5.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor)" *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 58

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, "Paper or Me, You Know...", 57.

*dynamis* as potentiality but also as power, power incorporated in a natural matter but force of law, in-formal matter for information but already form and act, act as action but also as archive – there you have the assumed tensions or contradictions that have to be thought under the name of ‘paper.’”<sup>33</sup> This chapter demonstrates that where we have studied the affect of printed material in the construction of collectivities, nations, and publics, we have largely taken the material existence of those texts for granted despite the fact that their writers and readers emphatically did not.

In 1765, “B. Mecom” printed a pamphlet containing a thinly-veiled protest against the Stamp Act, entitled *A New Collection of Verses Applied to the First of November, A.D. 1765, &c. Including a Prediction that the S---p-A-t shall not take Place in North-America, Together with A poetical DREAM CONCERNING Stamped PAPERS*. In the “poetical dream,” the speaker happens upon a group of anthropomorphized papers complaining about the adverse affects the Stamp Act will have on their role in mediating America. “One Night,” recalls the dreamer:

as I lay slumbering in my Bed, / Dark Images crouded [sic] into my Head. / I thought, as through the Town I walk’d alone, / I, at a Distance heard a grievous Moan. / Attention rous’d; I then approach’d more near, / And found a Croud [sic] of PAPERS gather’d there. / To each of them, as to the Prophet’s Ass, / A Tounge was giv’n to tell his wretched Case.... / They spoke by Turns: In this they all agree, / To plead the Cause of *English Liberty*: / And deprecate the Woe, which each one thought / Would, by the St--p-A-t, soon on them be brought.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Derrida, “Paper or Me, You Know...,” 58.

<sup>34</sup> *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, in *A New Collection of Verses Applied to the First of November, A.D. 1765, &c. Including a Prediction that the S---p-A-t shall not tak Place in North-America, Together with A poetical DREAM CONCERNING Stamped PAPERS* (New Haven: B. Mecom, 1765), 19.

One by one, the papers speak about how, by taxing official documents and other papers, the Stamp Act will be injurious to the health of the colonies, and to the “English Liberty” of colonists. In order of appearance, the personified papers are “the Bond,” the “Papers of the Court: Summons and Writ,” “Probate Papers,” “Diploma,” “License Paper,” “[News]Paper,” and the “Almanack.” The papers include those that perform acts of the state, such as the bond that is “so much Use / To Men of all Professions, rich and Poor, / Whose Property I daily do secure,” or the summons and writ that “call’d the Debtor to discharge his Debt,” and that “many Rogues at Justice’ [sic] Bar have set.” They also include papers that constitute the print public sphere such as the almanac that “try’d... to please / Both Rich and Poor, and Men of all Degrees” by talking about “the Stars and future Scenes.” The newspaper claims a position of prominence among all the papers, crying out:

Who, of ye all, has shewn a readier Mind, / At once to please and profit all Mankind? / I  
travel far and near; the World I range / And carry with me all that’s *new* and strange. /  
Advices of Importance I convey; / As well as merry Tales, to please the Gay. / Must I be  
burden’d with this cruel St--p, / Which will my Speed and Progress greatly cramp?<sup>35</sup>

The Stamp Act, according to the speaking papers, threatens not only the production of persons documented in deeds and diplomas, but the drawing together of “Men of all Degrees” within reading publics.

Any discussion of the “Speed and Progress” of the periodical press with respect to the health of a polity should make us think of *Imagined Communities*, in which Benedict Anderson theorizes the role of print periodicals in the organization of a large impersonal population into its

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<sup>35</sup> *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 20-22.

own national consciousness. The newspaper produces a ritual of reading with unknown others in both simultaneity and anonymity; it emplots national consciousness. Anderson writes:

“The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing... creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only this day, not that.... The significance of this mass ceremony... is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.

Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals, throughout the calendar.... At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.... creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.<sup>36</sup>

And thus in the *Poetical Dream*, the speaking newspaper emphasizes that the Stamp Act will impede the paper’s function in time and space. The newspaper’s “far and near” reach and the temporality of its serial publication, or its “Speed and Progress,” will be “greatly cramp[ed].” The same goes for the almanac which is published annually but “if deny’d [reprieve from the Stamp Act] I fear / I cannot live to see another Year.”<sup>37</sup> The speaking papers of the *Poetical*

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<sup>36</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2006), 35-36.

<sup>37</sup> *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 23.

*Dream* unsettle the notion of a stable material world of print from which print culture or print nationalism might arise.

Anderson's foundational narrative relies on the promise of serial time, the notion that today's newspaper will be obsolete tomorrow when it is replaced by tomorrow's edition. However, the rituals of community in anonymity come under threat as the *Poetical Dream* speaker hears "The wretched Papers [sic] dying Groans."<sup>38</sup> The *Poetical Dream* requires us to think about what happens when the ritual consumption of the newspaper comes under threat. Even though Anderson is willing to treat the newspaper as a commodity, paper appears in its fetish character in the during his process of imagining community. That is, the newspaper appears to readers for consumption without consideration of how it was produced. Thus, as it's offered, Anderson's theory of print nationalism depends on readers' belief – Anderson calls it their "remarkable confidence" – in the future consumption of newspapers without offering an account of the material conditions that would allow this. Forgetting the half of Robert Darnton's "communications circuit" (see figure 3) that represents the printers, suppliers, shippers, and booksellers, one is asked to accept that the newspaper will simply be there.<sup>39</sup>

But this is not how colonial Americans experienced the newspaper and other forms of print. Rags were always in short supply, threatening to choke the progress of papermaking, which meant that pleas for rags were present in the everyday lives of readers. These pleas yoked the fate of printed material to the fate of the colonies/nation and recruited readers to do their patriotic duty by collecting rags for the production of paper. A broadside advertisement printed and distributed in January 1777 provides one example of how these matters were linked:

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<sup>38</sup> *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> See Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111.3 (1982): 68.



Among the necessary articles wherewith America has usually been supplied from abroad, PAPER was a very considerable and important one; we could not subsist, in a state of society without it. And very large sums were annually paid and lent out of America for the purchase of it; but since our disunion with Great Britain, our supplies of paper from thence have totally ceased, and almost from every other part of the World; so that the United States of America, are reduced to the necessity of suffering the great inconveniences, through want of that necessary article; or of becoming manufacturers of it themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Here, the author links the availability of paper to the ability to maintain the state of society. This might seem like a hyperbolic claim, but it is hardly exceptional. A column in the *Connecticut Courant* from September 1777 makes a similar case. “Consider their [the paper mill owners’] distress on account of the scarcity of RAGS. The business of Paper-Making and Printing is at an end if Rags are not to be had.... The News Paper must inevitably stop, or be reduced to a half sheet – The Schools will be essentially affected, and all writing business cease.”<sup>41</sup> The making of paper itself becomes a primary concern for building and conducting the nation. The state of society is maintained on paper through documents, newspapers, and literate activity in the public sphere, but early American newspapers reiterate their uncertain existence unless readers contribute to the process of producing paper. This is hardly the “remarkable confidence of community in anonymity... the hallmark of modern nations,” but a deep worry about the existence of paper and the precariousness of the nation. If the United States is to become a separate entity from Great Britain, then they must become “manufacturers of it themselves.”

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<sup>40</sup> “New-Haven Paper-Mill” (New Haven: The Proprietors of the Mill, January 1777).

<sup>41</sup> “To the Ladies,” *The Connecticut Courant and Hartford Weekly Intelligencer*, Monday September 29, 1777.

As early as the 1690s, paper had already figured in the symbolic logic of the colonies' independence from Great Britain. The first large-scale paper mill in North America was established in Germantown outside Philadelphia in 1690, and it figures prominently in Richard Frame's 1692 poetic survey of Pennsylvania, "A Short Description of Pennsylvania, Or, a RELATION What things are known, enjoyed, and like to be discovered in the said Province Presented as a Token of Good Will to the People of England." Frame describes the riches of Pennsylvania with an eye to attracting investment from fellow Englishmen across the Atlantic:

TO all our Friends that do desire to know.  
What Country 'tis we live in, this will show.  
Attend to hear the Story I shall tell,  
No doubt but you will like this Country well. . . .  
Here are more things than I can well express,  
Strange to be seen in such a Wilderness.  
By Day we work, at Night we rest in Peace,  
So that each Day our Substance doth increase:  
O blessed be his Name, who doth provide  
For you, and us, and all the World beside. . . .

The many apparent riches of Pennsylvania include livestock, vegetation, precious metals, and strong building materials, but at the conclusion of the poem Frame notes a certain synergy between the work of the German and Dutch, whose expertise in producing linen and paper merge to produce a closed system.

The German-Town of which I spoke before,  
Which is, at last, in length one Mile and More,

Where lives High-German People,  
and Low-Dutch,  
Whose Trade in weaving Linnin Cloth is much,  
There grows the Flax, as also you may know,  
That from the same they do divide the Tow;  
Their Trade fits well within this Habitation,  
We find Convenience for their Occupation.  
One Trade brings in imployment for another.  
So that we may suppose each Trade a Brother;  
From Linnin Rags good Paper doth derive,  
The first trade keeps the second Trade alive:  
Without the first the second cannot be,  
Therefore since these two can so well agree,  
Convenience doth approve to place them nigh,  
One in the German-Town, 'tother hard by.  
A Paper Mill near German-Town doth stand,  
So that the Flax, which first springs from the Land,  
First Flax, then Yarn, and then they must begin,  
To weave the same, which they took pains to spin.  
Also, when on our backs it is well worn,  
Some of the same remains Ragged and Torn;  
Then of those Rags our Paper it is made,  
Which in process of time doth waste and fade:

So what comes from the Earth, appeareth plain,  
The same in Time returns to Earth again.  
So much for what I have truly Compos'd,  
Which is but a part of what may be disclosed,  
Concluding of this, and what is behind,  
I may tell you more of my Mind;  
But in the mean time be content with this same,  
Which at present is all from your Friend

RICHARD FRAME.<sup>42</sup>

The fraternal manufactures of linen and papermakers produce a perpetual harmony. Flax grows from the ground, is woven into linen, which is worn out and eventually sent to the paper mill. Paper, too, wears out and returns to the ground where it will become flax. The circularity of this process is mirrored in the poem's rhyming couplets; paired "brothers" form codependent units as the poem progresses. Frame himself is drawn into this pairing as the poem anticipates his name and positions him as the poem's final rhyme. The rhyming couplets establish a system of pairings like linen and flax, and these pairings do not leave room for interruption from outside. That is, the rhyme scheme is uninterrupted from beginning to end, just as the cycle of dirt to flax to linen to paper to dirt continues apace: "So what comes from the Earth, appeareth plain, / The same in Time returns to Earth again." Frame's description of papermaking, in other words, does not require the importation of rags from abroad. Unlike the 1777 New Haven writer who notes that paper "has usually been supplied from abroad," Frame imagines a polity that is perfectly

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Frame, "A Short Description of Pennsylvania, Or, a RELATION What things are known, enjoyed, and like to be discovered in the said Province Presented as a Token of Good Will to the People of England," (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1692), 7-8.

capable of producing its paper with no input from foreign trade. Political independence may not be one of Frame's goals in 1690, but he nonetheless produces an account of a place where material abundance permits "The first trade" in rags to "[keep] the second Trade" in paper "alive." During the Revolutionary moment, this is the material and political economy that papermakers and newspaper writers desire.

If Richard Frame is included in the fraternity of end rhymes and the perfect order of productive abundance in late seventeenth-century Pennsylvania, then, insofar as he represents the citizen rag collector, he is absent from late eighteenth-century anxiety-ridden accounts of papermaking. Presumably when Frame writes that, "when on our backs [linen] is well worn, / Some of the same remains Ragged and Torn; / Then of those Rags our Paper it is made," he actively delivers those rags to the papermill. Eighteenth-century newspaper readers, like those in New Haven, apparently needed to be recruited to help complete the cycle. They were reminded that the newspapers and printers would cease unless they, patriotically collected the rags off their backs:

The Subscribers therefore, to prevent these inconveniences, and as far as they are able to promote the public good, confidently with their own private advantage, have. . . lately erected and finished a PAPER MILL, at New Haven.... But as the success of this undertaking absolutely depends upon their receiving sufficient supplies of COTTON and LINEN RAGS, without which, the manufacture of paper cannot by any means be carried on, hereby earnestly solicit and hope to obtain assistance and encouragement from all persons of both sexes, more especially from the good women, who are friends to the freedom and interest of American, and this place in particular, in collecting supplies of this essential requisite to paper-making; which might easily be done, by a constant care

and attention to save the cotton and linen rags.... The great difficulty of obtaining supplies of rags to support a paper manufacture, arises, not from their real scarcity or insufficient quantity; but from their inconsiderable value, which affords no immediate inducement equivalent to the trouble of saving them; – the inducement therefore must arise from the love of our country, and the benefit that individuals will receive, in a full enjoyment of freedom and property in common with the whole community in general.... We are the public’s humble servants, THE PROPRIETORS OF THE MILL, Who will give Two Pence per pound for clean cotton and linen rags.<sup>43</sup>

According to these advertisements, it is not simply reading newspapers and participating in public debate that generates either the public sphere or a print nationalist structure of feeling. It also entails entering into the material circuit of linen and paper. National feeling – “love of country” and a sense of the “public good” – here pertains to “collecting supplies of this essential requisite to paper-making.” Nationalism is not merely produced by the arrival of the newspaper in serial time, but produced from the specter of its absence. Here, the idea of the nation does not arise out of the notion of a stranger who reads the same text elsewhere, but of the stranger whose rags are mixed into the paper along with your own.

And as the above appeal to “the good women” makes clear, this form of being in “common with the whole community in general” is not limited to men. The promotional literature issued by papermakers linked rag collection to what Linda Kerber has called “republican motherhood” in order to mobilize women’s para-industrial labor, attempting to harmonize the interests of nation, commerce, and citizenry. While John Locke’s 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* makes an early link between the raising of children and

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<sup>43</sup> “New-Haven Paper-Mill.”

paper itself (“white Paper receives any characters”), papermakers linked women’s work as rag collectors to the republican imperative to raise and educate patriotic capable children, nurtured into proper forms of citizenship.<sup>44</sup> An 1808 advertisement from a paper mill in Fort Edward, New York is but one example of the way giving rags was associated with the work of republican motherhood in which “the Republican Mother integrated political values into her domestic life”: “It is not thought that this appeal to our countrywomen will prove unavailing when they reflect that without their assistance they cannot be supplied with the useful article of paper.... For clean cotton and linen rags of every colour and description, matrons can be furnished with bibles... mothers with grammars, spelling books, and primers for their children.” If, in Linda Kerber’s account of republican womanhood, “righteous mothers were asked to raise the virtuous male citizens on whom the Republic depended,” then ensuring the supply of paper by collecting rags was an activity understood to directly connect domestic and political life.<sup>45</sup> This demonstrates

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<sup>44</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>45</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11,10. Fort Edward newspaper quoted in the “The Rag Supply A Hundred Years Ago” *World’s Trade Paper Review*, January 20, 1893. Kerber quotes from calls for rags in *Women of the Republic*, while discussing the republican woman’s place in early national economy, but they appear in her discussion of consumption codes. She writes, “the belief that consumption behaviors had political implications would persist long after the Revolution.... Buying American wares became a patriotic gesture, intended to support ‘infant’ manufacturers threatened by more fashionable products from abroad; it was up to American women to provide a protected market for domestic goods. A Virginia papermaker was frank to admit that when he had asked women to sell household rags to him few were forthcoming, but he proceeded to appeal ‘to the *Public Spirit* of the Ladies.’ Since support of home manufacturers was patriotic, “the lady favouring them with the largest supply [of rags] will be entitled to a distinguished place in the temple of PATRIOTISM.” Without acknowledging it, Kerber switches from discussing consumption of products to their production. These patriotic women are not being asked to buy American paper, newspapers, or books, but rather to direct their patriotic feeling to its manufacture. I find this especially interesting given the way these ads construct the relatedness between seemingly different aspects of republican womanhood, harmonizing the politics of domestic economy to literacy and religious instruction.

how manufacturers framed women's domestic labor as an essential prerequisite for the fulfillment of the ideal role of educators and moral influencers. Without rags, no paper, and without paper, no books, bibles, or primers. Furthermore, such paper products could be gained for use in the home in exchange for more rags.

Such arguments were common in calls for rags. Near the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, a Portland, Maine newspaper called for "the attention of the LADIES, [and other] inhabitants of the District..." to "invite all persons, whether rich or poor, old or young, male or female, but more especially of the sex last mentioned, to be very attentive to the *Saving of Rags*." The owners of the new paper mill declared, "It must afford pleasure and satisfaction to patriotic minds to reflect that while in the pursuit of any private business... they are at the same time promoting that of the public. [...] They will receive a generous price for the Rags they may have and be intitled [sic] to the thanks of all their fellow citizens: For there is not a man, woman or child who *reads* or *writes*, nor one who uses PAPER for the various purposes to which is constantly applied, but would be benefitted by the manufacture of that useful article, Therefore, *Save your Rags*."<sup>46</sup> This ad copy deploys the rhetoric of Kerber's republican motherhood by explicitly "politicizing private behavior," framing the domestic space of the home and the domestic space of the nation as parallel spheres of women's influence without granting women full citizenship in the nation.<sup>47</sup> Thus we see the paper mill owners making the case that saving rags harmonizes the private interests of domestic economy with the public interest of domestic

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Manipulated by papermakers, the rhetoric of republican womanhood leverages the instruction of children and national unification in order to collect rags.

<sup>46</sup> *Eastern Herald* (August 17, 1795), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 16.



manufacture: “It must afford pleasure and satisfaction to patriotic minds to reflect that while in the pursuit of any private business... they are at the same time promoting that of the public.”

This call also hints at an appeal to the republican mother to educate and prepare male children for citizenship, through the figure of the literate child and its need for material: “For there is not a man, woman or child who *reads* or *writes*, nor one who uses PAPER for the various purposes to which is constantly applied, but would be benefitted by the manufacture of that useful article.”

Saving rags for the paper mill is patriotic not merely because it conserves resources during uncertain political times – like in the midst of war – but also because of the special nature of its products (bibles, newspapers, primers) for creating citizens. Extending the work of the papermill into the home is figured as a necessary precondition for other responsibilities of the republican woman that involve instruction in reading. Women become important, even if somewhat obscured, laborers in the production of the material text and the nation.

These dynamics are visually represented in ream wrappers from the period, especially one from the Gilpin & Co. paper mill on the Brandywine River (see Figure 3). Like the ream wrapper already discussed above, this also positions the manufacture of paper at the nexus of national space and commerce. On one side is represented trade and the maritime ports, on the other agriculture. The act of making rags into paper links the agricultural trade of flax growers to the transatlantic trade of manufactured goods like stationery and books. An eagle sits atop the scene representing the federal body that binds the geographical space together as a nation.

At center is a paper mill where some children are taking sheets of paper out of the machine that presses liquid out of the newly formed sheet. In the background of the center scene, there is a house, suggesting the source of the rags now emerging from the mill as paper. Seated nearby is the figure of Columbia with an assembly of cherubic children. The children hold books and one



Figure 3: Ream wrapper for the Gilpin & Company paper mill. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

sits open in Columbia's lap, and she is presumably teaching them to read, performing the moral and intellectual work of the republican woman. The image compresses into one space the arguments laid out in the papermakers' ads. Moving from background to foreground, the eye moves from the home, to the paper mill, and to the printed page meant for children citizen-subjects of Columbia. Bookended by the "ladies" collecting rags in the house and the republican woman teaching children to read, the national space is unified (the agricultural work of flax growers is linked to the trade of manufactured good like stationery and books), and the imagined community of the nation, constituted of minds federated by print capitalism, is figured by the eagle. The Gilpin wrapper links white women and their domestic work to the construction of the nation, drawing a line connecting the home to the paper mill to the citizen reader.

### *Confederates*

But what would happen if, as late-seventeenth century papermakers and newspaper publishers feared, there weren't enough rags to produce the newspaper? While rags remained scarce throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was an acute crisis in the paper industry during the Civil War's economic despression. In 1864, publisher *cum* economist Henry Charles Carey wrote a series of public letters to Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax on "the paper question" regarding international protections and domestic encouragements for the small paper manufacturers whom, Carey thought, were needed if paper supply were to meet demand at a reasonable price. "The day is close at hand," he warned, "when we shall have to provide literary food for sixty millions of people."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Henry Charles Carey, "The Paper Question" in *Miscellaneous Works* (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 1865), 10.

The idea of paper mills providing “literary food” for the nation resonates with Oliver Wendell Holmes’ report on the effect of wartime mass mediacy on Northern homefronters in his 1861 essay, “Bread and the Newspaper.” He recalls:

“[A] most eminent scholar told us in all simplicity that he had fallen into such a state that he would read the same telegraphic dispatches over and over again in different papers, as if they were new, until he felt as if he were an idiot. Who did not do just the same thing, and does not often do it still, now that the first flush of the fever is over? Another person always goes through the side streets on his way for the noon *extra*,—he is so afraid somebody will meet him and *tell* the news he wishes to *read*, first on the bulletin-board, and then in the great capitals and leaded type of the newspaper.”<sup>49</sup>

Experiencing the Union at war in regular intervals and in print is a hallmark of this scene and of Anderson’s story of the national imaginary in print capitalism. Local gatherings around the bulletin board and a national sense of connectedness mark Holmes’ descriptions of the appetite for news. The community of readers is described like a body, “a network of iron nerves which flash sensation and volition backward and forward to and from towns and provinces as if they were organs and limbs of a single living body.” “This perpetual intercommunication,” of battlefield and home front, continues Holmes:

joined to the power of instantaneous action, keeps us always alive with excitement. It is not a breathless courier who comes back with the report from an army we have lost sight of for a month, nor a single bulletin which tells us all we are to know for a week of some great engagement, but almost hourly paragraphs, laden with truth or falsehood as the case may be, making us restless always for the last fact or rumor they are telling. And so of the

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<sup>49</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Bread and the Newspaper,” *Atlantic Monthly* Volume 8 (September 1861): 347.

movements of our armies. Tonight the stout lumbermen of Maine are encamped under their own fragrant pines. In a score or two of hours they are among the tobacco-fields and the slave-pens of Virginia.<sup>50</sup>

The typography of ink on paper and its appearance at quick intervals links Maine to Virginia in the “perpetual intercommunication” of nerves and organs.

Herman Melville famously dramatized this scene in “Donelson,” one his *Battle-Pieces*, a poem that incorporates news dispatches and the hungry crowd’s responses.

When, pelted by sleet in the icy street,  
About the bulletin-board a band  
Of eager, anxious people met,  
And every wakeful heart was set  
On latest news from West or South.  
"No seeing here," cries one—"don't crowd—"  
"You tall man, pray you, read aloud."

The following stanzas trade reports from the field at Fort Donelson with the crowd’s rising and falling response. The poem pays particular attention to the mediation of the news on the home front in oral performance and, most importantly, in print. “Washed by the storm till the paper grew / Every shade of a streaky blue, / That bulletin stood”<sup>51</sup> The newspaper, tacked up on the community bulletin board, takes on the appearance of both bloated dead bodies in the field and readers on the homefront with ink-stained tears running down their faces.

Indeed, for Holmes and Melville alike, access to the newspaper and food becomes the

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<sup>50</sup> Holmes, “Bread and the Newspaper,” 348.

<sup>51</sup> Melville, “Donelson,” *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1866), 33.

bottom line for life in the wartime economy. Holmes repeats over and over, “We must have something to eat, and the papers to read,” and, “Only *bread and the newspaper* we must have, whatever else we do without,” In fact, if the production of print became too costly to sustain, then, and only then, would it be okay to surrender the cause of the Union according to Holmes:

“The time may come when even the cheap public print shall be a burden our means cannot support, and we can only listen in the square that was once the market-place to the voices of those who proclaim defeat or victory. Then there will be only our daily food left. When we have nothing to read and nothing to eat, it will be a favorable moment to offer a compromise. At present we have all that nature absolutely demands,—we can live on bread and the newspaper.”

Holmes and Carey both figure paper and newspapers as the daily bread of communities, and when Holmes speaks of living on newspapers, it is almost hard to discern at moments whether he is actually talking about eating the paper. What about the specter of paper starvation?

Carey’s letters on the “paper question” emerge from a landscape in which wood-pulp paper production was not yet scalable and the Civil War had disrupted the supply and affordability of necessary rags within the Union while nearly destroying the Confederate states’ never fully-developed industry. Indeed, an 1863 diptych cartoon “The Paper Panic” (see Figure 4) links the high cost of rags that so worried Carey to the literary hunger he warned of. In the left panel, a husband asks his wife “where are my shirts?” to which she responds, “Hem – yes – you see, my dear, the premium on linens was so high that – a – I was tempted to sell them to the junk man.” The linked panel shows a rural newspaper editor being stopped while looking inside a barrel. He’s asked, “What’s this Smith, turned rag-picker, eh?” Smith answers, “Yes, ‘pon my soul, I’ll have to gather the materials and get the paper made before I can print my next issue.”

Other cartoons like “Scarcity of Paper in the Rural Districts” (see Figure 5) depict rural townspeople writing on old shutters and on rags themselves – completely cutting out the paper mill process. The panel on the left reads “The boss sent me to yez.... He’s got no paper for a letter, so he’s wrote on this shutter what he wants, and you place the answer on the other side.” The caption to the right panel says, “All the paper being used up, the Potterville people have to write their correspondences upon their under-clothing. The above picture show the expressman in the act of mailing said letters.”



Figure 3: "The Paper Panic," *Frank Leslie's Budget of Fun*, January 1863.





Figure 4: "Scarcity of Paper in the Rural Districts," *Frank Leslie's Budget of Fun*

What was uneasy humor for the Union papers and their cartoonists was happening on the ground in the South. On April 15, 1863, the *Southern Literary Companion* suddenly issued a half-sheet instead of a full-sheet newspaper. Under the heading "Want of Paper," the editors announced that "the destruction of the Bath Paper Mills by fire on the 2nd... near Augusta Ga., and the impossibility of the other paper mills furnishing a supply equal to the demand of the publishers, have rendered it necessary for us to print the *Companion*, for the present, upon a half sheet.... Money will not now buy paper. The material (rags) of which it is made, is the only thing with which we can purchase it." In another column readers learn about a rise in subscription rates because "the cost of paper on which the News is now issued is fully ten times as great as the price of paper on which we formerly printed, and much more than our former subscription price." New subscriptions were discouraged since "all the paper mills of the Confederacy are



now monopolized to their fullest capacity by press engagements” and the existing levels of production still exceeded supply. For this particular issue, the editors explain, “we have been fortunate enough... to procure a temporary supply at a great cost, and we this morning present the News on English paper brought through the blockade from Nassau to Charleston.”<sup>52</sup> Deeper into the South, printers resorted to printing newspapers on wallpaper, making real the idea of taking apart the house and writing on the shutters.

On April 8, 1863, the editors of the *Pictorial Democrat* in Alexandria, Louisiana, like printers at several Confederate States cities, ran out of paper. Finding that they couldn’t get any through the coastal blockades or from the dwindling number of southern paper mills, they printed the newspaper on the blank side of rolls of unused wallpaper. They lament:

We are forced, contrary to our expectations, to come down to the pictures, (or wallpaper), and issue this scant specimen of a newspaper. We have done all in our power to avert this evil, but all our plans and arrangement, made since the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, have been frustrated. Our agent left Augusta, GA on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February with a sufficient supply of paper to run the Democrat nine months, and is not here yet. He is safe and sound with the paper a “Confederate port,” not far from this, and thunder and lightening speed will be used to get the cargo here. As this is the first time under our control the Democrat has flukered, we hope our many patrons will look over it and be content with our pictorial, containing the latest compendium of news.<sup>53</sup>

The situation doesn’t seem to have improved at all one week later when the editor has nothing to show for himself:

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<sup>52</sup> “Want of Paper,” *Southern Literary Companion*, April 15, 1863.

<sup>53</sup> *The Pictorial Democrat*, April 8, 1863.

“Here we are again, dear patrons, roaming and scrambling among the pictures! The fates, for the while, seem to be against us, and for once Grosbecque has let down, and his ghost thunders in our ears, the awful cry, no paper yet! Well, it’s no use offering excuses, and our patrons must bear it with becoming grace and dignity. Let it be understood that, we will make no charge against them for our illustrated as we merely issue it to keep them posted in the latest... items, and to give circulation to the advertisements of our patrons.”<sup>54</sup>

Wallpaper newspapers are considered rare prizes for book and Civil War history collectors, but they are not well known to American print culture historians except as curiosities. In the context of this project, however, they introduce another path between the private and public spheres, between the domestic space and the national space. The material for the newspaper is paper meant for the walls of the home; the periodical that ties the community together in print is itself an artifact of the home. I have argued that a similar dynamic is working when readers’ attention is drawn to the collection of rags at home, but the connection between home and print is even more apparent here.

Wallpaper newspapers literalize the fear of the eighteenth-century newspaper editors and paper mill owners that I discussed earlier in this chapter. What if there was no paper? What if there was no “literary food” to nourish the crowds demanding news that Holmes and Melville depict. The editor of *The Pictorial Democrat* remains dedicated to circulating “the latest [news]” about the war and also make good on obligations to advertisers, but admits that the “fates seem against us.” The material lack and precariousness of the Confederate States as a nation are apparent in the wallpaper newspapers. They desperately try to maintain a reading public through the circulation of a paper object, going so far as to take apart the home in order to go to print.

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<sup>54</sup> *The Pictorial Democrat*, April 15, 1863.



Figure 5: Recto of the April 15, 1869 *Pictorial Democrat*, showing the wallpaper pattern side of the wallpaper newspaper. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

## Is There Paper In Our Future?

In closing, it also seems worth thinking about how early Americans thought community through their relation to media since we, too, are asking the question “is there paper in our future?” Amazon.com, for example, reported that in January 2011, Kindle e-books outsold not only hardcover books (which were eclipsed in 2010), but also paperbacks. For every 100 paperbacks, Amazon sold 115 Kindle editions. Reactions to this change at the nation’s largest bookseller are still coming from commentators on publishing, the media, retailing, the digital humanities, et cetera. Predictably, positive feelings for paper are regarded as nostalgic. Representative of hundreds of commentaries written after Amazon’s press release, one journalist writes: “After all these years, the actual feel and smell of a real live book is something that I’ve come to enjoy more and more when I’m reading. Over the years, as digital formats began to replace the paper format of reading material bit by bit, I’ve come to enjoy that nostalgia of actually holding a newspaper in my hand, or picking up a new book and smelling... it. Nothing quite compares to starting a new book and feeling the crisp, dry paper under your fingers as you begin to read.”<sup>55</sup> Even adopting page numbers to help clear the way for future increased ebook adoption in book clubs, classrooms, and scholarly journals is considered backward looking: “While it seems like a minute detail, I certainly missed the page numbers; perhaps it's just a little bit of nostalgia for actual paper editions, but they gave me a sense of exactly where I was in the book. The numbers will correspond with those on a printed book, helpful for book clubs, classroom discussions, or other scenarios where referring to a physical page number are relevant.” Much of what is called nostalgia in these commentaries addresses the loss of physical referents that tie groups or communities together over the shared experience of text. Paper

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<sup>55</sup> Mike Charves, “The Childhood Dream of the E-Book Reader,” *Blog Critics*.  
<http://blogcritics.org/books/article/the-childhood-dream-of-the-e/>.

editions (from the same publisher) allow everyone to get “on the same page” as it were.

Academics continue to privilege print journals because the mechanisms of peer review and the expenses of paper, printing, binding, and mailing go along with our sense that the community has vetted the scholarship in the right ways. No doubt, then, that adaptation of hiring, tenure, and promotions customs to include electronic journals and other digital humanities projects has been slow going and even met with skepticism. With the closure of university presses and the scaling back of library budgets, the question “is there paper in our future” seems never to have been more important. But it does not have to be a nostalgic question, because, as we see in the context of humanities publication, it has everything to do with the sustainability of our future.

In his 1740 “The Paper-Mill,” written to praise and advertise a Virginia paper mill, the poet Joseph Dumbleton begins with a similar materially-embedded connection of thought, community, and paper. “Tho’ sage Philosophers have said, / *Of nothing, can nothing be made;* / Yet much thy Mill, O *Parks* brings forth / From what we reckon nothing *worth*. / Hail kind *Machine!* – The Muse shall praise / thy Labours, that receive her Lays. [...] The Substances of what we think, / Tho’ born in *Thoughts*, must live in *Ink*.” With an epigram from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* that roughly translates to “My heart makes me tell of forms that have been changed into new shapes,” Dumbleton’s “The Paper-Mill” opens with the observation that nothing can be made of nothing. Immaterial thoughts take shape in material print and, further, that material texts bring people together. The third stanza begins, Ye Brave, whose Deeds shall vie with Time, / Whilst Mill can turn, or Poet rhyme / Your tatters hoard for future Quires; / So Need demands, So *Parks* desires. / (And long that gen’rous Patriot live / Who for soft Rags, hard Cash will give!) / The Shirt, Cravat, the Cap, again, / Shall meet your Hands, with Mails from Spain; The Surplice, which when whole or new / With Pride the Sexton’s wife could view, /

Tho' worn by Time and gone to rack, / It quits its Rev'rend Master's Back; / The same again the Priest may see / Bound up in Sacred Liturgy." Part advertisement for the Parks mill's willingness to buy rags for the mill and part reflection on the constitution of the social body, the stanza defines the brave and the patriotic as those who contribute rags to the paper mill, ensuring that colonial Virginia is able to keep correspondence with Spain. The circuit of rags and paper works on a local scale, too, as the Sexton's vestment is worn, turned to paper, and returns to the church as the Priest's sacred book. By producing paper, patriots ensure that the communicative circuits will continue in the future, and these relationships are figured by imagining that the metamorphosis of shirt to book exchanges materials meaningfully. The Sexton's shirt returns to the Priest as holy book. The young lady's handkerchief makes its way back to her as a lover's note: "Ye Fair, renown'd in Cupid's Field / Who fain would tell what Hearts you've killed / Each shift decay'd, lay by with care; / Or Apron rubb'd to bits at – Pray'r, / One Shift ten Sonnets may contain, / to Gild your Charms, and make you Vain, / One Cap, a Billet-Doux may shape, / As full of Whim, as when a Cap, / And modest 'Kercheifs Sacred Held / May sing the Breasts they once conceal."<sup>56</sup> The speaker refers to "future quires (of paper)," patriots "vy[ing] with time," and imagines a series of things that "may" take place once the old cloth is sent to the mill. The word "may" is repeated eight times over six stanzas. Paper then, appears as the object that ties the future to the past. It is not merely that memories are recorded on paper, ensuring a continuity of knowledge, but that relationships are maintained and even occasioned by the exchange of materials within paper. The poem pronounces that because we are in paper, the future contains us.

*"Kiss this paper"*

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Dumbleton, "The Paper-Mill" in *Colonial American Poetry*, ed. Kenneth Silverman (New York: Hafner, 1968), 326-27.

It is worth looking back to early writing about paper as we creep toward “paperlessness” because the poems and advertisements I’ve outlined here might help us understand why we “cling” to paper. The feeling for paper, so often characterized as nostalgic, may in fact have more to do with how paper constructs a sense of our collective future. And not only in a sense that it records our histories within printed books, but because paper books record our bodies somehow, or because we associate important feelings of commonality with shared reading objects. To close, I’ll relate a strange moment that came at the end of October 2010’s “Why Books?” conference at the Radcliffe Institute. One panelist hinted that soon even children’s books would be mostly electronic, and an audible gasp went through the crowd. Or, as Matt Kirschenbaum recorded the moment on twitter, “Audible intake of breaths at #WHYBOOKS as someone asks about children’s books.”<sup>57</sup> The concern in the crowd was that reading children’s books, especially picture books, with children was about building a relationship between parent and child, a relationship that would be indexed in the future through the physical book. The child, of course is a sign of futurity or reproductive futurity, and a participant in the audience remarked that one returns to children’s books over the course of a lifetime, bringing to hand and mind the memories of childhood and one’s children by holding the book and touching tattered or stained pages. iPads, Kindles, and Nooks, it seemed to those gasping in the crowd, could never contain and relate such histories. That moment might resonate with Anne Bradstreet’s writing to the child to whom she was giving birth. Sensing that she might die in childbirth, she writes the poem later titled “Before the Birth of One of Her Children.” Bradstreet offers parting words to the child and leaves the poem, written on paper, as a channel between herself and the infant. It is

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<sup>57</sup> *Twapper Keeper*.

[http://twapperkeeper.com/tweetdetail.php?type=hashtag&name=whybooks&notebook\\_id=18244&tweet\\_id=29120790248](http://twapperkeeper.com/tweetdetail.php?type=hashtag&name=whybooks&notebook_id=18244&tweet_id=29120790248).

through the absorption of Bradstreet's body into the paper upon which the poem is written that the child will have contact with the mother. Bradstreet writes: "And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse, / With some sad sighs honor my absent hearse; / And kiss this paper for thy dear love's sake, / Who with salt tears this last farewell did take."<sup>58</sup> Here, Bradstreet seems to say, along with those gasping in the WhyBooks crowd, paper is my future. Derrida echoes Bradstreet in this moment: "Here I am, this is my body, see this signature on this paper – it's me, it's mine, it's me so-and-so, I sign before you, I present myself here; this paper that remains represents me."<sup>59</sup> In early America as now, paper acts as more than a material support for print. It performs the communion of bodies represented within its particular matter, or of those who have gathered around it. When the ability or feasibility to continue producing paper media is in question, either in the eighteenth century or today, at stake is not merely a question of one media or another, but the very future of the social organizations built around it. Derrida reminds us that, "paper is evidently the limited 'subject' of a domain circumscribed in the time and space of a hegemony that marks out a period in the history of a technology and in the history of humanity."<sup>60</sup> We study the moment when paper's hegemony, its primary role in organizing publics, was in its beginnings. As scholars and readers in early twenty first century, however, we potentially face the end of that moment. As a result, the question "is there paper in our future" functions much as it did in the early American text explored above. The question raises the possibility that the "we" who speaks will cease to exist along with the media that conducts it.

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<sup>58</sup> Anne Bradstreet, "Before the Birth of one of Her Children," *Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, Volume II, ed. William Rose Benet and Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Oxford University Press) 1938, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, "Paper or Me, You Know..." 57.

<sup>60</sup> Derrida, "Paper or Me, You Know..." 41.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Shreds of Linen: American Women Writers and the Material Literary Public Sphere

“Sweet ladies, pray not be offended,  
Nor Mind the jest of sneering wags;  
No harm, believe us, is intended,  
When humbly we request your rags.

The scraps, which you reject, unfit  
To clothe the tenant of a hovel,  
May shine in sentiment and wit,  
And help to make a charming novel.”  
“Our gentle Belles will furnish paper,  
Our sighing Beau will wit supply.”

- Poetic Call For Rags<sup>61</sup>

On September 7 and 8, 1859, Norwich, Connecticut celebrated its bicentennial. Lydia Huntley Sigourney, by then near the end of her “half a century” as “America’s leading poetess,” and a resident of Norwich, wrote several poems for the event, one of which was printed on a broadside notice for the celebration (see Figure 7).<sup>62</sup> “Hymn. For the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Settlement of Norwich, Conn,” one of the many occasional poems Sigourney wrote during her long career, praises God for the success of the town from its colonial settlement (“these cultured glades / Redeem’d from thorns and savage sway, –”), its commerce and institutions (“the happy homes / The prosperous marts that thronging rise, / The peaceful academic domes, – / The church-spires pointing to the skies”) to its future (“as the past with joy is bright / So may the unborn future prove, –”).<sup>63</sup> The poem is set in the

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Lyman Horace Weeks. *A History of Paper Manufacture in the United States, 1690 – 1916* (New York: The Lockwood Trade Journal Company, 1916), 115.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon S. Haight, *Mrs. Sigourney: The Sweet Singer of Hartford* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), ix, 168.

<sup>63</sup> Lydia H. Sigourney, “Hymn. For the Bi-centennial Anniversary of the Settlement of Norwich, Conn” (Norwich: Manning, Perry & Company, 1859).

middle of the page, surrounded by advertisements for Manning, Perry & Co. steam book and job printers and the Chelsea Manufacturing [Paper] Company who together published the daily *Norwich Morning Bulletin* and the weekly *Eastern Bulletin*, which are also advertised. Readers are directed to see the “*Morning Bulletin* of Thursday and Friday,” which “will contain full reports of the... Celebration.” The number of advertisements and layout of the broadside make the bicentennial seem like occasion not only for Sigourney’s hymn, but also to sell more newspapers, printing, and paper.

Closer inspection of the Chelsea Manufacturing Company advertisement reveals a rather strange claim about the broadside. Beneath the claim that it is “THE LARGEST PAPER MANUFACTORY IN THE WORLD,” the company informs the reader that “the material of which [this paper] is made was brought from Egypt. It was taken from the ancient tombs where it had been used in embalming mummies.” The Chelsea mills were not the only firm to claim that their rags were from Egyptian mummies. Rags for papermaking were imported to the U.S. from Egypt for the first time in 1855<sup>64</sup>, and by July, 1856 the *Syracuse Daily Standard* claimed to have been printed on mummy paper:

Rags from Egypt.—Our daily is now printed on paper made from rags imported directly from the land of the Pharaohs, on the banks of the Nile. They were imported by Mr. G. W. Ryan, the veteran paper manufacturer at Marcellus Falls, in this country, and he thinks them quite as good as the general run of English and French rags.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Joel Munsell, *Chronology of the Origin and Progress of Paper and Paper-Making* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1876), 142.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality and Bibliographical Method* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 174.

**BI-CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION,**  
Norwich, September 7, and 8, 1850.

**MANNING, PERRY & CO.,**  
**Steam Book and Job Printers,**  
Chapman's Block, Franklin Square.

Publishers of the "Norwich Morning Bulletin," "Daily," and "Eastern Bulletin," (weekly).

**HYMN.**  
FOR THE BI-CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE SETTLEMENT OF NORWICH, CONN.  
*To be sung in the tune of Old Hundred.*

We praise the God who guides our feet  
Back to this sacred spot of earth,—  
With filial gratitude to greet  
Our Mother, on her day of birth.

We praise Him for these cultured glades  
Redeem'd from thorns and savage sway,—  
For rock, and stream, and woven shades  
That charm'd our childhood's cloudless day.

We praise Him for the happy homes,  
The prosperous mans that thronging rise,  
The peaceful academic domes,—  
The church-spires pointing to the skies.

We praise Him for the righteous dead,—  
Who have their course so nobly spent,  
And o'er their race rich-luster shed  
When through Heaven's open gate they went.

We praise Him for the wondrous change  
The last two hundred years have wrought,  
For His blest Gospel's glorious range  
Of faith and hope and holy thought:—

And as the past with joy is bright,  
So may the unborn future prove,—  
And wrap thee in new robes of light,  
Sweet Land!—the Mother of our love.

L. BENTLEY SIGOURNEY.

**CHELSEA MANUFACTURING COMPANY.**  
This paper is made by the CHELSEA MANUFACTURING COMPANY, Chelsea, Mass.  
**THE LARGEST PAPER MANUFACTORY IN THE WORLD.**  
The material of which it is made, was brought from Egypt. It was taken from the ancient tombs where it had been used in embalming. A part of the process of manufacturing is exhibited in the museum. The daily production of the Company's mills is about 10,000,000 sheets.

The Morning Bulletin, of Thursday and Friday, will contain full reports of the Bi-Centennial Celebration. The Eastern Bulletin for the week ending Sept. 10th, will contain a full account of the celebration, and all matters of interest connected therewith.

The Morning Bulletin is the only daily paper published in Norwich, and has the largest circulation of any paper in Northern Connecticut. The Eastern Bulletin is the largest and cheapest weekly paper in Northern Connecticut. Subscription price, \$1.25 per annum, in advance.

The American Antiquarian Society is for the purpose of preserving and publishing the history and antiquities of the United States. It is a non-profit organization, and its funds are derived from the sale of the antiquities it collects. It is a valuable institution, and its collections are of great interest to the public.

Figure 6: Broadside with Lydia H. Sigourney's occasional poem surrounded by advertisements for various printers, papermakers, and newspapers. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society and the John Carter Brown Library.

In 1866, the editor of the *Bunker Hill Aurora* said that he had recently talked to a minister who knew someone who, in 1865, loaded a cargo ship headed for the U.S. full of mummies because if it fell to war-time piracy the losses would be minimal. “On arriving here,” we are told,

the strange cargo was sold to a paper manufacturer in Connecticut, who threw the whole mass, the linen cerement, the bitumen and the poor remains of humanity, into the hopper, and had them ground to powder. "And," added the speaker, "the words I am now reading to you, are written on some of this paper."<sup>66</sup>

Back in Norwich, the Chelsea mill invited locals to come see the process of turning mummies into paper, and to marvel at their output: “part of the process is exhibited in the premises. The daily production of the Company’s mills is about 14,000 reams.”

It is incredibly unlikely that paper was ever made from mummy wrappings in commercial U.S. mills, but the persistence of the myth – right down to the present – is telling. Joseph Dane notes that “references to mummy paper have much in common... they are vaguely documented or pure products of oral history” often from secondhand accounts. The 1866 story from the *Bunker Hill Aurora* is illustrative of the layers of hearsay behind these stories. “They have the aura of a Swiftian projection, based on real needs – the shortages of [rag] material,” Dane notes. And they trade in supposed contact with the exotic, a tactic that, Dane reminds us, P.T. Barnum had perfected in the 1850s.<sup>67</sup> *This* newspaper that you’re holding is made of mummies. *This* paper I’m reading is full of “the poor remains of

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<sup>66</sup> Munsell, *Chronology*, 198.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture*, 180. S.J. Wolfe, author of *Mummies in Nineteenth-Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), on the other hand, believes that this very broadside, with Lydia Sigourney’s poem on it, is proof that the books printed by Manning, Perry, and Company are, in fact, made from mummies.

humanity.” Come to the Chelsea mills and see our impressive output for yourself. These deictic performances invite readers to experience the materiality of the text in a special way while reading.

Whether or not paper was out of mummies matters less to me than the fact that readers everywhere were confronted with notices about the materiality of the paper they were holding. The *Syracuse Daily Standard* might fairly be accused of sensationalism in trying to sell newspapers, but their claims about mummy paper tell us something about sensation itself. Readers were poised to be enticed by notices about the contents of paper. Discussions of the makeup of paper could be found almost anywhere, even on the promotional broadside for the town anniversary celebration. Readers could pick up a newspaper and be asked to take where its rag content came from as part of the reading experience. In the case of mummy paper, the goal seems to have been drumming up interest through contact with the exotic.

But, to return to Lydia Sigourney, writers could call attention to the rag content in paper for reasons other than creating a sensory spectacle. As I argue in this chapter, calling attention to the rag content of paper could be used, especially by women writers, to assert the continuity of private domestic labor and public use of intellect in print. Anne Bradstreet and Lydia Sigourney, two women poets whose presence in the print public sphere caused unease and sparked debate about the appropriateness of women writers on public display, traced the material intimacies between feminized domestic labor and masculinized print publicity. Pastor Wright noted that “strange as it may appear, the connection” between the kitchen rag-bag and the printed book “is very intimate.”<sup>68</sup> Bradstreet and Sigourney laid claim to this

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<sup>68</sup> M. Emory Wright, *The Parson's Paper Mill at Holyoke, Mass. Embracing A Minute Description of the Paper Manufacture in its Various Departments* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Samuel Bowles & Company, Printers, 1857), 19.

strange intimacy in order to argue for print's dependence on women's work with textiles. In other words, if publishing a book is like giving birth to a child, as Bradstreet is remembered for having written in "The Author to her Book," then it has as much to do with bringing ideal brainchildren to life as it does with tending to both book and child with rags.

### **Anne Bradstreet's "Raggs"**

If, as the story goes, Anne Bradstreet had no knowledge of the publication of her poetry in *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*, then the oft-imagined moment of her first introduction to the book would have one of great surprise. As Elizabeth Wade White imagines, "when the little book of her own poems. . . was put into her hands" it must have been "the most dramatic moment of Anne Bradstreet's not uneventful life."<sup>69</sup> Scholars have exhibited a certain fascination with the potential meanings and purposes of the publication of *The Tenth Muse*. Did her family need to demonstrate that its women were properly pious in the wake of Bradstreet's younger sister, Sarah Dudley Keayne's public preaching and subsequent divorce?<sup>70</sup> Was the moment of publication an occasion for fear of either being publicly chastised for her writing, as Anne Yale Hopkins was, or publicly tried, shamed, and exiled like Anne Hutchinson? Was publishing her work an act of betrayal or even appropriative violence carried out by men who felt they had license to do with her intellectual property what they pleased?

To be sure, thinking about the meaning of Bradstreet's entrance into the world of print has proven a useful interpretive heuristic. Earlier versions of this conversation,

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<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Wade White, *Anne Bradstreet: The Tenth Muse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 267.

<sup>70</sup> Ivy Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation: Lyric Poetry in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 151.

however, have missed an aspect that makes this story most worth imagining. Whatever else happened, or did not happen, in that moment of discovery, we can be certain that Bradstreet was greeted by a book. Though we cannot recover that dramatic moment of *The Tenth Muse*'s revelation to its poet, "The Author to her Book" preserves Bradstreet's poetic reaction to, and reflection on, the book. For certain, she knew enough to refer to the specifics of papermaking while assembling the central metaphor (book as child) of "The Author to her Book." None of Bradstreet's critics have considered how her technical knowledge of the object set before her may have structured her introduction to the book. As a result, I think, accounts have preserved a surprised and ignorant Bradstreet when it seems, to the contrary, that she a lot about how books were made.

We are familiar with how the story begins: John Woodbridge, Bradstreet's brother-in-law, had taken a sheaf of her poetry to London to be printed. What happened next is usually skipped over and we then imagine finished copies of *The Tenth Muse*, heading back to Massachusetts and we debate the ramifications of their arrival. This is a story with a beginning and an ending, but no middle. We can imagine, as Bradstreet herself could have, what happened. Woodbridge took the manuscript to Stephen Bowtell's London print-shop at the sign of the Bible in Pope's Head Alley. There the author's script was set into a matrix of leaden type against which sheets of dampened paper, most likely imported from Holland or France, were firmly pressed. After the sheets had been hung to dry, they would have been sent to a bindery, folded according to the proper format, bound, and then put into distribution through the printer's bookstore and, eventually, some were sent to Massachusetts. To print a book in the seventeenth century required a considerable expenditure of time, labor, and resources; a fact which should intensify our understanding of the exceptional nature of

Bradstreet's publication. It was a significant investment to publish any author, so the more significant for a woman from Massachusetts Bay Colony.<sup>71</sup>

My purpose here, however, is not to offer a complete analytic bibliography of Bradstreet's first book, as worthy as that unfinished task is. I am interested, rather, in addressing the way Bradstreet herself theorized authorship and gender in the construction of a complex metaphor involving one of the most crucial materials of printing: paper. In "The Author to her Book," the poem in which Bradstreet reacts to the printing of *The Tenth Muse*, the poet famously constructs a metaphor treating her book as if it were a child of her own. In the process, she turns to the technical language of papermaking in line five to unite the metaphor's tenor and the vehicle (book and child respectively) together in the same object: "raggs"<sup>72</sup>

Paper was made from linen rags, and in citing this fact Bradstreet found a convenient image to overlap with the ragged child she figures, while also evoking the connotations of a word whose global implications resonated with uncertainty, dependency, and unpredictability. In the seventeenth century (as in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries), the word rag was freighted with anxieties over a near-constant lack of supply, and in the cases of New England and England itself, of dependency on outside sources for provisions of paper for printing. Her use of the word would have been recognized contemporaries as an

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<sup>71</sup> Extant records do not completely document the production and trade of Bradstreet's book, but as Pattie Cowell has noted, "publishing decisions. . . were based on sales potential, and Bradstreet's poetry had several pre-publication indicators of commercial viability," including the "prefatory verses [of] seven satisfied readers,. . . conform[ity] to contemporary tastes," and the "double curiosity" of the authorship of a woman from the New World. See Pattie Cowell, "The Early Distribution of Anne Bradstreet's Poems," *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1983), 271.

<sup>72</sup> Anne Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book," *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David S. Shields (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 46.



evocation of an international trade in commodities that was essential for the manufacture of all nearly all printed matter, especially for books like *The Tenth Muse* that required quality white paper, a supply which could not be produced in either England or its colonies in 1650.

Rags and children, of course, are not solely meant to figure the printing industry. Rags and children introduce the language of the domestic into the poem, and, I argue, that in so doing, Bradstreet points to the literal continuity of domestic work and print publicity. The very rags that clothe the child and wipe its face become the rags that constitute the paper of all published matter. Observing the material continuity that links domestic labor to print authorship collapses the distance between the “household affairs. . . as belong to women” and the “things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger,” as Governor Winthrop wrote. These words of Winthrop’s come from his famous treatment of Anne Hopkins in his journal where he notes that Hopkins had “fallen into a sad infirmity. . . by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing,” and who had “written many books”.<sup>73</sup> For Bradstreet, rags unsettle the opposition between the needle and the pen, private women’s work and men’s public life, and biological reproduction and artistic production.

This reading also restores attention to an aspect of Bradstreet’s centrally important book/child metaphor that has been neglected by nearly the entire interpretive enterprise surrounding “The Author to Her Book.” To return to the schema of metaphor offered by I.A. Richards, the *tenor* of the metaphor, or the book, has been treated as a static, ahistorical object in analyses of the poem, whereas the *vehicle*, the child, has been richly read and historicized.<sup>74</sup> Such readings assume, by omission, that books and paper signify nothing

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation*, 128.

<sup>74</sup> Norman Friedman’s entry on “Tenor and Vehicle” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* provides a summary of the utility of these terms for discussing the

more than mere facticity. Modern readers of “The Author to her Book” need to denaturalize their relationship to paper and the book form, approaching these familiars with the senses of novelty, contingency, and not-giveness that Bradstreet and others would have felt when encountering print.

According to paper-historian John Bidwell, paper “almost never impinges on [the] communicative function” of books. It “serves as a mute vehicle of text, rarely noticed except when it fails its purpose, when defects inherent in its manufacture impede the transmission and preservation of printed information” (69). Bidwell’s description of the encounter with paper is indicative of common practice, but is incongruous with Bradstreet’s description of paper and her figurative use of it in her poetry. In “The Author to her Book,” Bradstreet constantly points to the defected, malformed, and blemished nature of the ragged object she addresses. She draws the reader’s attention to the textures of the plane of communication, not to highlight the manifest failures of paper, but to highlight the significant material of its constitution. Reading Bradstreet’s “raggs” in all their suggestiveness is essential for understanding how, in one of her most intriguing poems, the poet confronts the gendered

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mechanics of metaphor: “Since any metaphor at its simplest gives us two parts, the thing meant and the thing said, [I.A.] Richards used “tenor” to refer to the thing meant – purport, underlying meaning, or main subject of the metaphor – and “vehicle” to mean thing said – that which serves to carry or embody the tenor as he analogy brought to the subject.” For Richards, however, tenor and vehicle operated to create meaning greater than the sum of the metaphor’s parts: “the ‘transaction’ . . . establish[ed] between tenor and vehicle ‘results in a meaning (to be clearly distinguished from the tenor) which is not attainable without their interaction.’” Richards’ sense that the combination of tenor and vehicle enables meaning unattainable without their interaction is an important framework in which to view Bradstreet’s book/child metaphor. In the moment when tenor and vehicle are coeval in the material of rags the reader is faced with a literary object that is at the same time a domestic object, a realization that, I argue, undoes the gendering of print publication as male. See Norman Friedman, “Tenor and Vehicle,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger, T.V.F. Brogan, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1268.

distinction between the work of needles and pens, and of all the constrictions apparently warranted by that division.<sup>75</sup>

“The Author to her Book” has assumed a central importance in Bradstreet scholarship because the poem offers a window into the poet's thoughts about, and reactions to, the social regime of gender and writing in Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony. In it, Bradstreet famously juxtaposes artistic production and biological reproduction in a construction of metaphorical equivalence between book and child. Since she also references the specific circumstances under which *The Tenth Muse* was printed, the poem has special significance as Bradstreet's negotiation of her position as both a pious Puritan woman and a published woman in public. Feminist critics, in particular, have been interested in Bradstreet's figuration of the literary text as a child. In a discussion the poem in her book on self-representation in lyric poetry of the Colonial period, Ivy Schweitzer succinctly outlines the general debate over the meaning of the trope. The “double-edged metaphor of motherhood” allows Bradstreet either to “subversively [reconnect] what patriarchal culture severs: woman's body and her brain,” or, on the other hand, it “put[s her] back into the place that, according to Governor Winthrop, God had set her,” that of the “satisfied child-bearer.”<sup>76</sup>

Those who assume that Bradstreet in some way resigns herself to the role of motherhood tend to read “The Author to her Book” as a pivot between the elegies, Quaternions, and histories of *The Tenth Muse* and her later poems about domestic life in Massachusetts. Representative of this line of argument is Timothy Sweet who views Bradstreet's post-“The Author to her Book” work as having been “written within a discourse

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<sup>75</sup> Bradstreet, “The Author to her Book,” 46.

<sup>76</sup> Ivy Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation*, 173.

of domesticity. . . display[ing] an acceptance of the 'woman's place.'”<sup>77</sup> Sweet praises Bradstreet's early work for “demonstrat[ing] that subjectivity could. . . be detached from the gender assigned to the poet,” but laments that her later adoption of the position of mother-author constrained her to the writing of “domestic poems” that “merely reproduced the ideology of social discourse which reifies gender.”<sup>78</sup> In a similar fashion, one critic has argued that Bradstreet's poetry can be easily divided by period and quality according to her gendered voices, “the public voice is imitative, the private voice original.”<sup>79</sup> According to this view, the difference in voice between Bradstreet in *The Tenth Muse* and Bradstreet as motherly domestic lyricist evidences that she “never fully resolved for herself the conflict between what she considered to be her principle vocations as housewife and mother and her role as a poet.”<sup>80</sup>

More recent critics, however, have sought to disassociate Bradstreet's use of motherhood from an act of simple capitulation to social norms or as evidence of her settling-in to easier, more topically appropriate forms. These scholars historicize the childbirth metaphor and argue that Bradstreet's use of motherhood keeps her within the realm of acceptable Puritan discourse while granting her the leverage to explore subversive aspects of the connection between creative production and human reproduction. Jean Marie Lutes, for example, “assumes that physical experience is itself discursive” and thus that Bradstreet's exploration of childbirth and authorship does not signify acceptance of an externally defined role, but rather it represents her “active engagement with doctrines designed to *create*

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<sup>77</sup> Timothy Sweet, “Gender, Genre, and Subjectivity in Anne Bradstreet's Early Elegies,” *Early American Literature* 23 (1988): 168.

<sup>78</sup> Sweet, “Gender, Genre, and Subjectivity in Anne Bradstreet's Early Elegies,” 169.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth Requa, “Anne Bradstreet's Poetic Voices,” *Early American Literature* 9 (1974): 4.

<sup>80</sup> Requa, “Anne Bradstreet's Poetic Voices,” 3.

authentic versions of female physicality.”<sup>81</sup> According to this view, motherhood, the female body, and creation are not assumed to be stable categories within which Bradstreet presents herself, but rather they are investigated as contingencies of her social world, a symbolic order that she opens for exploration. While Puritan men used their linked religious and political influence to define and interpret which female bodies and bodily uses were proper, Bradstreet used her writing to renegotiate the terms of the dominant ideologies of “theology and gynecology.”<sup>82</sup> Instead of reading Bradstreet's metaphorical motherhood as a return to a traditional role, Lutes argues that the poet “uses medical and spiritual principles of generation to connect her physical reproduction to poetic reproduction, acknowledging the potential risks while also declaring the power of her own imagination.”<sup>83</sup> In this way, the child of Bradstreet's “The Author to her Book” is “a metaphor for power and constructing a female body that could legitimately produce not only children but ideas as well.”<sup>84</sup>

In similar fashion, Bethany Reid historicizes the poem's child metaphor. She finds in the child's illegitimacy and deformity the establishment of allegiance between Bradstreet and Ann Hutchinson, disrupting readings that make Bradstreet and Hutchinson representative Puritan women only to set them in contrast. Citing the history of Hutchinson's miscarriages and the use of them as confirmation, and a physical manifestation, of her heresies, Reid argues that through the image of an “ill form'd offspring,”<sup>85</sup> Bradstreet “enters a female discourse that extend[s] well beyond womanly fears of childbirth to embrace charges of

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<sup>81</sup> Jean Marie Lutes, “Negotiating Theology and Gynecology: Anne Bradstreet's Representations of the Female Body” *Signs* 22 (1997): 310.

<sup>82</sup> Lutes, “Negotiating Theology and Gynecology,” 312.

<sup>83</sup> Lutes, “Negotiating Theology and Gynecology,” 312.

<sup>84</sup> Lutes, “Negotiating Theology and Gynecology,” 310.

<sup>85</sup> Bradstreet, “Author to her Book,” 45.

illegitimacy not unlike those leveled at Ann Hutchinson.”<sup>86</sup> “Discrete and playful” where Hutchinson was “direct and defiant,” Bradstreet places herself in proximity to Hutchinson to question the contours of the power structure that determined the legitimacy of a woman’s thoughts and actions.<sup>87</sup> In this way, Reid, like Lutes, usefully contextualizes Bradstreet’s deployment of the trope of motherhood. Both of these critics convincingly read motherhood for its potentially subversive registers, not simply as an expected performance of, or capitulation to, motherhood as the more acceptable pursuit than writing for a Puritan woman.

Though they differ on the significance of motherhood and creativity in “The Author to her Book,” taken together, the readings offered by Sweet, Requa, Lutes, and Reid demonstrate the extent to which the book, the very object of the poet’s apostrophe, has fallen from attention. The status of the book in Bradstreet’s poem is deserving of the kind of contextualizing performed by Lutes and Reid in the service of the child imagery. This has not happened even though, as I will show, a reading of the book is, in fact, consonant with the work of these two critics who find serious questioning of social order in Bradstreet’s use of metaphor. This is a particularly interesting trend in the study of a metaphor since it neglects the book – the object of comparison, the tenor of the metaphor – at the expense of the figure in its service, the child – the vehicle. Even when the important connection between rag and rag paper is made, as in Marjorie Garber’s brief treatment of the poem, it attains the status of the unproblematic identification of one-to-one reference without deeper resonance, for, as she has it: “the phrase ‘even feet’ denotes ‘regular metrics,’ the ‘rags’ suggest rag paper, and

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<sup>86</sup> Bethany Reid, “‘Unfit for Light’: Anne Bradstreet’s Monstrous Birth” *The New England Quarterly* 71 (1998): 519.

<sup>87</sup> Reid, “‘Unfit for Light,’” 542.

so forth.”<sup>88</sup> When Bradstreet referred to her “rambling brat (in print),” however, was not simply substituting the image of the book for the more interesting one of the child.<sup>89</sup> If anything, her placement of the word print in parenthesis is prescient of the way critics have sequestered the book from view, as if readers need to be reminded halfway through the poem that this child is a book. Without such a reminder, a number of questions disappear from the critical landscape. When she figuratively collapses the difference between the child and the book by noting that they are both dressed in “raggs” not only does she evoke the image of an illegitimate or poorly mothered child, she also makes a set of contingent transatlantic and international relations immanent to the poem. These relationships are important for a poet interested in the structural position of women in the world of authorship and print.

Despite the fact that she represented her work as *book* and not manuscript, scholars have maintained a tendency to discuss “The Author to her Book” as if Bradstreet easily could have titled the poem “The Author to her Work,” or “The Author to her Writing.” It is as if, in this critical tradition, all literary pursuits could reasonably be expected to be represented by the signifier *book*. To the contrary, in the mid-seventeenth century there were many other more likely forms in which Bradstreet's writing would have been expected to appear, including author's manuscripts and manuscript copies circulated in a coterie.

As I've said, “The Author to her Book” is intriguing because in it the author reflects on her singular status as a *published* woman, permanently set on public view in Massachusetts Bay Colony, London, and further abroad. “Anonymity and manuscript publication [in a coterie], were employed both by men and women, and writers of both

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<sup>88</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Quotation Marks* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 187.

<sup>89</sup> Bradstreet, “The Author to her Book,” 46.

genders voiced the fear of being exposed in public,” writes David Hall.<sup>90</sup> Why then, has so little attention been given to the status of the printed book in the poem? Granting attention to the way Bradstreet locates herself within the emergent technologies of the book trade focuses the reader’s attention on the poet's engagement with questions of gender and authorship. Foregrounding the materiality of the book in her address provides not merely an historical account of the circumstances under which her poems were produced and circulated; more interestingly, it demonstrates how Bradstreet constructs the book as a discursive object that challenges the gendering of authorship as masculine.

The keys to such a reading are in Bradstreet's references to the material composition and production of the book, specifically the paper upon which her text was imprinted. In the first eight lines of “The Author to her Book,” Bradstreet makes her references to paper and printing most explicitly:

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,  
Till snatcht from thence by friends, less wise than true  
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view,  
Made thee in raggs, halting to th' press to trudge  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).  
At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> David D. Hall, “Readers and Writers in Early New England.” *A History of the Book In America*, Volume One: *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press with the American Antiquarian Society, 2000), 150.

<sup>91</sup> Bradstreet, “Author to her Book,” 55-56.



It is well-known that Bradstreet's brother-in-law, John Woodbridge, "snatcht" the poet's manuscripts away to London, and she hides an acerbic rebuke in a gentle chastisement by stating that he is "less wise than true." In the retelling of this famous story, however, it is worth noting *why* the manuscripts had to be taken "abroad" to reach "publick view."

In 1650 there was one press in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the then twelve-year-old office operated by Stephen Daye. It would not be until 1674, the two years after Bradstreet's death, that a second shop opened in Boston. The Cambridge press was founded to produce material for the twinned interests of colonial government and missionary work, represented by two of its first imprints: the *Freeman's Oath* and the *Bay Psalm Book*.

Another set of books for practical use were primers, which were "rivalled only by catechisms, psalmbooks, and the Bible" for widest ownership and distribution in New England.<sup>92</sup> Far into the eighteenth century, presses concentrated their resources around publishing primarily local legal, religious, and basic educational texts like "acts, local laws, bye-laws, almanacs, ABCs, [and] collections of sermons by local ministers."<sup>93</sup>

Press-work was resource intensive, and these print jobs aimed at the practical maintenance of the colony would have taxed the Cambridge press to its limits. Questions of need, urgency, and appropriateness surrounded not only printing, but also writing in New England. Decades after Bradstreet's death, Cotton Mather remained so concerned about the potential of poetry to waste time and sap resources that in his handbook for newly-graduated ministers, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, he advises these men "you may. . . all your days

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<sup>92</sup> David D. Hall, "The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600-1850." *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench. (Worcester, MA: The American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 26.

<sup>93</sup> Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard (New York: Verso, 1997), 210.

make a little recreation of poetry in the midst of your painful studies.” “Nevertheless,” he continues:

I cannot but advise you Withhold thy throat from thirst. Be not so set upon poetry, as to be always poring on the passionate and measured pages. Let not what should be sauce, rather than food for you, engross all your application.<sup>94</sup>

Mather continues to criticize the popular taste for stylish but, by his accounts, vacuous, literature. His reliance on the language of nourishment refers not just to the intellect and spirit, but also to the very “measured pages” that are injudiciously used. Literary publishing, the production of excessive works that could potentially tax the colony’s resources in time and material, was carried out abroad and moved from the metropole to the periphery.

Woodbridge's travel to Stephen Bowtell's print shop in London thus not only raises questions about Bradstreet's “handling” as she was ushered into print, but it also evidences the colonists' dependence on transatlantic trade and, in the case of the Puritans, the resources of coreligionists abroad.

These questions of need, dependence, appropriateness, and excess reside in the margin of the publication *The Tenth Muse*, which, we are reminded in the text’s fascinating array of approving prefatory paratexts,<sup>95</sup> Bradstreet wrote in “some few hours, curtailed from

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<sup>94</sup> Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (Boston: Thomas Hancock, 1726), 114.

<sup>95</sup> The prefatory material to *The Tenth Muse* is clearly a threshold negotiating the uncommonness and, even, the unseemliness of the promiscuous relationship between the world of readers and the woman author, though as Schweitzer argues, such paratexts can obscure as easily as they can better reading. Though not part of Genette’s schema, paper is also an important paratext, and one that Bradstreet highlights. Each piece of paper, constituted of thousands of pieces of textile is a threshold between reader and author; and also a moment in which feminized textile and masculinized text are enmeshed.

her sleep, and other refreshments.”<sup>96</sup> The paratextual preface was designed to mediate Bradstreet's introduction to the public. Critics have speculated on the range of possible meanings and effects of the seven men whose voices, they felt, were necessary to delicately mediate Bradstreet's incursion into the world of print. The “story. . . told in the pages of prefatory material,” writes Ivy Schweitzer, introduces a version of Bradstreet “into the public world where she dared not stray alone.”<sup>97</sup> Before a reader encounters a single word written by the poet, *The Tenth Muse*'s paratextual supports produce a pious Bradstreet whose role in the production of literature is nearly reduced to the status of accident. Schweitzer suggests that these “adorn[ments]” at the opening of *The Tenth Muse* also “obscure it from view.”<sup>98</sup> If the layout of the text works to present Bradstreet's authorship as dependent on the testimony of men for its ability to circulate without difficulty, then in “The Author to her Book” she dislodges their claims by insisting on her book's location in a complex of material relations that escape the authority of any localized group of men. In “The Author to her Book,” rag paper and the animation of the scene of *The Tenth Muse*'s printing in London both call to mind the interdependence of the colony on England, and even of England on other nations. Bradstreet, who at first appears as a meek woman with a global mechanism of print at work upon her, decentralizes the position of power assumed by approving men prefacing her book; they, too, are interpellated into the widening circles of reliance represented in the print trades.

Simply pointing to the fact that her book's existence depended on a complex transatlantic mechanism, however, is not the only way in which Bradstreet's poem challenges

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<sup>96</sup> John Woodbridge, “Kind Reader,” *The Tenth Muse (1650), and, from the Manuscripts, Meditations, Divine and Morall, Together with Letters and Occasional Pieces by, Anne Bradstreet: Facsimile Reproductions with an Introduction*, ed. Josephine K. Peirce (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1965), iv.

<sup>97</sup> Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation*, 146.

a hierarchical male-dominated print world. In line five, Bradstreet's poetic production, her manuscript sheaf of poems figured as an “ill-form'd offspring” is first associated with the *book* of the poem's title when that brainchild is clothed in “raggs.”<sup>99</sup> Bradstreet strengthens the relationship between the child and the book by pointing to common material, rags, in addition to shared parentage. By association with the word ragamuffin, the word rag brings to mind the image of the malformed, bratty, ill-groomed child. Citing several seventeenth-century references, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ragamuffin, noun and adjective respectively, as “a ragged, dirty, disreputable man or boy” and “rough, beggarly, good-for-nothing, disorderly.”<sup>100</sup> Certainly, these senses of the word have been important for unpacking the sense of the child Bradstreet was interested in constructing. As I've noted, however, the word rag is the point at which the cloth dressing the child and the cloth dressing/constituting the book are sutured together. While a child can be “made” in rags as far as “to make” signifies “to dress,” the book, however, the poem's object of address, would literally have been made of rags in 1650.

Though the technology for making paper was relatively unchanged from the fourteenth century through the eighteenth, the infrastructure of paper manufacture in Europe and its colonies did not develop evenly. Before the discovery and widespread use of wood pulp for paper production in the nineteenth century, the industry was volatile and subject to supply shortages, international trade negotiations, and changes in local conditions. There were no paper mills in the North American colonies during Bradstreet's lifetime. The first North American mill was established in Philadelphia in 1690, but papermaking would not

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<sup>99</sup> Bradstreet, “The Author to her Book,” 45.

<sup>100</sup> “Ragamuffin, n.2 and a.2b,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/cgi/entry/50196375single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=ragamuffin&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/cgi/entry/50196375single=1&query_type=word&queryword=ragamuffin&first=1&max_to_show=10).

reach Bradstreet's Massachusetts until 1729.<sup>101</sup> The situation was not much better in Bradstreet's homeland. Seventeenth-century English papermaking, was retarded by a lack of rags, especially for the production of print-quality white paper. According to Phillip Gaskell:

Practically all the white paper used by English printers up to 1670 came from foreign mills, and much the great part of it from France, especially Normandy. There were indeed a good many mills working in England from the later sixteenth century, but they suffered from the lack both of skilled workmen and of a regular supply of linen rags (English people wore wool not linen), and with few and unimportant exceptions, they made brown paper, not white. Foreign paper continued to supply the greater part of the English market during the last quarter of the seventeenth century and the first quarter of the eighteenth, but now it came chiefly from Holland, either from Dutch mills, or from French mills trading through Dutch ports.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> We can only say for certain that papermaking did not begin in the North American colonies until 1690. New evidence, however, suggests that, "paper may have been made in Massachusetts in the early 1670s" (See Keith Arbour, "Foreword," in Thomas L. Gravell and George Miller, *American Watermarks: 1690-1835* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2002), xii). This possibility is incredibly enticing for my reading of "The Author to Her Book" since it means that Bradstreet could have seen or heard of the process taking place near her. This would have placed her in a situation to both provide the rags for rag paper and the ragged lines of her prosody. As Arbour says, the evidence of this "tentative assertion. . . is slender, but it is interesting to think of a counter-narrative to the one that begins in Philadelphia in 1690 (Arbour, "Foreword," xii). The evidence, as Arbour presents it is that, "on 4 February 1674/5, the English polymath Sir William Petty sat down in London with two New Englanders, surnamed Frost and Bartholomew [sic], and recorded what they told him about their part of the world. Petty's informants were knowledgeable and trustworthy. Among the 300 or so data they communicated was one Sir William recorded thus: "*Paper hath been made in Ne England*" (Arbour, "Foreword," xii-xiii). Also pertinent to my argument about the global implications of the rag and paper trade is that, according to Arbour, Petty was concerned about papermaking in his economic writings because "he thought paper largely a French product, the importation of which depleted England's coffers while filling her historic enemy's" (Arbour, "Foreword," xiii, n7).

<sup>102</sup> Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), 60.

By calling attention to the conditions of the production of her book, Bradstreet goes beyond simply reiterating the dependence of colonists on European printers for the majority of printed material they used. By citing rags, she also points to the complex trade of manufactured paper that for England meant a great deal of contingency and dependence on other nations in order to maintain a strong national print media. England's dependence on and vulnerability to bordering European states was a familiar one in Bradstreet's poetry. In "A Dialogue between Old England and New" which appeared in *The Tenth Muse*, Bradstreet, positioning New England as the daughter of England the mother, questions "Old England" about the potential unkind influences of "Forreign ayde."<sup>103</sup> The possible reasons for Old England's ailments include treasonous barons and dukes receiving assistance from other countries, England's "allye, fair *France*" conspiring against her, and "*Holland* quit[ting]" her favor. Though Old England responds that "forraigne Foe, nor fained friend I feare," including France, there is still some question about Holland: "What *Holland* is, I am in some suspence."<sup>104</sup> This isn't to suggest that Bradstreet's engagement with England's dependence on other nations is the same across both "A Dialogue between Old England and New" and "The Author to her Book," but rather to point out that one of the poet's concerns was England's internal stability and the nature of its relationships with bordering states.

It wasn't until the eighteenth century that England was able to supply itself with enough raw material in rags to produce white paper suitable for printing, and problems of rag scarcity never dissipated until the development and widespread adoption of wood-pulp based paper in the mid-nineteenth century. Paper mills all over Europe struggled to keep their vats

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<sup>103</sup> Anne Bradstreet, "A Dialogue between Old England and New," *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David S. Shields (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 40.

<sup>104</sup> Bradstreet, "A Dialogue between Old England and New," 41.

full of rags and there was no shortage of political, juridical, and commercial wrangling to gain advantage in the rag trade. Demand for paper was high, in sixteenth century France alone the mills had to supply “1500 to 300 reams a day to keep [the printers] in production, which [meant] 450,000 to 900,000 reams a year if they were working at full capacity.”<sup>105</sup> The supply of rags, however, was scarce relative to the need for paper.

Book historians Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin have documented the long history of struggles over rag supply. “As the trade grew,” they write, “so rags became scarcer and had to be found farther afield. . . . hence the increasing importance of rag and bone men – the collection of old clothes became lucrative business from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.”<sup>106</sup> As early as 1366 Venetian paper-makers obtained the right to monopolize the collection of rags in order to “ensure supplied and prevent rag collectors [from] demanding exorbitant prices.” In the 1450's Genoese paper-makers “complained [that] they were under the thumb of the rag merchants and sought to prosecute them.” During Bradstreet's lifetime the problem was so acute in present-day Germany that “in 1622. . . all the rags collected in the Bremen area were reserved for the mills of Bremervörde and Altkloster.” In France, and thus likely to have had an effect on English printers, “the decline of the industry at Troyes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appears to have been caused initially by a critical shortage of rags,” vexing one official in 1674 to the point of concluding that the only solution to shortage was to stipulate “that paper-makers must keep their vats filled with rags!”<sup>107</sup> The aporia of this imperative, positing the keeping of a steady supply of rags as a solution to a rag

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<sup>105</sup> Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 35.

<sup>107</sup> Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 35-36.

shortage, evidences the stubbornness of material lack against the logics of economic demand and political necessity.

There are numerous other examples of ways in which the constant demand for, and relative scarcity of, rags were of great concern for everyone involved in the print trades and for the fledging nation-states of Occidental modernity as well. Given near constant conditions of scarcity all over Europe, compounded by the fact that England was doubly dependent on France and Holland for their paper and rags, suggests that any Englishman or woman in London or Massachusetts would have read the word rags with recognition of their function in the book and paper trades with all the connotations and anxieties I have implied.

In other words, Bradstreet and her contemporaries knew the ingredients of paper, their significance, and would have encountered *The Tenth Muse* within this framework. The object clothed in rags to which the poet speaks would have been made of rags owing to these very mechanisms and flows of supply. Like the child of uncertain paternity, the book itself was a physical manifestation of an unseen, indeterminate blending of liquified materials in the manufacture of an object whose 'mother's' contribution was clear, but whose "father" was disparate and foreign. In a single copy of that book, one held the writing of a woman from Massachusetts Bay Colony, presswork from London, paper from Holland or France, and countless mixed rag remnants from shops and households all over Europe.

Bradstreet certainly was aware of the composition of paper, as her use of the word rags shows, and I have offered a picture of the global issues surrounding rag-production in her world in order to suggest what important connotations could reasonably be expected to have accrued to her use of the word. Bradstreet was a poet, of course, and so her use a word in a powerfully complex metaphor of book as child held together by the common factor of



raggs cannot be reduced to commodity history. Metaphors and paper are both devices for reading, and while metaphors are read for their rhetorical effects whereas paper seldom is. Bradstreet's "raggs" offer a complex mingling of material object and discursive text, one that often escapes contemporary scholars, but which was perhaps more readily perceptible by early moderns. Writing about the typical reception of paper, Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass write that scholars assume that:

the clean and familiar textual surface allows reading to proceed unencumbered past matter and into the heart of the matter – into Shakespeare's "meaning." The standard edition thereby promotes a binarism between surface and depth in which the former leads to the latter. . . . No less than depth, surface is locked into the dichotomy of outer/inner, form/content, appearance/reality. Perhaps a more helpful way of conceptualizing the text is to be found outside metaphysics, in the materials of the physical book itself: in paper.<sup>108</sup>

Whatever meaning might be found in the "metaphysics" of a text, de Grazia and Stallybrass find that "the Shakespearean text is, like any Renaissance book, a provisional state in the circulation of matter."<sup>109</sup> These meanings are not available as long as the dichotomies of surface/depth, form/content, or body/sould are the structuring frameworks of the encounter with literature.

Bradstreet was born during the last years of Shakespeare's life, and thus she was born into the world of textiles and texts that Stallybrass, de Grazia, and Ann Rosalind Jones explore. Stallybrass himself has broken from the Eurocentric Shakespearean tradition and

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<sup>108</sup> Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, No. 3. (1993): 280.

<sup>109</sup> de Grazia and Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," 280.

recently co-authored a book on American and printer *par excellence*, Benjamin Franklin.

Bradstreet is much more proximate a figure to Shakespeare and the Renaissance whose work engages with questions of text, textile, and material memory. Her attention to these issues in “The Author to her Book” demonstrates that, like paper, the patterns of thinking about the material of culture moved across the Atlantic.

How did the poet understand her relationship to paper? I have already urged that we approach Bradstreet's use of the word rag armed not only with the history of paper in mind, but also with Derrida's hermeneutics of paper in place, what else can be said to happen in the “complex operation” of paper in “The Author to her Book”? What, for example, might paper itself have had to do with her construction of the book as child metaphor?

There are hints in Bradstreet's work that suggest that she did not assume the Cartesian model wherein the function of paper is likened to the function of the body: the accidental carrier of the essential soul. When Bradstreet mentions the surface of writing, she speaks of inscribing herself into it. When she is writing to her children she refers to the physical book or paper on which she is writing as her worldly representation after death. In “To my dear children” she writes:

This Book by Any yet unread,  
I leave for you when I am dead,  
That being gone, here you may find  
What was your living mothers mind.  
Make use of what I leave in Love

And God shall blesse you from above.<sup>110</sup>

More than words, ideas, or text, Bradstreet explicitly chooses “This Book,” the one which she had contact with, the very paper with which she interacts as she writes to her children both in this world and from beyond the grave. Her deictics point to *this* book, *these* sheets of paper upon which her eyes fell and her hands moved. She ascribes to a specific book of writing paper the ability to contain her mind, to carry the physical trace of herself through time to her children. The physical paper is invested with the body of the mother who it carries into the future. The transactions between the author of the these poems and their intended readers, Bradstreet’s children, are not accomplished through the words alone, they include Bradstreet’s presence carried in the objects of writing and reading. In addition, the commonsense framework that assigns the status of mere surface to paper (surface is to depth as paper is to writing) is displaced as the ink (and, in “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” which I discussed in the introduction, her tears) absorb into the paper. Stallybrass and de Grazia point to this “crucial quality of paper” that “eludes. . . dichotomy. Only because of its absorbency is paper permeable by the black spots of ink.”<sup>111</sup> In Bradstreet’s poem part of her body is absorbed into the paper as well, written *in* the paper in such a way that demands a new way of reading. In these poems Bradstreet is refers to a commonplace book in which she wrote by hand and would have expected her children to read from the same actual book. *The Tenth Muse* is different because of its manufacture and public nature, but these two poems show that she approached paper as much more than a passive surface,

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<sup>110</sup> Anne Bradstreet, “To my dear children,” *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David S. Shields (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 58.

<sup>111</sup> de Grazia and Stallybrass, “The Materiality of the Shakespearian Text,” 280.

giving us reason to ask what about the printed page of *The Tenth Muse* led her to figure it as a child in rags.

Like “The Author to her Book,” these poems are concerned with birth, reproduction, writing, and the material forms of communication. In all three of these poems, Bradstreet the mother addresses her literal and figurative children, and discusses the ways in which she relates to them and cares for them via processes involving writing, books, and paper. These later, personal lyrics illustrate Bradstreet's willingness to ascribe to paper something of a material memory or the ability to carry her presence into the future. “The Author to her Book” says something about the life of paper after Bradstreet's death too. It was found amongst other poems in her effects – her papers one might say – which were arranged, collected with edited poems from *The Tenth Muse*, and an entirely new Bradstreet volume was issued posthumously. “The Author to her Book” was given priority of place as the first of the section of new poems in this 1678 edition.

Unlike the two poems addressed to her children, however, “The Author to her Book” looks backward to 1650 and refers not to the paper on which her hand moves, but to the paper on which *The Tenth Muse* was printed. This is an important difference since not all acts of writing carried the same meaning in her seventeenth-century Puritan community. A woman writing in manuscript to her children was one thing, but, as she writes in “The Prologue” to *The Tenth Muse*, publishing a book of poems that “sing[s] of Wars, of Captaines, and of Kings” was likely to be considered “too superior,” a “thing,” for her; and as happened to Anne Hopkins, it was an act with social consequences.<sup>112</sup> With a fuller sense of the meanings of books and paper in Bradstreet's world, I now want to return to the

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<sup>112</sup> Anne Bradstreet, “The Prologue,” *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David S. Shields (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 36.

questions about gender and print publication that “The Author to her Book” so provocatively poses.

Earlier, I took Bradstreet's reference to rag paper and placed it in its world-historical context in order to understand the relationship she carefully develops between the rags on the child's back, the raggedness of the child's nature, and the rags constituting the paper object of *The Tenth Muse* in front of her. The rags used for paper-production were, in fact, culled from old linen textiles in all their forms: clothes, undergarments, and bedsheets are just three common sources. “In the sheets of a book, bedsheets began a new life,” write de Grazia and Stallybrass.<sup>113</sup> In “The Author to her Book,” Bradstreet relocates and retemporalizes the complex global exchange in rags and paper. The great time and distance traversed by the sheet of rag paper is suddenly localized as the cloth use to care for the child functions at the same time as the cloth within paper. In the poem, the various ways in which women work with textiles demonstrate various sources of rags for paper. She mentions washing the child's face:

Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw

And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw. (46)

These lines continue the dialectical turning of rags into paper and back again as Bradstreet, without warning, shifts registers between child and book. The very rags with which she washes the child's face would have gone to the rag collectors and eventually made their way into the paper mills. Linen rags, textiles, cloth, and clothing pertained to the labors of women, especially the work of caring for family and children. Having suggested the

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<sup>113</sup> de Grazia and Stallybrass, “The Materiality of the Shakespearian Text,” 280.

economics of rag paper, she also explores where those pieces of cloth originate: in the hands of women. If the reference to cloth in face washing is oblique, she returns in the next few lines to an explicit exploration of the cloth-related duties of the wife and mother:

In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun Cloth, I' th' house I find.  
In this array 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam,<sup>114</sup>

Here the language of cloth sustains images of both the child and the book. Bradstreet the mother wishes that she were able to provide better clothes for the child. It's ill-dress contributes to the sense of the child's illegitimacy, its vulgarity, its status as ragamuffin. Bradstreet means these images to reflect on her ability as a mother, perhaps to play to expectations of those like Winthrop who associated the woman writer with the bad wife and mother. She sends her book, such as it is, out into the world of book circulation to “roam” indiscriminately amongst texts high and low; the promiscuity of public life from which women were supposed to abstain.

And what would drive her to express anxiety over her capability to properly clothe the book? Perhaps Bradstreet's ability to “trim” the book is limited by the lack of presses and supplies in Massachusetts, forcing the production abroad. Such a possibility supports the idea that this poem uses connotations of the contemporary book trade to shift the structural position of feminized dependency away from her person as a woman writer and instead finding relationship indicative of the larger trade in books and paper. Interestingly, we know that English printers, by necessity, looked outward for their supply of white paper since, as Gaskell tells us, the majority of their domestic cloth was wool not linen. The line “nought

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<sup>114</sup> Bradstreet, “The Author to her Book,” 46.

save home-spun Cloth, I' th' house I find,” applies equally to English paper makers as it does to the mother addressing her child: both are limited in their ability to provide the right kinds of cloth for their purposes.

It is also worth remembering that clothing and textiles carried significant meaning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have produced extensive documentation of the ways in which Renaissance “clothing. . . reminds,” to borrow their stimulating phrase.<sup>115</sup> Stallybrass and Jones’s reading of Renaissance textile and clothing is analogous to how I have interpreted Bradstreet’s seventeenth-century understanding of paper: textiles carry material memory, a memory that Bradstreet wants to recall in the very pages of books. Just as Bradstreet’s paper could facilitate proximity and interpersonal relationships through time and distance, Stallybrass and Jones see in clothing “a world of social relations put upon the wearer’s body.”<sup>116</sup> Bradstreet’s co-placement of the ragamuffin and the rag-paper book should encourage us to read the world of paper as one more set of social relationships at work on the surface of the wearer’s body. By pointing to the continuity of the rags used to wipe or clothe a child and the rags that constitute paper, Bradstreet suggests that the paper in her book carries the social relationships of the cloth forms that preceded it. The book is the child in an abstract metaphorical sense, but it is through that metaphor that the reader begins to see that the cloth of child-rearing literally *is* the book. We can understand this either by looking at the ways in which people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ascribed to objects like cloth and paper the ability to carry material memory, or we can think more practically about the stains a child leaves on

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<sup>115</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>116</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 3.

the rags used to care for it. Like Bradstreet's salt-tears, the bodily fluids deposited into cloth from face scrubbing, diapering, or wound-dressing were carried to the paper-mills as remnants of domestic labor, where they became the matter of paper. In the moment that Bradstreet unites the book and the child, authorship and motherhood, she reinvigorates the material linkages between the two, pointing to rags as the connective tissue between biological reproduction and artistic production. This is even more apparent when one holds an original copy of *The Tenth Muse*, or any seventeenth century book. One finds large pieces of rag that weren't fully shredded into pulp. Figure 8 shows page 172 of The Library of Congress's copy of *The Tenth Muse* held against the light. A large piece of rag remains and can be seen and felt in the texture of the page. Since this little shred was not completely reduced to pulp, it is an obvious sign of the material past of the pages onto which *The Tenth Muse* was "made. . . in rags."

I.A. Richards described metaphor as the comparison of vehicle and tenor that when placed together, they made available a deeper meaning in the relationship of the two. This operation is at work in Bradstreet's book/child metaphor. In the moment when tenor and vehicle are coeval in the material of rags the reader is faced with a literary object that is at the same time a domestic object, a realization that undoes the gendering of print publication as male. This amounts to nothing less than a deconstruction of the binaries of needle/pen and textile/text that structure the gendered division of creative and intellectual labors, a division that Bradstreet bristled against in "The Prologue" to *The Tenth Muse*.



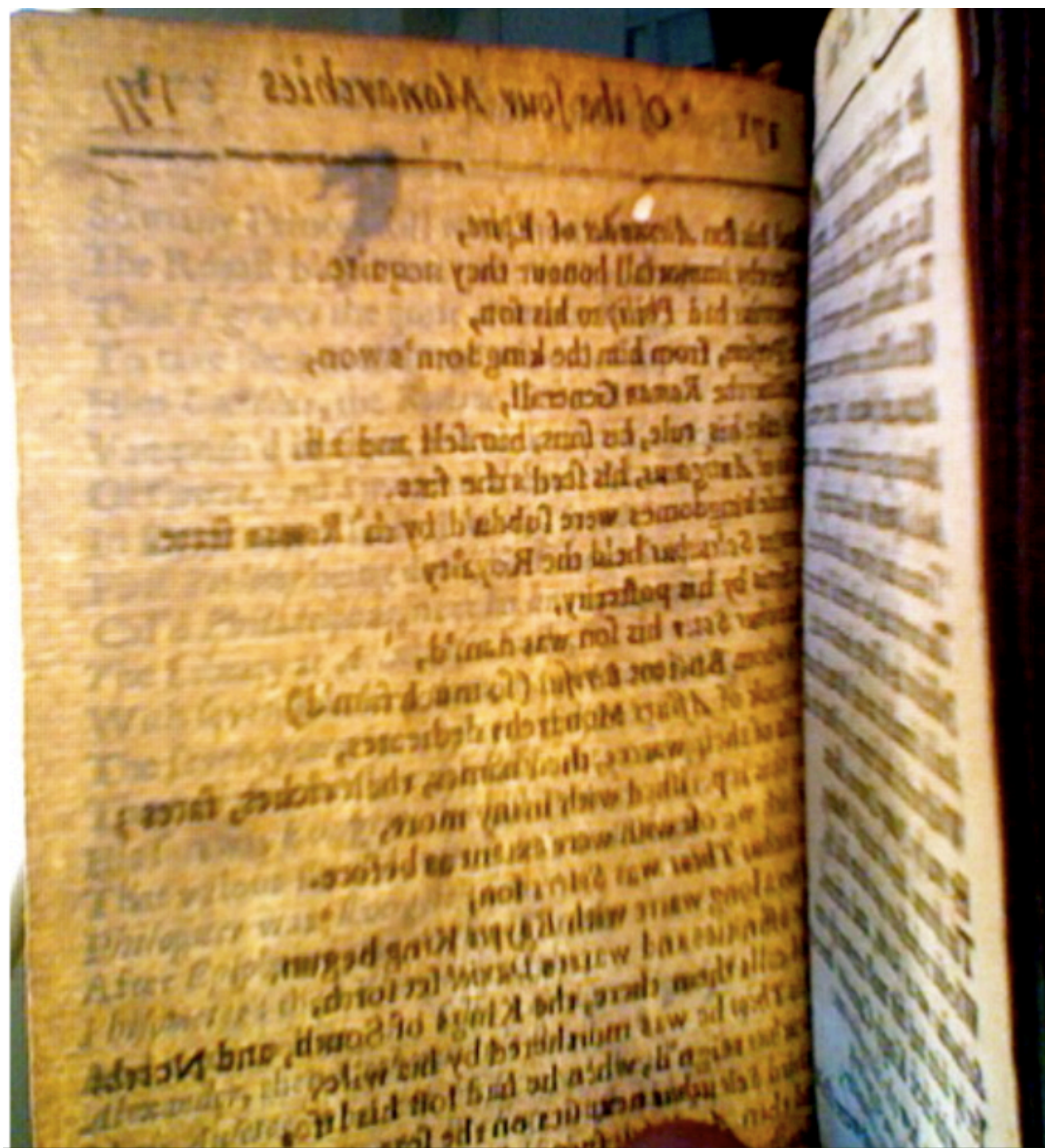


Figure 7: A shred of linen rag visible within page 172 of the Library of Congress' copy of *The Tenth Muse*. This is but one example of a common feature of handmade rag paper. Photo courtesy of the author.

Winthrop's treatment of Anne Hopkins is again useful to illustrate how these divisions permeated the perception of daily life and work in Bradstreet's Massachusetts. If, instead of reading and writing books, "she had attended to her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully in the place that God had set her."<sup>117</sup> Winthrop's phrases delineate the domestic space of women and the intellectual space of men. In "The Prologue," Bradstreet represents "household affairs" and "such things as are proper for men" in the familiar opposition between the needle and the pen. There she expects to be chastised by her community and told that in her hand "a needle better fits" than a "Poets Pen."<sup>118</sup> The symbolic separate spheres of needles and pens had a long history by the time Bradstreet seized on it to preempt her critics. "Text after text throughout [Renaissance] Europe," write Jones and Stallybrass, "insisted on the division of these two kinds of labor: the useful industry of the private woman could save her from aspiring to the dangerous self-display of the woman in print."<sup>119</sup> But, say Jones and Stallybrass, even as "conservative gender politics" opposed chaste textile work to the shameful example of Sappho, the art of the needle exceeded the frameworks into which it had been conscripted. "The needle could *be* a pen" as "new technical practices opened up unpredictable possibilities for the design and display of textile work of women."<sup>120</sup>

Even as Bradstreet chafes against the needle/pen separation, women's textile work had already disrupted "any clear distinction between public and private, inner and outer

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation*, 128.

<sup>118</sup> Bradstreet, "The Prologue," 37.

<sup>119</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 141.

<sup>120</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 144.

spaces” in the practice of English needlewomen.<sup>121</sup> Clothing, bed linens, and furniture, for example, were embellished with what are identifiably narrative forms. These textiles were also the spaces of political expression during Bradstreet’s life. During the English Civil War, needlewomen stitched caterpillars, butterflies, and peacocks (Royalist symbols) into the objects surrounding them including mirror frames and caskets, in addition to elaborate narrative panels.<sup>122</sup> In “The Prologue,” Bradstreet expects that her contemporaries will use the needle/pen division to insist on Bradstreet’s proper place in the social structure, as a producer of proper housework, proper textile work. This is, of course, her representation of others’ expectations. As a needlewoman using the same pattern books and producing needlework in the same contexts as explored by Jones and Stallybrass, the textile work she performed may have already resonated for her as one where “needlewomen clothed themselves, their intimate furnishings, and their public spaces with textiles that challenge any simple opposition between public and private, the domestic and the political, material labor and ‘immaterial memory.’”<sup>123</sup> The textile work of the needle could already be understood as a narrative form, a literary object. Highlighting the fact that cloth lends itself as the material substrate of both stitching and printing, a careful observer of the unequal gendering of objects and labors such as Bradstreet, could have easily seen the play of contradictions that inhere in the very pages *The Tenth Muse*.

Her pointing to the presence of rags also raises an important question about the reception and history of women’s art. The intricate textile work that women produced were categorized as the lower, or decorative arts, and as such women artists were considered

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<sup>121</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 148.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 165-166.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

producers of art worthy of inclusion in the Pantheon of great artists and writers. “The Prologue” is rich with her awareness of this hierarchy of creative pursuits. But by reminding that the basis of paper is old textile, she illustrates that such a hierarchy may indicate use value rather than inherent gender superiority. As art-historian Ingrid Rowland writes, “If we have no Leonardos and Michelangelos from [the] embroidered world, it is partly because so many towels and handkerchiefs have worn to rags.”<sup>124</sup> Rowland doesn’t go on to say that those rags went on to live as paper, but Bradstreet certainly made that connection.

Bradstreet’s “raggs” dissipate the discursive space between the bed linen and the book, the needle and the pen, the public and the private. Bradstreet’s poetry shows that she understood paper as an object with a material memory, an object that carries past material worlds within it. If in “The Prologue” she entertains the range of possible protests against her work, chief among these the call she remain in her domestic place, then in “The Author to her Book” she rejects these by illustrating the undeniable constitutive link between a woman’s ‘place’ and the book. The worlds of domestic production, biological reproduction, and literary production are, contrary to the norms of her contemporaries, mutually inclusive. The textiles of women’s domestic work, and in them the very traces of women’s labor, she shows, are present in every act of entextualization, whether in the print production of *The Tenth Muse* or the work of Du Bartas.

#### *A Book for Anne Bradstreet*

In 2004, book artist Margery S. Hellmann produced fifty copies of an art book, *A Book for Anne Bradstreet* that, consciously or unconsciously, reintroduces Bradstreet’s

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<sup>124</sup> Ingrid D. Rowland, “Women Artists Win!” *The New York Review of Books* Volume LV, No. 9 (May 29, 2008): 27.

critical engagement with her culture (see Figure 9). The artist memorializes the poet by appealing to her place in the popular imagination as a pioneering, yet pious woman poet who balanced authorship and motherhood. Because it is an art book – and such books are marketed to collectors who are either knowledgeable about the book arts or who desire the senses of authenticity and scarcity created by such information – the artist’s description highlights the process of production:

Each folio of this popup book is comprised of three levels. Her poem, *An Author to Her Book* [sic], is printed on the pop-up pages. Beneath them is my explanation of her life. Circling the edge of the folio is a series of sayings/proverbs collected by Anne Bradstreet. The lower page levels are sewn together using embroidery stitches appropriate to her time. Letterpress printed in brown, rust, black, and white inks on Canson Mi Teintes papers. Bound in paper over boards with a linen spine in an edition of fifty. (Hellmann)

This level attention to the details of production is, I think, close to how Bradstreet would have perceived her copy of *The Tenth Muse*. She probably wouldn’t have been able to name the font, or the source mill for the paper, but she could have described how the paper was made, how the type was set, and how the book was assembled. Hellmann adds a significant detail to her book that links *A Book for Anne Bradstreet* to Bradstreet’s “The Author to her Book” in more than a reprinting of her words. The book artist used “stitches appropriate to [Bradstreet’s] time” to bind the papers together. This detail maintains the connection between a multitude of women’s work with textiles and her work as a woman poet. While popular readers today might see those stitches as a feminization of the page meant to highlight the gender of the author, those stitches speak to the conditions of book production that Bradstreet

herself insisted meant that the so-called masculine printed book was always feminized. It is a fitting tribute to the way in which “The Author to her Book” engages with the technology of the seventeenth-century book in order to unsettle the space between the needle and the pen.



Figure 8: Margery Hellmann, *A Book For Anne Bradstreet*. Letterpress printed in brown, rust, black, and white inks on Canson Mi Teintes papers. Bound in paper over boards with a linen spine in an edition of fifty. 17 x 19 x 2 centimeters. 2004. Margery Hellman, [photo of “A Book for Anne Bradstreet”] Photo. <<http://www.guildofbookworkers.org/gallery/100anniversary/contemp/hellmann.shtml>> 1 October, 2011.

## **“I’ve heard the veriest trifles have a voice”: Lydia Sigourney’s Cloth Poems**

Though separated by over a century, Lydia Sigourney, like Bradstreet, faced criticism for being a woman in print. Also like Bradstreet, she wrote poems about cloth and paper in order to argue that not only did women belong in print, but that print depended on women. When she was composing and publishing her cloth poems between 1833 and 1841, Lydia Sigourney had recently been commanded by her husband to “be less a poet and more a wife.” Objecting to her increasing desire to publish and to engage in what he thought were secret dalliances with the literary men of Hartford, Charles Sigourney prepared an “Appeal” to his wife after she requested a separation that he, in turn, denied. In an 1827 letter he lists grievances with his wife:

The ambition for literary distinction seems now to be occupying all your thoughts, & threatens to destroy your conjugal character... the apparently unconquerable passion of displaying yourself is the secret principle which of late influences your conduct.... It is not, my dear wife, that I have a decided objection to your writing, & improving the elegant accomplishments you possess. It is not that I object to your publishing what you write, provided it be in moderation, and... “like the Sun behind a cloud, yourself unseen.” But I do object to the excess, & the abuse of this talent, the consequent immoderate desire of constantly appearing before the publick... which amounts, in fact, to a mental disease.... I do object, and it has given me great pains to see your name bandied about in the newspapers, & magazines... in the mouths of printers, & publishers, artists, & shop boys.... I do object that you sink the woman, & the wife, in the writer; that you appear to be more anxious, and better pleased to be



known for your talents as an author, than for virtues as a wife, & a mother.... Who wants, or would value, a wife, who is to be the publick property of the whole community? – She who wishes to belong to the publick never should consent to be the private possession of any individual man.<sup>125</sup>

In Charles Sigourney's mind, writing was a fine talent and an adornment for a woman, but the promiscuity of publication, combined with the increasing professionalization of writing, disqualified a wife from her husband's full possession. This sense is reflected especially in his recoiling at the thought of printers and publishers having an intimacy with her such that she is in their mouths, an image that could be extended even to the mouths of her anonymous readership voicing her in their mouths. Charles Sigourney's appraisal of his wife's writing is also marked by his fear of what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call the ever-present potential "duplicity" of female authorship.<sup>126</sup> Toril Moi's characterization of the masculine construction and fear of the duplicitous female author seems relevant to Charles Sigourney's incomprehensibility of his wife's creative mind. When her husband accuses her of having a "mental disease" it seems likely to be a product of his perception of her as a "duplicitous woman... whose consciousness is opaque to man, whose mind will not let itself be penetrated by the phallic probings of masculine thought."<sup>127</sup>

Despite his conventional understanding of her work, the poet and her husband did not reach a separation, nine months after he wrote the letter she bore their first child to survive

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<sup>125</sup> Charles Sigourney, "A Husband's 'Appeal' – Be Less a Poet and More a Wife," October 1837, in *Lydia Sigourney: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Gary Kelly (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 311-315. Underline emphasis in original.

<sup>126</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 34.

<sup>127</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 58.



birth, and two years later had another. She published anonymously at first, and when she returned to working under her own name (because her husband's business went into a slump and her name carried value in the literary marketplace), she "pick[ed] up on the theme of her husband's appeal," and published on "acceptably feminine subjects such as education, moral reform, and female conduct."<sup>128</sup> It was in the feminized print marketplace, however, that her work proved remarkably profitable while allowing her to critique the personal and professional limits placed upon her by discourses of appropriate femininity.

One topic befitting the "virtues" of a wife and mother was cloth. Addressing silk, linen, and cotton in poetic apostrophe, however, also meant that Sigourney's poems discussed the essential ingredients of papermaking that good "ladies" who ran households were expected to collect. While still speaking from the "proper" terrain of the domestic, Sigourney used cloth's presence in both the home and the paper mill to explore how the public and the private were interrelated, and how the domestic and the literary were materially linked, challenging the partitions that circumscribed her.

The first poem in her cloth series, "To A Fragment of Silk" was published in the 1833 edition of the gift annual, *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir: A Christmas and New Year's Present*. "To A Fragment of Silk" begins, as do all three cloth poems, with the speaker's notice of a piece of fabric lying out of place in an otherwise tidy household. "Well, radiant shred of silk, is it your choice, / Here on my carpet, thus at ease to lay?" The occasion of the poem is an interruption of the orderly domestic space; the speaker is one whose perception of her domestic environs ("my carpet") is so acute that the presence of a random silk strand sticks out.

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<sup>128</sup> Gary Kelly, "Introduction," in Lydia Sigourney, *Lydia Sigourney: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 23.

This interruption of the orderly domestic space immediately opens unto an expansive imaginative scene. The speaker addresses the object: “I’ve heard the veriest trifles have a voice / Unto the musing mind; what can you say?” It is unclear what is meant by the attribution of voice to this object. Does the silk speak; is it fully personified? Or, rather, does it present the speaker with the opportunity to engage in imaginative contemplation? In whatever manner it communicates, the silk inspires within the speaker’s “musing mind” dreams of the exotic lands from which the silk has come: “You seem to wake a dream of southern bowers / Where sprang your rudiments, among Italian flowers.” Like a novel or poem, the piece of cloth provides an occasion for the imaginative mind of the housewife to break from the confines of the home and its demand on her attention.

The object does more than inspire Romantic images of the Mediterranean. It carries within its specific material history. “Who were your ancestors?,” the speaker asks. The silk replies and the speaker, surprised, repeats the answer so that the reader shares in the information: “What! those unsightly worms, with tireless maws, / And such a marvelous digestion?” The silk strand occasions a comparison between the worms that die in their “cone like urns” and “many a purblind dame” who work the “shuttle’s toil.” Both the worms and the women who work silk into cloth on the looms suffer bodily harm to produce the “rainbow tinted tissue.” In Sigourney’s poems, cloth defies the logic of what Marx called the commodity fetish, ushering forth a narrative history of its material production.<sup>129</sup> We might

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<sup>129</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between narrative and commodity fetishism, and the ways in which commodities “speak” in Marxian terms see Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, 25-30. Brown characterizes Marx’s construction of the commodity as the container of “the whole truth of Capital understood as a system – lurking at the bottom of a mystery.... This mystery story [is] predicated on the difference between the commodity’s apparent and actual source of value.” See Bill Brown, *A Sense of*

recall that Marx's prime example in explaining the commodity fetish is "a coat and ten yards of linen," and that Sigourney's cloth poems (and the it-narratives to which they are related) predate Marx's *Capital* by thirty years.<sup>130</sup> For Sigourney this is an occasion to display both the artistry and the hardship of women's labor in an *objet d'art* that from a masculinist perspective, appears, like women's work generally, to be the "veriest of trifles."

Between stanzas three and four, the poem shifts from exploring women's labor to juxtaposing the ways silk figures the public and private in the U.S., or silk's "destiny in this New World." Silk is first imagined as part of the private, intimate lives of women young and old who use it either as a "dazzling robe to make the young beauty vain," or "to hide time's ravage" of "some waning lady pranked and curled." The silk covers and uncovers women's bodies according to codes of beauty, adornment, and propriety, acting as a boundary that places the woman's body within and the public eye without. Along these lines, silk is imagined to grace "the bosom.... with outward show doth swell,"<sup>131</sup> revealing as it conceals.<sup>132</sup> Here Sigourney's speaker interrupts the focus on women's work and women's

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*Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>130</sup> Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 226.

<sup>131</sup> Lydia Sigourney, "To A Fragment of Silk," *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Gary Kelly (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 107.

<sup>132</sup> There is a connection here to the work of Elizabeth Maddock Dillon in *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*. Dillon explores notions of publicity and the establishment of the literary public sphere, familiarized by Jürgen Habermas, while tracing the ways in which these set themselves against notions of privacy and femininity as necessary backdrop. Dillon identifies a tendency for the literary public sphere to construct itself on the revelation or exposure of the feminized private sphere, which leads me to think of how these women were constantly asked to send their underclothes into the public for the technological realization of the print public sphere. To use Dillon's provocative phrase, "we might say that women have been indecently exposed in print." See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 25.

bodies and turns radically to the world of business and finance, familiar industries to her as a resident of Hartford, Connecticut:

Your history is not complete. Your second birth  
is in bank-paper, to allure the eyes,  
Making the rich o'erprize the gifts of earth  
And the poor covet what his God denies:  
Man's vanity from a vile worm may grow,  
And paper puff his pride; go, gaudy fragment go!<sup>133</sup>

Though Sigourney has used the natal image to hedge the sudden shift from the domestic and the decorative to the public and financial, the change is dramatic. What began as a noticeable mark in an otherwise clean and organized domestic space, and what seemed at first to represent women's work and women's dress, silk is, by the end of the poem, the catalyst of a critique of "Man's vanity." Certainly, the capitalization of "Man" could indicate that Sigourney means to speak of mankind, but the spatial and thematic shift from the domestic to the public ensures that "Man's vanity" is freighted with gendered significance.

In the choice of cloth for her subject matter, Sigourney mostly remains within properly defined feminine subject matter, but because cloth materially interpenetrates "spheres" it connects the "trifles" of women to the "vanities" of men. The link is established when the speaker sends the piece of silk to the paper mill: "go, gaudy fragment, go!" Sigourney uses this material connection as justification for a critique of the financial market's misvaluation of a piece of silk paper. Silk enwraps both the "dazzling [young] beauty" and the "allure[s] the eyes" of the investor, but she shows that at the same time it

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<sup>133</sup> Lydia Sigourney, "To A Fragment of Silk," 108.

also dresses the “waning lady” and “puff[s]” the value of goods. In 1833, Sigourney’s remarks about the potentially inflated value of paper money were probably occasioned by Andrew Jackson’s withdrawal of all federal deposits from the Second Bank of the United States in September of that year, an act that crippled federal bank regulation and fueled speculation until the Panic of 1837 plunged the U.S. economy into a five-year depression. Sigourney recognizes in silk a material connection between the private and public domains that allows her to maintain the propriety her husband wished while also momentarily venturing into the public discourse of economic critique.

Sigourney looked to linen, however, to argue for women’s connection to the literary marketplace, answering her husband’s objection that “you sink the woman, & the wife, in the writer” as if these were exclusive categories. As both a writer and keeper of what her husband called the “domestick fire,” Sigourney, like Bradstreet, recognized that she was an important contributor to the processes of paper and textual production.<sup>134</sup> By tracing the “life” of a piece of linen, “To a Shred of Linen” highlights the irony of a situation in which women are chastised for engaging their imaginative literary faculties at the same time that they are called upon to lend their labor to the production of paper. First appearing in the third edition of *Select Poems* in 1838, the poem continues on the theme of women’s cloth-based public/private involvement while expanding her reach to address women’s authorship.<sup>135</sup>

The linen poem begins in the same manner as does silk poem. A housewife discovers an errant shred of cloth, except whereas once the speaker’s imagination immediately began to spin romantic images of the Mediterranean, now the occasion inspires a critical

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<sup>134</sup> Charles Sigourney, “A Husband’s ‘Appeal,’” 314, 316. Underline emphasis in original.

<sup>135</sup> Lydia Sigourney, “To a Shred of Linen,” *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Gary Kelly (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 168n1.

consciousness about the consequences of such readerly imagining. As Melissa Ladd Teed explains, “in ‘To a Shred of Linen,’ Sigourney observed that if a ‘neat lady’ had seen the scrap of cloth had escaped the speaker’s housecleaning, that domestic critic would undoubtedly have admonished, ‘this comes from reading books’ or ‘this comes of writing poetry.’”<sup>136</sup> Teed identifies an important aspect of Sigourney’s change in tone from the silk poem to the linen poem. “While the tone of the poem is playful,” she says, “Sigourney raised in it an issue of central concern: that she risked public censure for writing if she failed to attend to her familiar responsibilities.” Sigourney’s method of dealing with this threat, however, was not simply to “walk the fine line between promoting her career” while at the same time passively “appearing not have any interest in doing so,” as Teed suggests.<sup>137</sup> By offering an archaeology of the page in her poem, Sigourney’s speaker answers the domestic critic’s accusation that the intruding linen “comes from reading books” by actually demonstrating the inverse. Reading books comes from *this*, the shred of linen in a woman’s home. Like “To a Fragment of Silk,” “To a Shred of Linen” allegorizes the relationship between material, memory, and narration. “To a Shred of Linen,” however, is more focused on the category of the literary; unlike silk that was made into paper for bank notes, linen produced the finest paper for book production. Because of its well-known uses in both the domestic and the literary, linen provided Sigourney the material through which it was possible focus on the links between women and literary production, rather than the supposed necessary separation of the two.

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<sup>136</sup> Melissa Ladd Teed, “A Passion for Distinction: Lydia Huntley Sigourney and the Creation of a Literary Reputation,” *The New England Quarterly* 77.1 (March 2004): 56.

<sup>137</sup> Teed, “A Passion for Distinction,” 56.

Sigourney's characterization of the "littering shred" as "a vile reproach to all good housewifery" of course pertained to the gendered social expectations that constrained her own professional life, but it also alludes to the long history of female poets (like Anne Yale Hopkins and Anne Bradstreet) having to answer to claims about their housewifery. Linen refigures this commonly negative connection between housewifery and the literary, showing the domestic to be generative of the literary in *both* material and content. The "littering" is resignified as the literary.

Like Richard Frame's "Pennsylvania" papermaking poem, "To a Shred of Linen" retreats in time and space back to the flax fields. "Resolve thyself into thine elements," the speaker commands the shred, "I see the stalk and bright blue flower of flax.... I see thy bloom tinging... these New England vales." Sigourney again uses cloth production as an opportunity to discuss women's labor. The speaker imagines the flax farmer's wife, "with kerchiefed head, and eyes brimful of dust" combing the flax. Here again, working the fiber into cloth afflicts the eye, which might stand in for assumptions about women's ability to read and comprehend. Yet another woman works the flax into linen on the loom while her "rustic lover" sits by her side imagining how her labor will increase his worth: her "dextrous hand" will bear "many a keg and pot of butter to the market." He sits, she works and Sigourney offers another reflective scene on the value women's labor relative to men's.<sup>138</sup> All the way back to the flax field, the loom, and the tattered garment, and, as we shall see, all the way to the paper mill and the book, women perform labor at all points along the life cycle of the flax, linen, and paper object.

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<sup>138</sup> Lydia Sigourney, "To a Shred of Linen," 169.

What makes “To a Shred of Linen” stand out as a poem about the literary, however, is the way Sigourney describes the life of linen after it leaves the loom. The speaker’s “thread of... discourse” turns to the scene of the domestic and linen begins to read like a sentimental plot, set within the nineteenth-century middle-class home:

Methinks I scan

Some idiosyncrasy, that marks thee out  
A defunct pillow-case. – Did the trim guest,  
To best chamber usher’d, e’er admire  
The snowy whiteness of they freshn’d youth  
Feeding thy vanity? or some sweet babe  
Pour its pure dream of innocence on thee?  
Say, hast thou listen’d to the sick one’s moan,  
When there was none to comfort? – or shrunk back  
From the dire tossing of the proud man’s brow?  
Or gather’d from young beauty’s restless sigh  
A tale of untold love?

The linen pillowcase’s perception is imagined as a version of the phrase, “if these walls could talk.” What stories does it have to tell? In this, Sigourney’s paper poems are generically related to eighteenth-century it-narratives, and especially to “The Adventures of a Quire of Paper.” The cast of characters and scenes circulating around the pillowcase resemble some of the stock of sentimental narratives: finely appointed rooms, the distinguished houseguest, the innocent child, the sick and the dying, the prideful man, the sighing beauty, hidden love. Resulting from its place in the home, the shred of linen is imagined to absorb the stories of



the people who move around it. The linen becomes a container for stories, an object that can be “scanned,” rather like a poem. It is threaded with discourse, plots are interwoven; Sigourney invites the reader to make as much use of these textile metaphors as possible.

In the final poem’s final stanza, the speaker finds the shred unsatisfactory in its current form. Unlike the fragment of silk whose story was retold through the speaker, but seemed to have the power of speech itself, the linen is “mute.” But this changes as the poem continues:

Still, close and mute! –

Will tell no secrets, ha? – Well then, go down,  
With all thy churl-kept hoard of curious lore,  
In majesty and mystery, go down  
Into the paper-mill, and from its jaws,  
Stainless and smooth, emerge. – Happy shall be  
The renovation, if on thy fair page  
Wisdom and truth, their hallowed lineaments  
Trace for posterity. So shall thine end  
Be better than thy birth, and worthier bard  
Thine apotheosis immortalize.<sup>139</sup>

Mill advertisements often described old linen as somehow deficient, and thus ready to be sent to the mill. In the handkerchief no longer fit to cover the lady’s snowy breast and that I opened with, the linen is no longer fit cover the bosom of a maiden and it returns to her with new utility as a lover’s note. This last stanza of “To a Shred of Linen” retains this structure

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<sup>139</sup> Lydia Sigourney, “To a Shred of Linen,” 170-1.

at the point she is most interested in shifting focus to the paper mills. For all we've heard from/about the linen, its muteness requires that it be sent away to the mills only to return as a literary object.

As the poem closes, the linen does not, however, return as a popular novel that tells the stories pent up in the pillowcase. Sigourney, constrained by social expectations as the speaker fearing reprimand, cannot come out fully in praise of these literary forms. Sigourney modestly deflects any indication of her status as a poet, and hopes that the linen emerges from the paper mill to receive the hallowed "wisdom and truth" of a "worthier bard" immortalized at his apotheosis. This imagining of the literary market is the opposite of what Sigourney knew the field to be. She knew the amount of paper being used to produce gift books, novels of sentiment and sensation, periodicals, and newspapers far outstripped the production of lofty tomes claiming to transmit immortal "wisdom and truth." In the 1830s, when linen was turned into paper for print production it was most likely going to participate in the "carnival of the page," or the vast world of commercial print where her name was a valuable commodity.<sup>140</sup>

If Sigourney couldn't publicly celebrate the development of a literary marketplace in which women were robust producers and consumers of literary content, she could call upon the familiar language of women as rag collectors and consumers of sentimental literature. The paper mill ad ensured that women were seen as essential collectors of material for paper, and in these same ads they were promised sweet notes and interesting novels. Even if these ads pretended that "sighing beaux" would do all the writing, Sigourney shows in this poem that the subjects of popular literature are born in the home and borne to the mill by women.

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<sup>140</sup> Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 14.

When the shred of linen appears at the beginning of the poem, it represents the speaker's fear of being found out as a reader and writer of poetry. By poem's end, however, that piece of linen represents the proliferation of literary material. She knew as well as we do that this desire for more paper and more reading material produced exactly the kinds of literature the home embedded in the shred of linen. Decades before newspaper readers were confronted with sensational stories of mummy paper, and before Sigourney's own poem was printed on paper claiming Egyptian provenance, Sigourney traced the production of paper from a feminist perspective. Sigourney, like Bradstreet before her, developed the public's sense of the contents of paper into an argument about the reliance of the masculine public sphere on the feminine private sphere for its existence. By highlighting the materiality of the literary public sphere in their poetry, Bradstreet and Sigourney look to paper as a route linking domestic work and literary production.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Herman Melville's Queer Paper Allegories

We might learn something about Herman Melville and about how we conceive his relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne if we paid more attention to paper. It is an odd claim, perhaps, but one that is borne out by Melville's biography, his writing, and the history of criticism and speculation on his apparently homoerotic expressions toward Hawthorne. Questions about blank paper alternately frustrate and inspire those who seek meaning from or who seek to make meaning out of Melville's tombstone, of a blank paper scroll carved in stone. Others wonder, if only we had the letters, the now-missing papers, that Hawthorne sent to Melville, then we might know what happened between the two in the summer of 1851. But what if we stopped trying to fill in the meaning of the blank or missing pages? What if we followed Thoreau in being attuned to the "language which all things speak... without metaphor," especially for the meaning resonating within paper, inherent in the shreds of rags.<sup>141</sup> What's queer about Melville's correspondence with Hawthorne is his figuring himself in relation to Hawthorne through what Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips call, "a communal model of impersonal intimacy."<sup>142</sup> Via Melville's letters to Hawthorne from 1851 and his 1855 magazine fiction, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," this chapter examines how Melville figures himself as an always fresh riband of still-wet paper rolling off a paper mill, comprised of the remnants of other lives and past selves, and ready

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<sup>141</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, Second edition, ed. William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 75.

<sup>142</sup> Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 42.

for the pure potentiality of unlimited signification. But first, we go to Thoreau for a primer in the meaning-making capabilities of paper.

Early in *Walden*, a train cuts across the Walden Woods. “The Fitchburg Railroad touches the pond about a hundred rods south of where I dwell,” writes Thoreau. In addition to moving consumer goods and commuters to and from the small towns and villages of central and western Massachusetts, the train carries bales of linen rags from Boston, past Concord, and to the paper mills in Fitchburg.<sup>143</sup> At the harbor in Boston, tattered sails were sold to papermakers who broke down the linen and recycled the cloth into paper. Thoreau continues: “These rags in bales, of all hues and qualities, the lowest condition to which linen and cotton descend... gathered from all quarters both of fashion and poverty... [will go] to become paper... on which forsooth will be written tales of real life, high and low, founded on fact.”<sup>144</sup> But for Thoreau, who prefers hoeing beans to reading, who is, “more influence[ed by] those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on linen paper,” and who asks “why should we leave it to Harper & Brothers... to select our reading,” the carloads of tattered sails are preferable to novels of the sea. “This car-load of torn sails,” writes Thoreau, “is more legible and interesting now than if they should be wrought into paper for books. Who can write so graphically the history of the storms they have weathered as these rents have done? They are proof sheets which need no correction.” I introduce Thoreau’s preference for the rag’s narration of its material memory over the alphabetic characters in the printed book to establish first that the ability of things to convey meaning in and of themselves was an important topos in American Renaissance writing, and, second, that the materiality of paper

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<sup>143</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, 78.

<sup>144</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, 81.

was a crucial site for thinking the relation between thing, signification, and language. A bill of lading for tattered canvas sails headed for a paper mill (see Figure 10). The image of a ship is printed on the sheet. For Thoreau, the ragged sails speak more directly and authentically to their experience of the sea than any mere representation. The sails this bill of lading bring to the mill resonate with meaning before they are turned into paper and written upon, before the image of sails is printed on them. In the same chapter, Thoreau warns that, “we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. Much is published, but little printed.” In other words, the public sphere includes not only the printed, but the signification of things sensible within the common sense Thoreau describes.

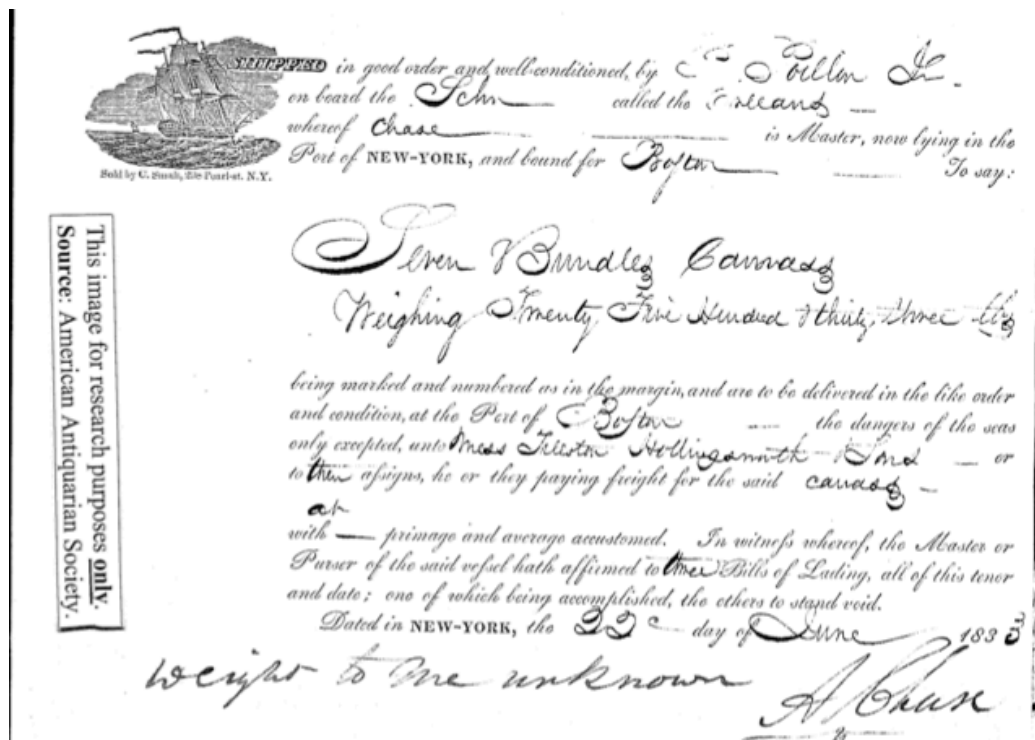


Figure 9: A bill of lading for “seven bundles canvass” delivered to the Port of Boston for the Tileston and Hollingsworth paper mill. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Here I turn from Thoreau to Melville to consider the language that blank sheets speak without metaphor. Marking his grave in the Bronx's Woodlawn Cemetery, Herman Melville's headstone bears the image of a blank scroll, or a long sheet of paper (see Figure 11). Thus provoked by his, "last grave joke" as Kenneth Speirs puts it, Melville scholars have offered several readings of the blank sheet, actually a standard-model headstone left uncustomized beyond the inscription of name and birth/death dates. "Is it the cruelest of jokes, the darkest of dead letter offices, a mum glance to posterity, or is it suggestive of something else?," asks Speirs. He continues: "Is it stupid or brave? Is it honest? .... Its simplicity is finally confounding, the utterly blank scroll on Melville's grave, like the whiteness of the whale, is an invitation to further interpretation, an ending containing innumerable beginnings."<sup>145</sup> Others eschew the interpretive for the biographical, speculating that, "perhaps his family had planned to engrave titles of all his books on the scroll and then decided it 'wasn't worth the expense,' or perhaps they decided he 'hadn't written anything worth remembering.' Perhaps a daughter... deliberately left a blank page like a fresh pad on a writer's desk."<sup>146</sup> With Melville, it seems, we are so often left lingering on that "perhaps." The headstone is but one of the great enigmas surrounding the writer, the stone's representation of blank paper eliciting more questions than it, and the earthly person whose remains it keeps, will answer. I suggest, however, that the image of a blank sheet accurately represents the "ineffable socialities" that Melville felt constituted his subject.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Kenneth Speirs, "Scriptural Stones and Barn Mending: At the Grave of Herman Melville," *Markers XV: Annual Journal for Gravestone Studies* (1998): 36.

<sup>146</sup> Judy Logan, "Melville's Last, Grave Joke?" *Melville Society Extracts* No. 122 (February 2002): 9.

<sup>147</sup> Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 17, 1851, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 212.



Figure 10: Herman Melville's grave. Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, New York. Russ Dodge. [Herman Melville's Grave] Photo. , <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=705>. 30 May 2010. 1 October 2011.



As perplexing as the blank headstone is, another archive of unreadable pages, the missing half of the correspondence between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, has raised even more questions. Much about the surviving letters, those written by Melville to Hawthorne, seem, in the words of Jordan Stein quoting his students' reaction to *The Blithedale Romance*, "so gay."<sup>148</sup> In response to a letter in which Hawthorne apparently praises the just published *Moby-Dick*, itself dedicated to Hawthorne, Melville writes:

Your letter was handed me last night on the road going to Mr. Morewood's, and I read it there. Had I been at home, I would have sat down at once and answered it. In me divine magnanimities are spontaneous and instantaneous -- catch them while you can. The world goes round, and the other side comes up. So now I can't write what I felt. But I felt pantheistic then -- your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's. A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. . . . Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips -- lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. . . . My dear Hawthorne, the atmospheric skepticisms steal into me now, and make me doubtful of my sanity in writing you thus. But, believe me, I am not mad, most noble Festus! But truth is ever incoherent, and when the big hearts strike together, the concussion is a little stunning.<sup>149</sup>

A few months earlier, Melville summoned Hawthorne to Arrowhead Farm for an overnight visit, a prospect with which, for reasons unknown, Sophia Hawthorne, the writer's wife, apparently wasn't very pleased.

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<sup>148</sup> Jordan A. Stein, "The *Blithedale Romance*'s Queer Style," *ESQ* 55.3-4 (2009): 211.

<sup>149</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, November 17, 1851, 212.

That side-blow thro' Mrs Hawthorne will not do. I am not to be charmed out of my promised pleasure by any of that lady's syrenisms. *You*, Sir, I hold accountable, & the visit (in all its original integrity) must be made. -- What! *spend the day*, only with us? -- A Greenlander might as well talk of spending the day with a friend, when the day is only half an inch long. . . . Fear not that you will cause the slightest trouble to us. Your bed is already made, & the wood marked for your fire. . . I keep the word "Welcome" all the time in my mouth, so as to be ready on the instant when you cross the threshold. (By the way the old Romans you know had a Salve carved in *their* thresholds) Another thing, Mr Hawthorne -- Do not think you are coming to any prim nonsensical house -- that is nonsensical in the ordinary way. You must be much bored with punctilios. You may do what you please -- say or say *not* what you please. And if you feel any inclination for that sort of thing -- you may spend the period of your visit *in bed*, if you like -- every hour of your visit. . . . Come -- no nonsense. If you don't -- I will send Constables after you. . . . By the way -- should Mrs. Hawthorne for any reason conclude that *she*, for one, can not stay overnight with us -- then *you* must -- & the children, if you please.<sup>150</sup>

Add to these letters Melville's pronouncement in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" that "Already I feel that this Hawthorne has dropped germanous seeds into my soul. He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further, and further, shoots his strong New England roots into the hot soil of my southern soul,"<sup>151</sup> and it seems like understatement

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<sup>150</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, January 29, 1851, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>151</sup> Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in *Nathaniel Hawthorne, the Contemporary Reviews*, ed. John L. Idol Jr. and Buford Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 112.

when Leland Person and Jana Argersinger write that “the question of sexuality looms like grand hooded phantom” over these two central figures of the American Renaissance.<sup>152</sup>

Person and Argersinger open *Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship*, with an illustration of Queequeg and Ishmael’s nighttime embrace emblazoned on the cover, then with the question of these letters, especially the missing ones. “What’s in a letter? All the world.... But what if the letter is missing?,” they ask.<sup>153</sup> We are invited to imagine, with a particular strain of archive fever, that a complete paper record would pull the hood off the phantom; fill in the blank sheets that taunt us in their silence.

The absence of Hawthorne’s replies has invited rampant speculation. We know Hawthorne sent return letters, as Melville indexes the spaces left blank by his destruction of Hawthorne’s paper record. “I thank you for your easy-flowing long letter,” Melville writes, “which flowed through me, and refreshed all my meadows, as the Housatonic -- opposite me -- does in reality.”<sup>154</sup> The desire for the papers that would alleviate some of the ambiguity is so strong that Melville scholar Wyn Kelley even wrote some herself, ventriloquizing Hawthorne and Melville’s conversation about another enigma, the unwritten Agatha story. Kelly situates her fictional supplement like so,

Drawn by my admiration of Hawthorne and Melville to the Berkshires... I sought and gained a position as a Surveyor in... Lenox and Pittsfield.... One day, while eating a simple repast in the cornfield near Arrowhead... I noticed a glint – of metal? – in the grass at the margin of the field... I was able to dig... uncovering a small but heavy

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<sup>152</sup> Person and Argersinger, “Hawthorne and Melville: Writing, Relationship, and Missing Letters,” *Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship*, ed. Jana L. Argersinger and Leland S. Person (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>153</sup> Person and Argersinger, “Hawthorne and Melville,” 2.

<sup>154</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, July 22, 1851, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 199.

sea chest with the initials “HM” .... Imagine my astonishment at finding within a collection of tissuey letter tied in a black ribbon with a paper marked “Secret” pinned to the top sheet. Opening this eagerly, I read the following words: “Being the correspondence between my self and Hawthorne from the summer and fall of 1852. Some of the letters appear to be missing somehow? – but these remain – and remain cherished as tokens as what might have been.”<sup>155</sup>

The archive is incomplete, the papers missing, and the headstone blank. Even in Kelley’s effort to complete the archive with counterfactual papers hidden away in Melville’s cornfield – as though one of those germanous seeds finally sprouted– a few of the letters apparently retain their fugitive status. Kelly calls her imaginative piece “letters on foolscap,” one part allusion to Melville’s discussion of paper in *The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*, one part play on the foolishness of archive fever, and one part invocation of the materiality of paper, an important fact of life in the Housatonic River Valley, where before refreshing Melville’s meadows, the river powered the largest concentration of paper mills in the U.S. during and after Melville’s time in the Berkshires. Melville frequented the paper mills in Dalton, mere miles from Arrowhead, where he purchased his paper directly from its source. These trips formed the experiential base from which he wrote “*The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*,” for example, and prompted him to associate his location with paper production. Writing to Evert Duyckinck, he said, “I went... and got a

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<sup>155</sup> Wyn Kelley, “Letters on Foolscap,” *Hawthorne and Melville: Writing a Relationship*, ed. Jana L. Argersinger and Leland S. Person (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 156.

sleighload of this paper, a great neighborhood for authors, you see, is Pittsfield.”<sup>156</sup>

In noting the importance of paper to Melville’s everyday experience, I want to pivot from the muteness of the blank scroll and the missing letters – paper that seems to refuse our demand to speak, to be present in the archive, to be forthcoming with answers and identities – to the resonances and significations of paper for Melville in the letters and literature that remain. If we stop looking for paper to document whether Hawthorne and Melville were “so gay,” we might start to see what is queer about paper, or how Melville might understand intimacy to be mediated through paper. I follow recent scholarship employing queer theory to historicize sexuality in the American Renaissance, looking to queer forms and relations rather than gay identities or sex acts that later consolidate into homosexual identity. As Jordan Stein writes,

It’s becoming easier (in part because so many more people are looking) to find apparent evidence for queer sex and homoerotic relations in pre-twentieth-century texts. But it is no easier to determine what exactly this evidence is evidence of. The point here is not to deny lesbian and gay historiography its due, but rather to insist that the project called “literary criticism” does not need to concern itself exclusively with gay themes or gay authors in order to be continuous with the project called “the history of sexuality.”<sup>157</sup>

Instead of the confirmation of apparent gayness that a “completed archive” might offer, Melville’s attention to paper and, following Thoreau, the meanings it contains, directs us to the fount of relations, histories, and encounters embedded in all mediated communication.

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<sup>156</sup> Herman Melville to Evert Duyckinck, February 11, 1851, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 180.

<sup>157</sup> Stein, “*The Blithedale Romance’s* Queer Style,” 214.

Paper is an intensely queer medium, subtending acts of written communication with stranger sociability and nonlinear relationality. Here, I think it useful to follow Kate Thomas' work on queer media. Writing about Victorian Postal system, Thomas shows how the promiscuity of letters mixing in the mailbag and other forms of stranger sociability "asked everyone to imagine themselves in relations of correspondence with each other" and how queer theory helps explain how networks "simultaneously bind us and also show us divergent pathways, help us understand ourselves as both linked and dispersed, reveal the contrapuntal, often erotic relationships between fiction and counterfiction."<sup>158</sup> In Melville's imagination of his own subjectivity and his relation to others, paper signifies the ability to be in infinite correspondence with his own writing process and his idol, Hawthorne. Like Stein, who avoids the seemingly gayest parts of Blithedale's discourse for the queerest parts of its form, I leave behind the "gayest" parts of these letters and the desire for missing papers they provoke, and instead look at the queerest parts of paper media, hopefully opening the possibility to read paper the way Melville seems to, as a form of unlimited intimacy.

During the winter of 1850-51, Herman Melville nearly ran out of paper for the voluminous manuscript of *Moby-Dick*, necessitating a trip to Carson's "Old Red Mill" in Dalton, a few miles away from Arrowhead Farm in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In the heart of the Berkshires, where paper manufactories took advantage of ample running water and immigrant labor, Melville could get paper directly from the source. He and his family returned from the paper mill with "a sleigh-load of paper," and what Melville saw there would become the basis of novella in part about papermaking published four years later in

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<sup>158</sup> Kate Thomas, "Post Sex: On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (Summer 2007): 618.

*Harper's*, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." <sup>159</sup>

On his fresh supply of Berkshire paper, Melville would not only finish writing *Moby-Dick*, but he also began a correspondence with Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom the novel would be dedicated. Surrounded in his office and region by paper and papermaking, Melville began to think of his work and his relationships in terms of paper. Days after the publication of *Moby-Dick*, he wrote to Hawthorne expressing anxieties about the novel's reception: "Appreciation! Recognition! Is Jove appreciated? Why, ever since Adam, who has got the meaning of his great allegory – the world? Then we pygmies must be content to have our paper allegories but ill comprehended."<sup>160</sup> On the surface, "paper allegories" compares Hawthorne's and Melville's fictional tales to God's "great allegory – the world," and recalibrates expectations about reader response. Yet Melville seems to have a richer relationship with paper, suggesting greater depth to the "paper allegories" he mentions. Looking further into the letter, for example, reveals figures of paper that construct Melville's self and relation to others in very complex formations. Melville's description of reading Hawthorne's praise for *Moby-Dick*, for example, is one in which the divisions between minds, bodies, and the paper that communicates between them seemingly all fall away, leaving behind an "infinite fraternity":

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink of my flagon of life?

And when I put it to my lips – lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the

Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence

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<sup>159</sup> Augusta Melville to Helen Maria Melville, January 14, 1851, in Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography, 1819-1851*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 810.

<sup>160</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, November 17, 1851, 212.

this infinite fraternity of feeling. Now sympathizing with the paper, my angel turns over another page.<sup>161</sup>

What does it mean to sympathize with the paper? Melville cannot but imagine the relation between himself and Hawthorne (in all its homoeroticism and high-flown rhetoric) as an intimacy conducted by paper as wires conduct electricity. In imagining sympathy through paper, Melville anticipates the erotic charge that Whitman finds in the materiality of the book:

WHOEVER you are, holding me now in hand,  
Without one thing, all will be useless,  
I give you fair warning, before you attempt me further,  
I am not what you supposed, but far different.

[ ]

Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,  
With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss, or the new husband's kiss,  
For I am the new husband, and I am the comrade.

Or, if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,  
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart, or rest upon your hip,  
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;  
For thus, merely touching you, is enough—is best,  
And thus, touching you, would I silently sleep and be carried eternally.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>162</sup> Walt Whitman, "Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now In Hand," *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh & Company, 1882). 97.



Moving lips link bodies, transforming one body into another. Reading the same words aloud is figured as a kiss, linking bodies through the movement of mouths around the same words. Melville and Hawthorne's two bodies are figured as the Eucharist: one body broken in two pieces, one divine spirit in two bodies. The "infinite fraternity of feeling," the oneness of the mouth or of two bodies cut from the same bread, is then transferred onto the page as Melville's spirit ("my angel") "sympathizes with the paper" as he lays his finger on it to turn the page. What does it mean to sympathize with paper, to feel with paper? Whitman imagines himself living on within the book and so feeling the reader's body heat and heartbeat while secreted away within a pocket. But for Melville, something else seems to be at work, and other parts of this letter might help us understand his "paper allegories."

After initially closing his long and suggestive letter ("this is a long letter.... gibberish," he admits) Melville added the first of two postscripts:

P.S. I can't stop yet. If the world was entirely made up of Magians, I'll tell you what I should do. I should have a paper-mill established at one end of the house, and so have an endless riband of foolscap rolling in upon my desk; and upon that endless riband I should write a thousand – a million – billion thoughts, all under the form of a letter to you. The divine magnet is on you, and my magnet responds. Which is the biggest? A foolish question – they are *One*.<sup>163</sup>

Here, the ideal intimacy is to have "infinite fraternity of feeling" in the form of a paper mill and its still-wet never-ending sheet. Paper materializes the allegorical, the metaphorical, and the symbolic, but not by simply recording these in language on its surface; a paper allegory is not simply figurative language written on paper. Paper itself signifies. This is sometimes

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<sup>163</sup> Whitman, "Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now In Hand," 97.

obvious as when in Melville's correspondence the manufacturer's mark occupies the writing surface. In an 1852 letter, to congratulate Hawthorne on the well-received *Blithedale Romance*, Melville turned to the embossed stamp, drawing a feather over the embossed image of a crown, the mark of Bath papermakers (see Figure 12). He wrote, "By the way, here's a crown. Significant this. Pray, allow me to place it on your head in victorious token of your "Blithedale" success.... I have embellished it with a plume."<sup>164</sup> In pointing out the crown's significance, Melville says that paper, before it has writing on it, signifies. This is clear in the case of the papermaker's embossed logo, which is arguably a form of writing itself, but paper's significance is deeper than that for Melville. The "endless riband of foolscap" running between himself and Hawthorne is a paper allegory about how an endless still-wet roll of paper structures subjectivity and intimacy. As Melville writes in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," paper always represents a set of social relations through its material composition. Rag paper embodies, and the discourse surrounding it imagines, relationalities that, as Kate Thomas has written "see[s] through or look[s] around forms of relation that insist upon linear, discrete, and exclusive models, engaging instead structures of human relation built upon dispersed, infinitely relative, prosthetic, or virtual associations."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, July 17 1852, in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 230.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas, "Post Sex," 619.

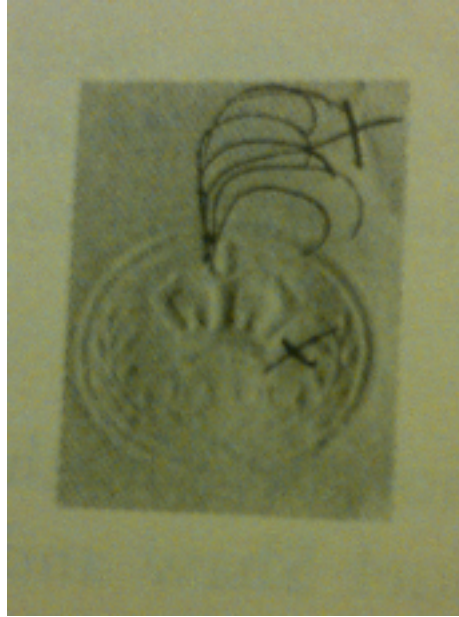


Figure 11: The plume Melville added to an embossed crown on the surface of a sheet of writing paper. “Significant this.” *The Writings of Herman Melville*, Volume 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 230.

Melville looks within the sheet of paper, to the “ineffable socialities” of mixed pulped rags that roll out onto his desk and connect him with Hawthorne. Putting Melville’s “PS,” in which the paper mill figures so importantly, if cryptically, in conversation with another of Melville’s paper allegories, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” will help us understand how Melville perceives the “socialities” within paper and within himself.

“The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” is a linked set of stories, a diptych. The first story is about the narrator’s time with bachelor legal clerks, scholars, and writers in the homosocial space of London’s Temple Bar, enjoying the pleasures of literary discussion, leisure, and food. The homosociality of the space, or more precisely the absence of women and children, opens possibilities for the bachelors to follow their literary pursuits: manuscript collecting, law, architecture, travel. “It was the very perfection of quiet

absorption of good living, good drinking, good feeling, and god talk,” explains the narrator. “We were a band of brothers.... And you could plainly see that these easy-hearted men had no wives or children to give an anxious thought. Almost all of them were travelers too, for bachelors alone can travel freely.”<sup>166</sup> Elizabeth Renker has read Melville’s “Paradise/Bachelors” as a record of his violence toward women and the resentment he felt toward his wife and children for both stymieing his writing and requiring him to write for a market. “Herman’s metonymic chain associating writing with misery, women with misery, and women with writing is both most notable and most notably symptomatic... in “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” she writes.<sup>167</sup> Following Renker, we might read into Melville’s letter urging Hawthorne to stay overnight at Arrowhead (without his wife if she didn’t want to come along) as Melville’s urge to be away from his wife and children, in society with men, and with his literary idol.

But Melville does not write in his “PS” to Hawthorne that in a perfect world they would both be together in the “very Paradise of the Bachelors.”<sup>168</sup> He imagines that he and Hawthorne will be connected through an endless band of paper flowing from a paper mill.

The second part of the diptych has the narrator in the Berkshires on his way to a paper mill. There, he goes on a tour of the operation. In the rag room, where young immigrant women shred cloth for the pulping machine, he has the startling realization that the shirts the maids are cutting up might be those of the bachelors, and the reader is invited to

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<sup>166</sup> Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” *Herman Melville: Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 153.

<sup>167</sup> Elizabeth Renker, “Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page” in *No More Separate Spheres: A Next Wave American Studies Reader*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Durham, North Carolina: Duke, 2002), 106.

<sup>168</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 155.

understand the transatlantic movement of cloth as the formal link between the two parts of this diptych.

"This is the rag-room," coughed the boy.

"You find it rather stifling here," coughed I, in answer; "but the girls don't cough."

"Oh, they are used to it."

"Where do you get such hosts of rags?" picking up a handful from a basket.

"Some from the country round about; some from far over sea -- Leghorn and London."

"'Tis not unlikely, then," murmured I, "that among these heaps of rags there may be some old shirts, gathered from the dormitories of the Paradise of Bachelors. But the buttons are all dropped off. Pray, my lad, do you ever find any bachelor's buttons hereabouts?"<sup>169</sup>

The realization that the rags being turned to paper in this mill might be "gathered from the Paradise of Bachelors" provides a material link between the two parts of the diptych and they prompt a reflection on the different conditions under which the male bachelor writers and the female millworkers labor. As with Bradstreet and Sigourney, we see that without women's constitutive labor in the papermaking process there would be no paper for the bachelors to write on.

But the narrator is quickly distracted by the horrors of the paper mill, horrors that arise, mostly, from the Bachelor's rags not only coming to this U.S. paper mill, but entering into the bodies of the maids. As the maids breathe in the shreds of linen; they become part of their bodies which, in turn, start to resemble paper:

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<sup>169</sup> Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," 161.

The air swam with the fine, poisonous particles, which from all sides darted, subtly, as motes in sun-beams, into the lungs.

"This is the rag-room," coughed the boy.

"You find it rather stifling here," coughed I, in answer; "but the girls don't cough."

"Oh, they are used to it."<sup>170</sup>

Like other industrial tour narratives such as "Life in the Iron Mills," "Tartarus" indexes concern over brutal working conditions under industrialization. Here, breathing in particulate fibers is so routine that it no longer troubles the women most exposed to it. But this is also a form of intimacy amidst the brutality. Remember that we are positioned to think of these rags as coming off the backs of the bachelors. The airborne shreds from the bachelors' shirts enter the maids' bodies. This process makes them resemble paper, too:

"What makes those girls so sheet-white, my lad?"

"Why" -- with a roguish twinkle, pure ignorant drollery, not knowing heartlessness --

"I suppose the handling of such white bits of sheets all the time makes them so sheety."<sup>171</sup>

The clothes of the bachelors enter the maids' bodies – making them sick and pallid looking, like the sheets of paper that other shreds will make. The human relations haunting or inhering in the rags are then mixed into the maids and into a pulp, promiscuously combined in bodies as in paper. Bachelors entering maids through their rags in the lungs is not a form of sex, but it is a kind of sexuality – one of the "intimacies" produced by the "odd companionships and dependencies" that Pastor Wright tells us rags bring to paper. The promiscuous mixing of rags – whether in the maids' bodies or in the paper mill – forms a

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<sup>170</sup> Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," 161.

<sup>171</sup> Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," 162.

peculiar social relation. Melville might call the relations within paper “ineffable socialities,” mixtures of rags that are impossible, definitively, to trace back to individual owners but that we nonetheless know go back to someone. Or, in Thomas’ words, the relation of rags within paper are not “forms of relation that insist upon linear, discrete, and exclusive models.” Rags in paper, rather, build queer “structures of human relation built upon dispersed, infinitely relative, prosthetic, or virtual associations.”<sup>172</sup>

This is a more subtle reading of sexuality in this story than it has tended to receive. Critics have focused on symbols of sex in the story, dividing it between male and female halves (where rags and paper actually move between these spheres) and reading it through the lens of heterosexual reproduction. Critics have read the Fourdrinier paper machine in this section of the story as a womb; inseminated by the white pulp, sheets of wet paper emerge exactly nine minutes later. It is a comparison that Melville invites, to be sure. After all, the title gives us bachelors and maids and the white pulp going into the paper mill is clearly coded as semen entering a womb: “I crossed a large, bespattered place, with two great round vats in it, full of a white, wet, wooly-looking stuff, not unlike the albuminous part of an egg, soft-boiled.”<sup>173</sup> When the “stuff” enters the mill, the narrator tracks how long it takes until it emerges as paper on the other side. “Nine minutes to a second,” is the answer.<sup>174</sup> So, there really isn’t a question of whether sex happens somewhere in “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.” It just happens inside a Fourdrinier machine and it doesn’t produce children. It produces paper. This is the force of Melville’s critique of industrialism. It is anti-human. The bachelors remain bachelors and the maids remain maids. There are no children,

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<sup>172</sup> Thomas, “Post Sex,” 619.

<sup>173</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 162.

<sup>174</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 164.

but there are commodities. “Why is it, Sir, that in most factories, female operatives, of whatever age, are indiscriminately called girls, never women?,” the narrator asks. The guide replies:

“We will not have married women; when they are apt to be off-and-on too much. We want none but steady workers twelve hours to the day, day after day, through the three hundred and sixty-five days, excepting Sundays, Thanksgiving, and Fast-days.”

“Then these are all maids,” said I, while some pained homage to their pale virginity made me involuntarily bow.

“All maids.”

Again the strange emotion filled me.<sup>175</sup>

Of course these girls exhibit such paleness because they have become paper through working in the mill, and through working in the mill have become unmarriageable in this “strange” sort of “pale virginity.”

In this vein, Robyn Wiegman has characterized the story as a “diptych of segregated spheres of gender relations.”<sup>176</sup> Leland Person expands on this thesis, describing the linked stories as Melville’s exploration of his “pessimism about the possibility of mutually create male-female relationship. The bachelors of paradise have no connection to women, the maid of Tartarus have no fruitful connection to men.”<sup>177</sup> Dwelling on the somewhat obvious imagery of the phallus and womb, Person asserts that “if the ‘iron animal’ that embosses the paper is phallogcentrically male, the ‘great machine’ that makes paper unmistakably

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<sup>175</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 166.

<sup>176</sup> Robyn Wiegman, “Melville’s Geography of Gender,” *American Literary History* 1 (1989): 736.

<sup>177</sup> Leland S. Person, “Gender and Sexuality,” *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 233.



male.”<sup>178</sup> But these elide a more complex reading of the erotics of paper. In fact there are connections between the “separate spheres” of the two halves of the story: rags and paper. The templars read and write and perform their intellectual labor on paper made in the mills where their shirts are pulped, and shreds of linen enter the bodies of workers there. I’d like to look past the womb theme that seems to make part 1 (masculine) and part 2 (feminine) into a heterosexual reproduction discourse, and look instead at the infinite possibility of dispersion and refabrication of matter. Shredded rags enter bodies and make the bachelors’ matter part of the maids’. Liquefied and reconstituted into the page, they unite London and the Berkshires, classes who write and classes who labor in mills, bodies of men and bodies of women enter one another across space, out of linear time, and create the infinite possibilities of the blank sheet:

It was very curious. Looking at that blank paper continually dropping, dropping, dropping, my mind ran on in wonderings of those strange uses to which those thousand sheets eventually would be put. All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things -- sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on, without end.<sup>179</sup>

“You make only blank paper, no printing of any sort, I suppose? All blank paper, don’t you?” asks the narrator when he arrives at the mill. “Certainly, what else should a paper factory make?” replies the guide.<sup>180</sup>

But even if these sheets are blank, the narrator is able, by the end of the story, to see

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<sup>178</sup> Person, “Gender and Sexuality,” 234.

<sup>179</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 164-165.

<sup>180</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 161.

infinite possibility in, or on, them. Sermons, legal documents, love letters, government papers, “and so on, without end.” Renker argues that Melville was an incredibly frustrated writer who felt stymied by the women and children in his life and house. Identifying white paper with white women, Melville, Renker says, fought against the blank page and using metaphors for writing like “stabbing” at a book that indexed his abuse of the page and the women in his life.<sup>181</sup> I am not going to argue whether or not Melville was an abusive husband and father, but I do want to point out that the blankness of paper was not necessarily a frustration for Melville, or an index of his inability to write. The paper rolling off the mill in “Tartarus” signifies writing “without end.” More significantly, however, is how blank paper rolling off the mill figures in his “PS” to Hawthorne. There, the blank paper rolling off the mill allows Melville to “write a thousand – a million – billion thoughts.” Why does the paper mill allow Melville to conceive of infinite writing?

In “Paradise/Bachelors,” the ingestion of the Bachelor’s airborne ragged clothing into the millworking Maids’ bodies signifies for Melville the strange reworking of reproduction under industrialism. But in his thinking about his own writing and his subjectivity, the infinite mixing and blending of rags from countless sources is significant. In her book, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman discusses a different kind of archive fever than the one made familiar to us by Derrida. Steedman focuses on the inhalation of dust in the archive and how taking into one’s body the particulate matter of the past affects the writing of history. “The Philosophy of Dust,” she writes, “speaks of the opposite of waste and dispersal; of a grand circularity, of nothing ever going away.... To recognize and deal with the understanding that nothing goes away: to deal with dust. Historians writing the

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<sup>181</sup> Renker, “Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page,” 106-111.

narrative that has no end, certainly make endings, but as we are still in it, the great slow moving Everything, in which nothing has gone away and never shall, you can produce only an Ending, which is different from an end.”<sup>182</sup> Ultimately, I want to suggest that Melville’s endless riband of still wet rag particles is his self-figuration as a writer who ingests the dust of history – the particulate matter of others – and writes the “narrative that has no end,” as Steedman calls it.

Melville figures himself as a perpetually wet, always coming together, endless riband of paper, containing the multitudes of his self. In the November 17 1851 letter, the “rapturous” reply to Hawthorne with the paper mill “PS,” Melville imagines his body and his subject as constantly in flux, reconstituting itself each moment, as if new molecules had entered and rearranged him: “Ineffable socialities are in me,” he writes.

This is a long letter, but you are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it, and direct it to Herman Melville, you will missend it -- for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper. Lord, when shall we be done changing? Your letter was handed me last night on the road going to Mr. Morewood's, and I read it there. Had I been at home, I would have sat down at once and answered it. In me divine maganimities are spontaneous and instantaneous -- catch them while you can. The world goes round, and the other side comes up. So now I can't write what I felt.<sup>183</sup>

Melville here reiterates that he never steps into the same Melville twice. He is constituted, reconstituted, and recirculated. He is figuring himself as a riband of still wet paper rolling off

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<sup>182</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002) 167.

<sup>183</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, November 17, 1851, 213.

a mill. Always becoming Herman Melville out of a set of social relations, other bodies, and other places, his subjectivity is dispersed across many Melvilles, ready for infinite becoming. This, then, is the sense of subjectivity at which the narrator of “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” arrives while looking on the blank pages.

Then, recurring back to them as they here lay all blank, I could not but bethink me of that celebrated comparison of John Locke, who, in demonstration of his theory that man had no innate ideas, compared the human mind at birth to a sheet of blank paper; something destined to be scribbled on, but what sort of characters no soul might tell.<sup>184</sup>

Rather than the narrative of separate male/female spheres engaged in frustrated sexual non-reproduction, the image of the paper here is akin to the endless riband full of a billion thoughts. It expresses the ineffable socialities *within* the page that creates queer impersonal intimacies between the bachelors and the mill workers, and between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. When Melville says of his hand “the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper” he is engaging in the “ego-dissemination” of “self-divestiture” that Bersani names. But, it is in his figuring of the self as endless riband flowing off the mill that Melville is able to achieve “self-expansiveness” in relation to Hawthorne. And with it comes the “writ[ing] of a thousand – a million – billion thoughts.” Melville’s headstone, then, is the riband of foolscap rolling from himself to Hawthorne. It does not represent the muteness of death, but infinite possibility in the loss of self to intimate communication with another through the ever-shifting relations within a sheet of paper.

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<sup>184</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 165.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **“Bottles of ink, and reams of paper”: Racialization and the Material Culture of Print**

At the beginning of “The Tartarus of Maids,” Melville’s narrator describes the Berkshires as an ink and paper landscape, a world of black and white. It is January, so the landscape is overwhelmingly white, “fairly smoked with frost; white vapors curled up from its white-wooded top, as from a chimney.” He is pulled by a horse named Black through the “ebon-hue[d]” “Black Notch,” and when we see of the paper mill we find that it “white-washed... like some great whited sepulchre.” “The whole hollow gleamed with white,” and it is “a snow white hamlet amidst the snows.”<sup>185</sup> Once inside the mill, the narrator sees the maids and compares their white faces to the whiteness of the pulp and paper coming through the mill:

A fascination fastened on me.... Before my eyes – there, passing in slow procession along the wheeling cylinders, I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day....

Their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper, like the print of the tormented face on the handkerchief of Saint Veronica.<sup>186</sup>

The maids’ excessively white faces could be due to the illnesses they develop from working in the mills. But the pallor of their faces also registers a particular problem about their gender: their class, ethnicity, and occupations disqualify them from proper participation in white femininity. Melville’s repeated insistence on the blank whiteness of the page anchors

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<sup>185</sup> Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” *Herman Melville: Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 155-157.

<sup>186</sup> Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” 165.

his explorations of the maid's social positions, providing a key metaphor through which to explore how racial marking works. Unlike other writers who compare "fair maidens" to blank sheets of paper in order to extol their virginity and passivity (later in this chapter we will encounter a poem that asks us to "Observe the maiden, innocently sweet, / She's fair white paper, an unsullied sheet;"), Melville explores the pathologized reversal of this symbol.

Just as the horse "Black" and the geological formation "Black Notch" are visible against the backdrop of white snow, the whiteness of the page acts as a ground for legibility. Melville throws his narrator into a certain kind of vertigo as when he observes the paper mill and its whited sepulchre exterior against the snow. The narrator goes through the mill unable to read what is before him, always needing to be told what he is seeing. He describes the mill as the "great machine... a miracle of inscrutable intricacy." Seeking information about the workings of the mill, the narrator repeatedly turns to his guide, Cupid, and asks, "why?" In the whited mill, observing white paper and white maids, the narrator loses the ability to make sense of what is before him. "A strange emotion filled me," he says. Noticing the narrator's disorientation, Cupid turns to the narrator and says, "Your cheeks look whitish yet, Sir.... You must be careful going home. Do they pain you at all now?"<sup>187</sup> Overcome by disorientation, the narrator himself is in danger of being absorbed into the white world of the mill. Amid all that whiteness, and while turning white himself, the narrator nearly loses himself. That threat of loss speaks to a need to maintain difference (the narrator immediately goes outside where the horse Black and the Black Notch), or legibility.

This chapter explores how two important discourses of legibility, print legibility and racial legibility, inform each other in the nineteenth century. By making meaning out of a

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<sup>187</sup> Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," 166.

field of white spaces and black marks, antebellum print carried racial significance for writers, readers, and print practitioners. Putting William Wells Brown's theories of whiteness in *Clotel* within the context of the everyday utterances of papermakers, printers, and engravers, I argue that the way readers perceived the whiteness of the page ultimately mirrored emergent theories of racial whiteness. Like a white page grounding black print, racial whiteness seemed to be the natural invisible background against which differently marked bodies could be read.

### **Stereotypical**

William Wells Brown carried stereotypes with him. So we learn in an 1849 letter from William Lloyd Garrison to a British abolitionist who had inquired about the American Anti-Slavery Society's role in Brown's English lecture circuit. Brown carried letters of introduction and other credentials from influential Americans, but he went to England a free agent, relying on the generosity of friends and book sales to pay his way. "Mr. Brown does not go out officially from any anti-slavery society, simply because he prefers to stand alone responsible for what he may say and do," Garrison replied. "Nor does he go out to be a pecuniary burden or to make himself an unwelcome guest to any one; but he hopes that, by the sale of his Narrative, (the stereotype plates of which he takes with him,) he shall be able to meet such expenses as may arise beyond what the hospitality of friends may cover."<sup>188</sup> Existing interpretive frameworks for early African American literature tend to privilege literacy and writing in the attainment of agency and subjectivity, exploring how, William L.

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<sup>188</sup> Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, July 17, 1849, in William Edward Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 143.

Andrews writes, “the *writing* of autobiography [is] in some way self-liberating.”<sup>189</sup> As Garrison explains, however, Brown’s freedom in Europe from the reaches of kidnappers and from the management of white abolitionists alike depended on his relation to the material conditions of print production as much as it did his own literacy. The stereotype plates in Brown’s traveling case remind us that producing oneself as a free subject in print and in life is embedded within a set of material textual practices—practices that are (as the double meaning of stereotype suggests) also constitutive in processes of racialization.

Contrast Brown’s carrying stereotype plates of his narrative as a sign and source of his independence with an event Brown recounts in the narrative itself. He describes an incident that occurred while enslaved in Saint Louis, during the period when he was hired out to Elijah Lovejoy, the publisher of the *Saint Louis Times* who would, years later, become an abolitionist printer and famous First Amendment martyr. Brown recounts how he was often sent to the office of another newspaper to retrieve forms of standing type and on one occasion was stopped and harassed by local youth. “Once while returning to the office with type, I was attacked by several large boys, sons of slave-holders, who pelted me with snow-balls. Having the heavy form of type in my hands, I could not make my escape by running; so I laid down the type and gave them battle. They gathered around me, pelting me with stones and sticks, until they overpowered me, and would have captured me, if I had not resorted to my heels. Upon my retreat, they took possession of the type; and what to do to regain it I could not devise.”<sup>190</sup> Just before this passage, Brown notes that his first

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<sup>189</sup> William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi, emphasis in original.

<sup>190</sup> William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), 29. Lovejoy’s story was a national sensation in



acquaintance with literacy was made while working at Lovejoy's press, probably while sorting or setting type. "I am chiefly indebted to [Lovejoy], and to my employment in the printing office, for what little learning I obtained in slavery."<sup>191</sup> To perform basic tasks in the shop Brown would have needed, at minimum, the ability to recognize basic letter shapes in order to sort pieces of type in the cases.

The beginning of literacy, commonly associated with the beginning of freedom in nineteenth-century African American narrative, does seem to stem from Brown's access to letters, but it is an alphabet in the type cases before it is an alphabet in the mind. And while Brown's literacy grows out of the material practice of print production, it is the awkward heft of these materials that encumbers him physically. As an enslaved person, Brown's movement is already restricted to the circuit between two newspaper offices, but the wooden form, furniture, quoins, and leaden type only frustrates his "escape" and exposes him to threat of "capture." Compared to frames of type, the stereotype is freeing. Of course, I am intentionally stressing the similarities and differences between stereotype printing plates and stereotypical representations in order to highlight the links between technologies of print and technologies of racialization. A stereotype plate is created from a mold of moveable type, producing a lightweight replica in a single piece of metal; while the thousands of pieces of movable type are redistributed for new uses, the stereotype can be reprinted over and again, unchanged.<sup>192</sup> Thus Brown can carry his stereotypes across the Atlantic and around England without remaining tethered to a publisher or a particular print shop's type. This mobility is

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the late 1830s and in this passage Brown may be casting himself in Lovejoy's role in the well-known story. Brown is attacked while ferrying type and readers would remember Lovejoy's murder by an anti-abolitionist mob while defending his printing press.

<sup>191</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 27.

<sup>192</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "stereotype" (n., def. 2, 3a, 3b).

documented in an edition of Brown's narrative from 1849 that lists Charles Gilpin as publisher and London as place of publication on the title page, yet on the very next page we find: "Printed, chiefly from the American Stereotype Plates, by Webb and Chapman, Great Brunswick-street, Dublin."<sup>193</sup>

This essay argues that greater attention to the significance of the material culture of print, especially in early African American print culture, shows how technologies of racialization emerge in conjunction with technologies of printed words and images. The stereotype is perhaps the most familiar case. In one sense it offers quick reproduction of legible text, and in another it offers quick reproduction of a legible social type. In the rest of this essay, I examine how another technology of legibility, black/white dualism, structures both print legibility and racial legibility. This essay proposes that the material culture of whiteness in antebellum print culture participates in nineteenth-century racial formation by modeling how whiteness is to be seen while unseen, providing the structural backdrop against which marks or types become legible.<sup>194</sup> I will focus on the materiality of paper (and to a lesser extent, ink) because, as Brown himself suggests in the opening sentences of the 1867 edition of *Clotel*, these materials transmit the author's writing about racial categorizations of blackness and whiteness while they also shape the *sensus communis* about

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<sup>193</sup> William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown, an American Slave, Written By Himself* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), <http://books.google.com/books?id=JWE6AAAACAAJ>.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant theorize racial formation as a "process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized." See *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55–56. For other recent work on material textuality and early African American literature, see Marcy J. Dinius, "Look!! Look!!! at This!!!!": The Radical Typography of David Walker's *Appeal*," *PMLA* 126 (January 2011): 55–72; and Beth A. McCoy, "Race and the (Para)Textual Condition," *PMLA* 121 (January 2006): 156–69.

whiteness, blackness, and structures of legibility and visibility.<sup>195</sup> Reading print relies on making meaning out of the difference between black and white, and in the antebellum period where black ink and white paper were racially coded, the black/white dualism underwriting print legibility further naturalized black/white racial dualism by implying the possibility of “reading” bodies in relation to one another. Finally, I turn to “The Death of Clotel,” a wood engraving providing the only illustration of Brown’s novel’s namesake, as a moment when the materiality of the text, and the racialized meaning of whiteness in paper, forces a foreclosure of the novel’s exploration of racial ambiguity by “filling in” Clotel’s face with ink, signifying racial content instead of the absence implied in white paper (see Figure 13). On display in such a moment is print’s role in the construction and maintenance of dualism as a technology for making sense out of difference both in print culture and antebellum racial discourse.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> This use of “common sense” owes to Jacques Rancière’s concept of the distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*), or the “implicit law governing the sensible order. . . . The distribution of the sensible. . . produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done.” See *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 85.

<sup>196</sup> I refer to *Clotel*, or “the novel,” across its title changes and revisions, as an ongoing project called *Clotel*. Samantha Marie Sommers develops the idea of *Clotel* as an unfolding project in “A Tangled Text: William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853, 1860, 1864, 1867)” (undergraduate thesis, Wesleyan University, 2009), [http://wessscholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1264&context=etd\\_hon\\_theses](http://wessscholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1264&context=etd_hon_theses). Except as noted, references to *Clotel* will be to Robert S. Levine’s reprint of the 1853 edition, William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853), ed. Robert S. Levine (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000).



Figure 12: “The Death of Clotel,” the only illustration of the novel’s eponymous character, was printed in each bound edition of *Clotel*. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

### Black and White and Read All Over

The minstrel riddle “What’s black and white and re(a)d all over? (Answer: the newspaper)” turns on the multiple meanings of white and black and is complicated by the homophonic “red”/“read.” It is a racially inflected joke, not only in its formal use of minstrelsy’s comic indirection, but also in the way it trades in the racialized meanings of color. The demand to think these colors together is frustrated by the assumption that a body is ultimately identified only by one color, or racial identification, “all over.”<sup>197</sup> The resolution arrives in the replacement of racial significations with a printed thing that can, without contradiction, be black and white simultaneously. Titles of scholarship in African

<sup>197</sup> For further discussion of this joke’s history, and a reading of its racial significance in terms of print, publicity, and visual culture, see Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 154–77.

American literature that announce a focus on American literature “in black and white” also play on the heart of this riddle. Such play retraces the historical process in which, through the printed page, black and white became sensible as binary opposites. Print provided a binary black/white structure that would later be used as a key form for the articulation of racial difference.

The emergence of the printed letter and image between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries precipitated the partitioning of black and white from the domain of the full color spectrum, setting them in their now-familiar opposition. The visual experience of the codex shifted from the medieval manuscript culture’s rich illuminations to modern print culture’s black/white contrast. John Calvin, for example, saw in the stark contrast of black print against white paper the model for an aesthetic in which “the most beautiful ornament in the church must be the word of God.” For the “people of the Book,” the word of God appeared in black and white. Michel Pastoureau places ink, paper, and the engraved image at the center of a modern revolution in perception:

It was the circulation of the printed book and engraved images that . . . led to black and white becoming colors ‘apart.’ And even more than the book itself, it was undoubtedly the engraved and printed image—in black ink on white paper—that played the primary role. All or almost all medieval images were polychromatic. The great majority of images in the modern period, circulated in and outside of books, were black and white. This signified a cultural

revolution of considerable scope not only in the domain of knowledge but also in the domain of sensibility.<sup>198</sup>

The printed book, then, quite literally redefined “black” and “white.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in 1594 “white” began to mean “blank space between certain letters or types . . . space left blank between words and lines,” and four years later, “black” began to signify both “writing fluid” and “characters upon . . . paper; writing.”<sup>199</sup>

Black/white dualism is assumed in these definitions: white is sensible between black marks, and black against paper, which is white by definition.

If the black/white binary of print is an analogue of the black/white binary of race, then it seems important to ask how much cultural work this analogue performed. In other words, does the material contrast between black ink and the white page really have significant meaning with respect to the ideological contrast between black and white racially identified bodies in the period during which Brown was writing? The archives of paper mills, stationers, and publishers reveal the degree to which professionals of the material text were occupied with the production and preservation of whiteness. Professional roles in the print shop such as the “printer’s devil” were part of the daily practice of maintaining the purity of paper from staining ink, and even a surprising amount of children’s literature was produced to discipline children’s experience of the page. The paper industry’s preoccupation with and protection of whiteness as a valuable commodity cannot be seen in isolation from

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<sup>198</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 114–18; Calvin quoted in *ibid.*, 127, 114. For more on the meaning of black and white in the development of modern science of sight, mind, and thought, see the “White Science” chapter in Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip Hop* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), esp. 294–302.

<sup>199</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.vv. “black” (n., def. 2a; adj., def. 15b) and “white” (n., def. 7a).

the production of what George Lipsitz calls the “possessive investment in whiteness.”<sup>200</sup> Print legibility does indeed require contrast, but the adoption of whiteness as a central metaphor makes paper inextricable from the processes by which blackness becomes difference and whiteness the unmarked center. In what follows, I offer a range of contexts for the use of whiteness in the paper industry, suggest its convergences with racial discourse, and read how these convergences are at work in parts of *Clotel*.

In his 1814 *American Artist’s Manual*, James Cutbush states a fact about papermaking so well known that it seems axiomatic in its presentation: “I will suppose that the object of the manufacturer is to obtain paper of a beautiful white.”<sup>201</sup> Despite actual differences in the color of finished product, the paper industry adopted white and brown as signifiers of quality loosely related to appearance. The idea of white as pure, unmarked, and beautiful lent itself well to the purposes of an industry in search of an unobtrusive background that contrasted with black ink. “White” was adopted to signify paper with a suitably light and refined surface for printing, and “brown” to signify darker and coarser paper for wrapping and other uses.<sup>202</sup> Until 1867, paper in the United States was still

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<sup>200</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>201</sup> James Cutbush, *The American Artist’s Manual; or, Dictionary of Practical Knowledge in the Application of Philosophy to the Arts and Manufactures*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, and R. Fisher, 1814), reprinted in *Early American Papermaking: Two Treatises on Manufacturing Techniques*, ed. John Bidwell (New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Books, 1990), 59. In his introduction to *Early American Papermaking* Bidwell notes that Cutbush cribbed entire passages from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, including the one from which this quote was taken.

<sup>202</sup> The “brownness” of brown paper takes on added racial significance in the twentieth century with “paper bag societies” and “paper bag parties,” colorist African American associations that are said to have used brown paper bags to test the tones of a potential member’s skin. People with skin darker than the bag were ineligible for inclusion. See Audrey Elisa Kerr, *The Paper Bag Principle: Class, Colorism, and Rumor and the Case of Black Washington D.C.* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

primarily produced from cloth rags, a perpetually scarce resource. Because of the further scarcity of rags considered clean enough to make white paper for printing, both white paper and the “white rags” used to make it commanded high prices.

Writing to Boston papermakers Tileston and Hollingsworth, one salesman explicitly linked whiteness to quality and the promise of great profit: “If you continue to send in as *good* an article as the first 50 reams, I have a prospect of selling a considerable amount of it. . . I hope you will keep up the quality, make it as *white* as possible.”<sup>203</sup> But white paper wasn’t necessarily visually white; “white” served as a metaphor for refinement and lightness in tone. The way whiteness functions in white paper begins to look like the function of whiteness under racial dualism: it is representative of supposed refinement and desirability and only loosely associated with the visual experience of a certain color.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> D. Elliot to Tileston and Hollingsworth, March 9, 1833, in the Tileston and Hollingsworth Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

<sup>204</sup> The ideological value of whiteness that is constructed in relation to the paper trade appears in remarkably similar terms in relation to the slave trade, as Brown demonstrates in *Clotel*. The ragman’s receipt documents whiteness as a valuable property in ways similar to the way whiteness functioned at the slave auction depicted in *Clotel*. The “still wet from the press” advertisement that includes notice of Clotel and Althesa’s sale reads: “Notice: Thirty-eight negros will be offered for sale. . . . Also several mulatto girls of rare personal qualities: two of them very superior.” This marketing of “superiority” comes just before Brown’s description of Clotel as having “a complexion as white as those who were waiting with a wish to become her purchasers.” Here, too, the possession of whiteness has quantifiable value. When Clotel is sold to Horatio Green, the narrator offers an itemized list of her worth. Her body is worth only five hundred dollars, but the virtues of white womanhood that she is said to possess are worth one thousand more: “This was a southern auction, at which the bones, muscles, sinews, blood, and nerves of a young lady of sixteen were sold for five hundred dollars; her moral character for two hundred; her improved intellect for one hundred; her Christianity for three hundred; and her chastity and virtue for four hundred dollars more.” The itemization does not explicitly include her white skin, but shows Clotel’s whiteness to be both physical and metaphysical, tying her physical whiteness to the trope of true white womanhood. The possession of whiteness, whether in the commodity of paper or in the body, is a promise of purity and refinement carrying with it quantifiably higher market value. Brown, *Clotel*, 84, 85, 88.



The first order of business in the papermaking process was to distinguish between rags that could be used to make “white” paper from those that would make “brown.” This was known not only to millworkers or printers, but also to the general public. The separation and appraisal of rags was taught even to children and linked to literacy itself. For example, in an 1837 version of “Jack and the Beanstalk,” an illiterate Jack does not find a giant in the clouds, but rather a paper mill, a type foundry, printing press, bindery, and a schoolhouse. While at the paper mill, Jack joins a group of children working in the rag pile: “[Jack] found himself in a room where there were a great many boys and girls sitting round, and picking among huge piles of cloth of every size, shape, and color, and as they picked they sang,— Pick, pick the black from the white, Assort the whole bundle before it is night.... The mill and the water and man with care have turned dirty rags into paper fair.” Jack selects white from black through equation with dirtiness and fairness. The story’s rhyming refrain, “pick, pick the black from the white,” shows that metaphors of dualism structured the perception of rags and the paper they would become, despite whatever actual color the linens were. Upon returning to his mother, Jack says, “I should like to know what they are going to do with all this white paper,” and later learns about writing that distinguishing black from white is also the most basic skill required in the acquisition of literacy: “I see some strange-looking things of black on a white board...but I do not know what they mean.”<sup>205</sup>

The professional practices of the print shop were shaped by the need to maintain white paper’s virginal state, keeping ink away except for intentional marks. Shops were set up such that workers who touched ink never touched paper. The apprentice who applied ink to the type and who touched the leaden forms was called the “printer’s devil,” a “term [that]

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<sup>205</sup> *Jack and the Beanstalk: A New Version* (Boston: T. H. Carter, 1837), 15, 30.

originated in reference to the fact that the young apprentice would inevitably become stained black from the printing ink.”<sup>206</sup> Paper mills and print shops were structured by metaphors of purity/deviance and cleanliness/filth constructed and circulated in the service of preserving white from black.

One papermaker, however, suggested that the orientation toward whiteness distracted from making the best quality paper, showing the preference for whiteness to be ideological, not functional. The focus on cleanliness and whiteness of rags and paper is misplaced, he claimed, and the rage for whiteness predominated other important qualities: “The degrees of fineness and whiteness, distinguished with little care, are thought to be the only objects of importance; whereas the hardness and softness, the being more or less worn, are very essential in this selection.”<sup>207</sup> Instead of obsessing over color as a determinant of quality, papermakers are here urged to make stronger paper by selecting rags for their texture, not color. Some readers even took a contrary position on what made for the most legible paper color, arguing that the contrast of white and black was painful to the eye and that brown paper was superior. “Brown paper preserves the eye better than white,” argued one reader, “and when authors and readers agree to be wise, we shall avoid printing on a glaring white paper.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> *Ink: Webster’s Quotations, Facts, and Phrases* (San Diego: ICON Group International, 2008), 305

<sup>207</sup> Cutbush, *American Artist’s Manual*, 59.

<sup>208</sup> Quoted in John Power, *A Handy-Book about Books, for Book-Lovers, Book-Buyers, and Book-Sellers* (London: John Wilson, 1870), 135.

These indicate that white color in paper was less a utilitarian need than a reflection of the importance of whiteness in the antebellum imagination.<sup>209</sup> Toni Morrison suggests that Herman Melville, when writing *Moby-Dick*, “was overwhelmed by the philosophical and metaphysical inconsistencies of an extraordinary and unprecedented idea that had its fullest manifestation in his own time in his own country, and that... idea was the successful assertion of whiteness as ideology.”<sup>210</sup> In a similar deployment, the desire to have paper “as *white* as possible” made papermakers, printers, and readers into actors in the production of this pervasive ideology of whiteness in the nineteenth century.

### **Bottles of Ink and Reams of Paper**

The widespread and repeated experience of ink and paper established black and white in the binary opposition that gave substance and support to the logic of racial dualism that dominated social and legal understandings of race in the nineteenth-century United States inhabited by African American writers such as William Wells Brown. The reliance of racial discourse on the binary black/white color metaphor—and the critique of this racial binary—is a key subject in much of Brown’s work.

*Clotel* was first published in London in 1853 while Brown was on the aforementioned European lecture circuit. Tracing the lives of women (Clotel, Althesa, and their daughters) who are descended from Thomas Jefferson and an enslaved woman named Currer (a thinly veiled Sally Hemings), Brown devotes much of the novel to parsing the different forms of

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<sup>209</sup> For more on the racial significance of white goods in the antebellum United States, see Bridget T. Heneghan, *Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

<sup>210</sup> Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 16.

whiteness that these figures simultaneously do and do not inhabit. Clotel and Althesa are described in the novel as white women when whiteness refers to a tone of skin, but as the novel unfolds, their legal and social status as blacks under enslavement reveals itself, like the logic of hypodescent, as prevailing over all else. Though Clotel's light skin color and refined manners allow her temporary inhabitation of white domesticity, she and her daughter are abandoned by the white man who, though he has promised to be a husband and father, cannot finally overcome the legal and social structures that make him their owner. After Althesa's death from fever, her daughters learn of their "true" racial status and are sold into sexual slavery to pay debts. In this way, the novel both bends binaries by indicating how unstable the chromatic metaphors for race are and explores how antebellum U.S. practices forcibly insisted that racial legibility be maintained by settling racial identification into the binary relation of black and white.<sup>211</sup>

As critics in the field of race studies have shown, racial binaries are unstable and socially constructed, yet nonetheless are embedded in legal and social discourse. Addressing the rigidity of racial and symbolic dualisms compared to the slipperiness of the visual, Richard Dyer writes that "white as a symbol, especially when paired with black, seems more stable than white as a hue or skin tone." "White as a skin colour," he explains, "is [an] unstable, unbounded . . . category," a "category that is internally variable and unclear at the edges."<sup>212</sup> As a symbol adopted by law, however, white is, as Cheryl Harris describes, more

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<sup>211</sup> I am aware that the question of racial identification in the nineteenth century can be cut different ways depending on local contexts, laws, customs, and so on, and that these do not always result in categorization as either black or white. I remain interested here, however, in Brown's exploration of black and white as racial signifiers that are flexible or ambiguous in certain registers like the visual, yet which are, in *Clotel*, in the end answerable to the legal constraints of hypodescent, or "one drop" logic.

<sup>212</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 60, 57, 48.

rigidly defined: a legal construct that “defined and affirmed critical aspects of identity (who is white); of privilege (what benefits accrue to its status); and of property (what *legal* entitlements arise from that status).”<sup>213</sup> Brown never misses an opportunity to complicate supposed congruities between the visual and legal syntaxes of race implied in the terms “black” and “white.” Characters dwell in the spaces between apparent skin color and the legal/social privilege metaphorized through racial color. Clotel has a “complexion as white as” white men and features “as finely defined as any” white women. Clotel appears to be “Anglo-Saxon,” even “Real Albino,” which stresses the congruence between racial whiteness and extreme visual whiteness, while also confusing that congruence by locating it in Clotel’s “black” body.<sup>214</sup> Althesa is “as white as most white women in a southern clime,” but “was born a slave.”<sup>215</sup> Brown turns a phrase that puts white next to *white*, elegantly demonstrating the difference between visual and legal registers of race.

Despite Brown’s interest in deconstructing a black/white racial binary, as a writer and printer, he traded in a material world structured by a black/white binary. And indeed, success in that world—printing—depended, one might say, on his ability to present ideas in black and white. Brown seems attuned to the contradiction that his work as a racial theorist constantly interrogated the decipherability of whiteness and blackness in opposition to one another, but that as a writer/printer his work would always depend upon this very structure.

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<sup>213</sup> See Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91.

While stating that legal whiteness is more defined than visual whiteness, I do not mean to suggest that it is homogeneous. Indeed, as Ian Haney-López has shown, local differences in population and power structures have mediated which populations are invited to participate in the property rights of whiteness. See *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>214</sup> Brown, *Clotel*, 87.

<sup>215</sup> Brown, *Clotel*, 196.

Yet, in the final revision of his novel in 1867, Brown seems to capitalize on this irony. In order to theorize the difference between print legibility and racial legibility, Brown figures printing, the putting of black ink onto white paper, as racial intermixture, describing “Quadroon women” as products of ink and paper.

These lines open the 1867 edition:

For many years the South has been noted for its beautiful Quadroon women. Bottles of ink, and reams of paper, have been used to portray the “finely-cut and well-moulded features,” the “silken-curls,” the “dark and brilliant eyes,” the “splendid forms,” the “fascinating smiles,” and “accomplished manners” of these impassioned and voluptuous daughters of the two races.<sup>216</sup>

As Brown suggests, “mulatta” narratives were quite popular, and one in particular rewrote the limits of the possible in the book industry.<sup>217</sup> “One Hundred thousand volumes issued in eight weeks!” exclaimed the *New York Independent* on the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “The demand continues without abatement. . . . It has taken 3000 reams of medium paper, weighing 30 lbs. to the ream—90,000 lbs. of paper.”<sup>218</sup> But, *Clotel*’s final opening passage does more than highlight the expanding scale of print production. Brown opens with print production in order to theorize the concept of legibility. Where earlier editions of *Clotel* begin with a discussion of racial intermixture under slavery,

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<sup>216</sup> Brown, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine* (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1867), 5.

<sup>217</sup> Since the term “mulatto/a” is historically pejorative, I use it only to quote or paraphrase another text or when addressing the figure of the mulatta, which I take to be a cultural trope, not a descriptive term.

<sup>218</sup> Announcement in the *New York Independent*, May 13, 1852, quoted in Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 364.

this one discusses the production of representations of racial intermixture. The first edition begins with a description of an actual population of people, described as a “fearful increase of half whites, most of whose fathers are slaveowners, and their mothers slaves.”<sup>219</sup> In 1867, however, white fathers and black mothers are replaced with black ink and white paper, and the defining characteristics of “Quadroon women” are put under quotation: “silken-curls,” “dark and brilliant eyes,” and so on. Brown shifts from discussing the birth of actual mixed-race people to the production of the literary trope of the mulatta that over “many years” of “portray[al]” has become synonymous with these features. As Ann duCille has written, this passage seems concerned with the problem of representation, or the hypervisibility of the mulatta trope in antebellum popular culture, and that Brown is unlikely, for example, to have uncritically figured mixed-race women as “voluptuous.” Even the replacement of “half whites” with “Quadroon women” recalls “The Quadroons,” the 1842 short story by Lydia Maria Child out of which Brown built *Clotel*. Brown suggests that racial mixture is most legible, then, as a set of literary tropes as the appearance of “silken-curls,” “dark . . . eyes,” and “voluptuous” bodies immediately orients readers to a set of standard characteristics and plots.<sup>220</sup> These figures are mixtures of black and white both because they have “fathers [who

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<sup>219</sup>Brown, *Clotel*, 81.

<sup>220</sup> Ann duCille writes of this passage that Brown’s reference to ink and paper and his “use of quotation marks around the defining phrases he cites, indicate that he is himself is addressing the problem of representation” and how fiction “position[s] . . . black women as objects of the white male gaze.” Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22–23. In his annotations to the 1867 *Clotel* in the Electronic Scholarly Edition, Christopher Mulvey notes, “The passage . . . is possibly taken from a printed source, but, if so, it has not been identified. [Brown] uses quotation marks for six of its phrases. These express stereotypes of exotic, particularly of mixed race, beauty. The quotation marks may indicate that they are quotations, or they may indicate that they are simply stock expressions.” I would argue that Brown does not need a specific source for these lines because he is quoting print culture’s habitual representation of mixed-race women. See Mulvey, ed., *Clotel: An Electronic*

are] slaveowners, and . . . mothers [who are] slaves,” and because they are formed from “bottles of ink, and reams of paper.” It is only in print, however, in assembling lists of features like “silken-curls,” that these figures are legible within a structure of black/white dualism, for, as Brown emphasizes in *Clotel*, the mixture of “black” and “white” in mixed-race people does not produce the legibly “black” body demanded by the laws and logics of hypodescent.

If the portrayal of mixed-race figures like Clotel involves the mixture of black ink and white paper, then Brown’s 1867 introduction also begs a practical question: how does an illustrator visually represent racial ambiguity when the tools at hand are contrasting fields of white paper and black ink? The question is particularly pertinent in the case of *Clotel* because the only illustration of Brown’s eponymous heroine, “The Death of Clotel,” (see Figure 8.1) contradicts the author’s repeated descriptions of the character’s light skin and the importance of her whiteness in the narrative. Clotel looks, Brown writes, “as white as . . . those who . . . wish to become her purchasers,” yet, in the engraving she is visibly darker than the men surrounding her. This disconnect between the verbal and visual text has not escaped scholars. Russ Castronovo, for example, notes that “even though Brown repeatedly states that Clotel . . . is so close to appearing white that she can pass as an Italian or Spanish gentleman, the illustration darkly shades her face.”<sup>221</sup> It is not uncommon for the visual and verbal texts within a work to create tension; “The Death of Clotel” presents what W. J. T. Mitchell calls “image/text,” or “relations of the visual and verbal” that create a “problematic

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*Scholarly Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu:8080/clotel/>.

<sup>221</sup> Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 41.



gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation.”<sup>222</sup> In this instance, the rupture arises out of the link between black/white dualism in print legibility and racial legibility. Brown’s deconstruction of dualism threatens to eradicate the system of black/presence and white/absence through which engravers make meaning.

Mixed-race figures break down the false logic of black/white dualism, presenting a problem for artists whose renderings are dependent upon engraving as a practice of presence and absence that cannot easily mix black and white. What engravings, or “finely-cut” portrayals, like “The Death of Clotel” reveal in their attempts to depict mixed-race women is the problem of racial presence and absence, the idea of blackness as raced and whiteness as normalized, neutral, or transparent, which racial theorists ultimately expose as false. For the illustrator, though, these structures of race and legibility constitute the very form of engraving. In wood engraving, the whiteness of the page literally *is* the racial whiteness of legally white figures who go unmarked in two senses: their faces are not inked, and they are not generally understood to be “raced.” The whiteness of the page makes type legible at the same time as it naturalizes the social structure of whiteness as absence, making race appear “present” on the body of its others. Working out this binary on the surface of the body was even part of an engraver’s training (see Figure 8.2).

Michael Gaudio argues that instead of “explain[ing] away the physical substance of the engraving as the neutral agent of symbolic meaning,” literary scholarship must grant attention “to the peculiar materiality of the engraver’s art.” Engravings have “a syntax,” according to Gaudio, a system of meaning making constructed through “the visible sign of a wood-engraver’s concentrated efforts with his tools,” the “insistently present, insistently

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<sup>222</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 89.

interfering, insistently *material* lines of the engraver.”<sup>223</sup> The material lines marking Clotel’s face actualize the racial coding of the whiteness of paper and the blackness of ink, rendering Clotel’s racial status legible by making it readable on the surface her skin (see Figure 14).

“The Death of Clotel” was originally engraved for the first edition of the novel published by Partridge and Oakey, the same Protestant press that a year before had issued one of the first illustrated London editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In sharing a publisher, Brown’s and Stowe’s novels also had a common illustrator, Henry Anelay, and an engraver, James Johnston, a team recognizable enough to attract top billing alongside Stowe on the edition’s title page.<sup>224</sup> Their images may even have surpassed Stowe’s prose in the eyes of literary tastemakers:

All criticism on the subject of the story of Uncle Tom is superfluous; the public have settled the matter effectually by accepting the book as a sort of anti-slavery Bible not to be spoken against. The question among publishers now is, who can sell the best edition for the money? So far as real art is concerned in the illustrations, the volume before us, to our thinking, answers that question most satisfactorily. The designs of Anelay, engraved by Johnston, which adorn this edition, are alone worth the money it sells for.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xii, 132.

<sup>224</sup> See the title page of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The History of a Christian Slave, by Harriet Beecher Stowe; with an Introduction by Elihu Burritt; Illustrated by Sixteen Engravings by Johnston, from Original Designs by Anelay* (London: Partridge and Oakey: Saunders & Otley, 1852).

<sup>225</sup> William Tait and Christian Isobel Johnstone, eds., review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The History of a Christian Slave, by Harriet Beecher Stowe*, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 19 (December 1852): 761.

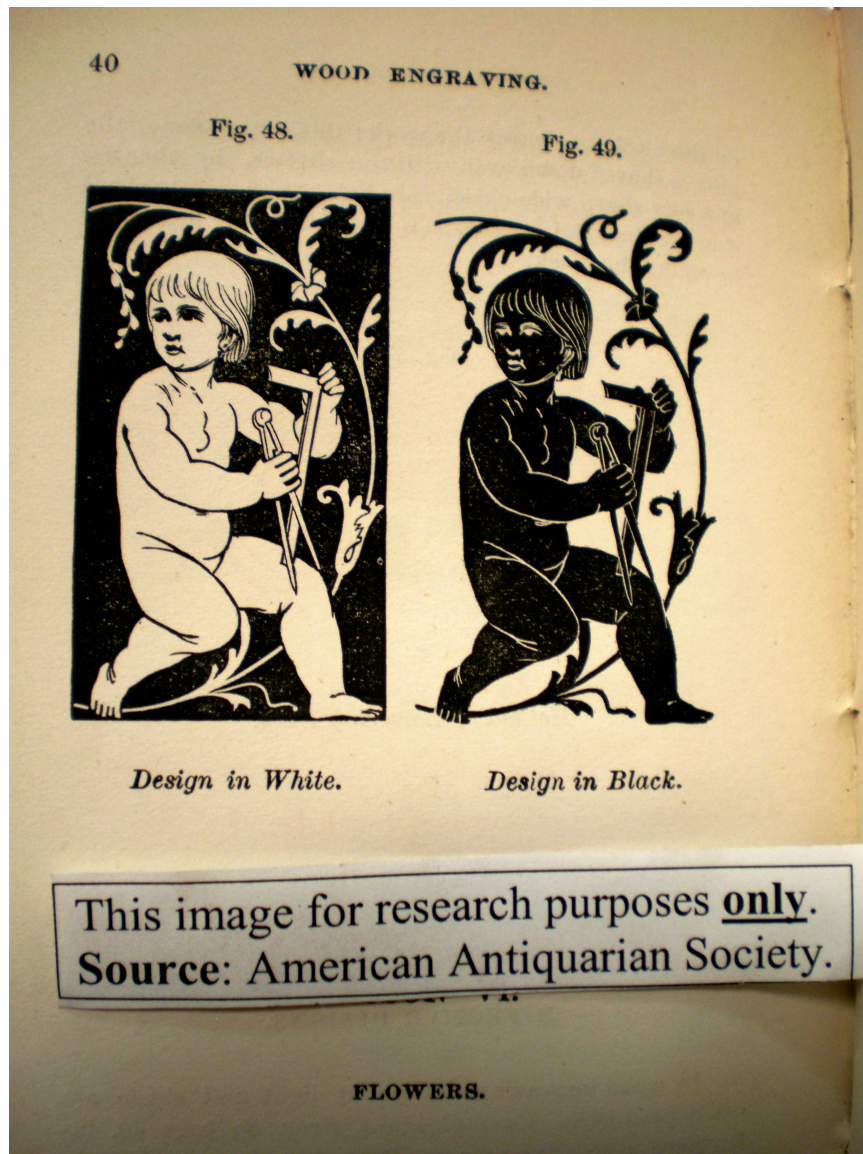


Figure 13: “Design in White” and “Design in Black,” from the *Hand-book of Wood Engraving*, by William A. Emerson (East Douglas, Mass.: C. J. Batcheller, 1876). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.





Figure 15: The face of Clotel—a detail from “The Death of Clotel.” Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 16: The faces of Eliza Harris and Harry Harris—a detail from “Eliza, with Her Child, Escaping from Haley.” The year before illustrating the first edition of *Clotel*, Johnston and Anelay illustrated Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The History of a Christian Slave* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

The pair of well-known illustrators applied the same representational strategies in their depictions of both Eliza Harris and Clotel (see Figures 15 and 16). Anelay and Johnston's Clotel and Eliza each have faces similarly marked by striations designed to index a racial difference located in "blood" but not skin color. Not all engravers approached Eliza similarly. George Cruikshank, for example, does not use such lines to mark Eliza's complexion. Anelay and Johnston's lines try to register a "tint" between white and black, both visually and racially. "At one time, cross-hatching was much employed in representing flesh, which is now generally cut in tints, with white lines crossing," instructed one manual for engravers. "The lines that are [not cut away] receive ink in printing, and the lines that are cut out appear white. The quality of the plain tint depends on the evenness of the lines, which make it both black and white."<sup>226</sup> Anelay and Johnston's attempt to present Clotel and Eliza in "both black and white" goes beyond Brown's and Stowe's texts in order to present racial nonwhiteness as always legible on the surface of their white bodies and the surface of the white paper they inhabit. This poetics of racial representation in which "color," must be registered on the surface of the skin reflects popular thinking about the visibility of race.<sup>227</sup>

It is useful here to recall how strongly white paper was associated with meanings of whiteness that overlap with racial significance. A poem attributed to Benjamin Franklin

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<sup>226</sup> S[arah] E. Fuller, *A Manual of Instruction in the Art of Wood Engraving* (Boston: J. Watson, 1867), 46, 21.

<sup>227</sup> For more on the nineteenth-century idea that race would always be manifest on the surface of the body, see Walter Johnson, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* 87 (June 2000): 27, 34. Johnson describes the case of *Morrison v. White*, in which the defendant successfully sued for her freedom using her white-looking body as evidence and arguing that "colored blood will stick out."

demonstrates the extent to which white paper was associated with white femininity, the status ultimately denied Clotel. Franklin's "Paper: A Poem" explicitly connects white paper and white femininity. Reprinted in the popular oratorical schoolbook *The Columbian Orator*, the poem was widely circulated during the first half of the nineteenth century. Expanding on John Locke's comparison of the human subject to paper ("white Paper receives any characters"),<sup>228</sup> the poem organizes social types as types of paper in varying degrees of quality and purpose: "Men are as various; and, if right I scan, / Each sort of *paper* represents some *man*."

SOME wit of old,—such wits of old there were,—  
Whole hints show'd meaning, whose allusions, care,  
By one brave stroke, to mark all human kind,  
Called clear blank paper every infant mind;  
Where still, as opening sense her dictates wrote,  
Fair virtue put a seal, or vice a blot.

After several stanzas classifying different social types according to different kinds of paper (fools/foolscap and so on), the reader comes to a stanza that aligns fine white paper with white femininity:

Observe the maiden, innocently sweet,  
She's fair *white paper*, an unsullied sheet;  
On which the happy man, whom fate ordains,

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<sup>228</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 81.

May write his *name*, and take her for his pains.<sup>229</sup>

The clean white sheet signals virtuous white femininity: the virginity, innocence, and purity of spirit that awaits the writing of a man's name in marriage and sexual consummation.

Locke's tabula rasa takes on a sense of feminine passivity as the clean white sheet awaits the receipt of a man's "character."<sup>230</sup>

Despite her appearance as a white woman in the texts, Clotel is denied even the visual status of nineteenth-century white womanhood. That intersection of race and gender depends on ideas of racial unmarkedness and spiritual/genetic purity largely denied to mixed-race women, and incompatible with the metaphorical construction of paper most clearly articulated when Franklin equates the "unsullied sheet" of "fair white paper" to "the maiden, innocently sweet." The material lines of the engraver externalize the racial blackness

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<sup>229</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "Paper: A Poem," in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1836), 161–62. The editor of this volume registers his skepticism of Franklin's authorship. "This poem has been printed in nearly all the collections of Dr. Franklin's writings, and for that reason it is retained in the present edition; but I have seen no evidence which satisfies me that he is the author of it. In the *American Museum*, where it was printed in 1788, it was said to be 'ascribed to Dr. Franklin'; and, on that authority, it was taken in Robinson's and then into Longman's edition, and then transferred, under Franklin's name, to various other publications in England the United States. It is not contained in W. T. Franklin's edition." Whether or not Franklin actually wrote the poem, it was widely reprinted in *The Columbian Orator*, a text most readily remembered, perhaps, as the one from which Frederick Douglass learned the master-slave dialectic.

<sup>230</sup> Contemporary art is beyond the scope of this essay, but Glenn Ligon's 1990 *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)* is worth mentioning because it compares the whiteness of writing surfaces to racial whiteness and the blackness of text to racial blackness. The phrase "I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND" is stenciled in black and repeated down the length of a white door. The text is taken from Zora Neale Hurston's 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." As the border between white background and black text blurs, the repeated phrase becomes increasingly illegible toward the bottom of the panel. In this piece, racial legibility and print legibility depend on the distinction between black marks and white surfaces, and whiteness is constructed as the background against which all else becomes readable. See Figure 5.

forbidding Clotel from entering into legal marriage with Horatio Green and indexing the sexual history of her parentage that disallows her ever having been a properly “unsullied sheet.”

Given the senses of purity, beauty, refinement, and even overt white femininity sedimented on the surface page, it then seems like no surprise that Anelay and Johnston cannot, within these racial logics, let the whiteness of the page equal the whiteness of Clotel’s face described in the text. What happens on the surface of Clotel’s skin here becomes inextricable from the processes of wood engraving. The wood engraver works by cutting away wood where the “white” should show, preserving the whiteness of the page from the impression of ink. Wood left raised accepts the ink and impresses it into the paper. The wood engraver, then, works by producing absences, cutting away voids that create the “invisible” whites that structure the visible blacks. Following Dyer and Lipsitz, from a visual standpoint, race, especially when articulated in color metaphors, is commonly held to be a “content” or “presence” that nonwhites carry on the surface of their bodies, a content that becomes legible as racial difference against the “background” of whiteness that claims for itself the privilege of invisibility or absence.<sup>231</sup> This describes the same structure through which wood engravings negotiate the figure/ground relationship: a passive, yet structuring whiteness makes visible the black marks that contrast it. But the work of the engraver actively produces these absences, just like the papermaker engages in great effort to produce a whiteness that purposefully fades out of sight. On the surface of the engraved woodblock, areas carved away (absence) “print” white, maintaining the whiteness of the page, whereas

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<sup>231</sup> Jean Genet also makes this connection between critical race theory and print legibility explicit: “In white America the Blacks are the characters in which history is written. They are the ink that gives the white page a meaning.” See Genet, *Prisoner of Love* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), 245.



areas left raised (presence) “print” black because, they accept ink from the press marking the surface of the page. Illustrating Clotel “as white as most of those ... waiting to become her purchasers” would have required Anelay and Johnston to cut away the wood within the borders of the figure’s face, creating a void, or making actual the ideology of whiteness as the absence of marking. Indeed, this is how the faces of the white men surrounding her are crafted. Leaving the wood in place to transfer ink to Clotel materially creates racial marking as presence, a “face” filled with wood on the engraving block and color on the page. Anelay and Johnston’s illustrations of Clotel and Eliza demonstrate the extent to which the ideology of a racially marked blackness and a racially unmarked whiteness, reinforced in the legal institutions of “blood,” guided the work of engravers for whom whiteness was literal absence and blackness literal presence.

In *Pictorial Victorians*, Julia Thomas suggests that black figures were perfect subjects for Victorian engravers seeking to demonstrate their talent:

At a time when wood engraving was the most popular form of illustration, the reproduction of the Negro provided an opportunity for the artist and engraver to demonstrate their skills. The technique of cutting away the white parts of the image on the block and leaving the part to be inked in relief seemed designed specifically for the representation of whites. The skin could be cut away more or less in its entirety, while the inked lines served to demarcate the features.... Manipulating the wood engraving process and leaving all the skin in relief and therefore black, however, not only blurred the distinction between outline and content, but could obliterate the features, making the appearance of the figure too dark. The solution was to produce tonal effects

by cross-hatching, cutting the wood between sets of crossed lines.... Such techniques ... tested the skill and patience of the engraver, but they also showed wood engraving at its best, giving the Negro more visual impact than his white counterpart.<sup>232</sup>

Thomas's reading fails in its assumption that there is a discernable visual difference between "the Negro" and "whites." The image most resonant with this reading is that of Eva sitting in Uncle Tom's lap, one white and one black in visual contrast. As Brown and several other nineteenth-century writers (including Stowe) point out, however, visually identifying the legal construct of "the Negro" by complexion is not viable. Illustrating mixed-race figures that complicate the notion of racial dualism pressures both the technological limits of engraving and the tendency to equate racial status with the presence of "color." Perhaps, when he wrote the opening to the final revision of *Clotel*, Brown meant to emphasize that his title character challenged the duochromatic media through which she had been represented since the novel's first edition. Victorian engravers may have felt that "the Negro" figure was a showcase for the richness and possibility of the art, but once the dualisms that premise the form come under question, the figure of the mulatta collapses the binaries upon which wood engravings are encoded.

In "The Quadroon's Home," a chapter in *Clotel* that strategically edits Child's "The Quadroons," Brown repeats Child's characterization of *Clotel*'s daughter, Mary, as an "octoroon." "Their first-born was named Mary, and her complexion was still lighter than her mother. Indeed she was not darker than other white children. As the child grew older, it more and more resembled its mother. The iris of her large dark eye had the melting

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<sup>232</sup> Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 35-36.

mezzotinto, which remains the last vestige of African ancestry.”<sup>233</sup> Though Mary has the “dark and brilliant eyes” of her mother, she is imagined outside of the black/white ink/paper dualisms. Mezzotint is a different process of engraving that produces more refined shades of gray than wood or copper engraving. Rather than black lines and white lines, mezzotint creates its effects in “tones” and “halftones.” In place of wood engraving’s rigid separations, the mezzotint “melts” between shades. In the illustration this use of the term “mezzotint” imagines, then, that Mary’s whiteness can be represented outside the black/white binary of the printed page. In place of white and black are shades of darkness and lightness. Capable of producing more mimetic representations of skin tone than the black/white dualism of wood engraving’s presences and absences, the “melting mezzotinto” seems better suited to work outside the boundaries of a racial dualism never adequate to represent the people it nonetheless inscribed. William Wells Brown worked in this material world of print, a world saturated with ideological meanings related to racial difference. *Clotel* works in, through, and against these materialities and ideologies when it thematically, verbally, and visually trades in forms of legibility and illegibility—in their construction and deconstruction—and the forms of freedom and unfreedom they afford.

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<sup>233</sup> Brown, *Clotel*, 101.

## **CODA**

### **The People's Republic of Paper**

In 2007, Drew Cameron, a six-year veteran of the U.S. Army active duty and the Vermont National Guard, put on his combat-worn fatigues and began a performance. He began slowly cutting the U.S. Army uniform off his body in strips until he stood in his underwear. He then shredded the uniform, turned it into pulp, and reconstituted it as sheets of paper. Then, he printed images of his cutting process on the paper (see Figure 17), along with a poem, “You are not my enemy.”

You are not my  
enemy  
my brother my sister  
but I have done something wrong  
and perhaps I am now yours  
I went to your home  
I went inside  
Soiled your rug  
and bullied your children  
You are not my  
enemy  
my father my mother  
I drove on you  
threw garbage in your window  
burned your garden

and spit in your water  
You are not my  
enemy  
my grandmother my grandfather  
I built walls between us  
rubble and sand  
sand altered plastic bags  
all around  
rifles and check points  
bright lights into your eyes  
No you are not my enemy  
my partner my friend  
we were betrayed  
You are not my enemy  
my child my self  
our blood  
is the same  
You are not my  
enemy  
my memories and rage  
re-making sense now  
together  
you are not my enemy

you never were  
you are a part of me  
as I am with you  
You are not my  
enemy  
we shall stay true  
you are not my enemy  
we will change this  
with you.<sup>234</sup>



Figure 14: A panel from Drew Cameron's "You are not my enemy," Combat Paper Portfolio IV. Drew Cameron, "You are not my enemy." Photo. <http://www.combatpaper.org/portfolio.html> 1 October 2011.

As Cameron cuts the uniform from his body, his speaking voice in the poem is increasingly able to put distance between himself and the tasks he performed in the name of the U.S. Army. As his body appears from underneath the uniform, he is able to identify with Iraqis as fellow humans ("our blood is the same"). The removal of the uniform removes the friend/enemy frame and positions Cameron, no longer the bearer of rifles and U.S. insignia, as a vulnerable exposed body. He takes personal responsibility for his actions, but also separates himself from the military that ordered him to do them. He also recognizes that he, like the Iraqi addressee, is a victim of the U.S. military ("my memories and rage / re-making sense now"). All

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<sup>234</sup> Drew Cameron, "Combat Paper Portfolios," *Combat Paper Project*, <http://www.combatpaper.org/portfolio.html>.

the while, the pile of rags on the floor grows. And from those rags, Cameron produces the paper upon which all of this is printed. The uniform, which had represented the oppressive power of the U.S. and the traumatic acts Cameron did in its name, is transformed into the medium of his reconciliation.

Cameron is one of the founding members of the Combat Paper Project, an art and art therapy program in which veterans transform their uniforms into paper upon which they write or produce visual art. The Combat Paper Project calls the process of transforming military uniforms into paper “cathartic,” and many veterans who participate in Combat Paper workshops are living with post-traumatic stress syndrome after serving in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. “Through papermaking workshops veterans use their uniforms worn in combat to create cathartic works of art,” states the Combat Paper Project’s “about” website. That process of catharsis is depends on understanding uniform rags as containers of material memory. Cameron describes how memories of combat, in addition to material traces of it, inhere in the uniforms: “The story of the fiber, the blood, sweat and tears, the months of hardship and brutal violence are held within those old uniforms.... Reshaping that association of subordination, of warfare and service, into something collective and beautiful is our inspiration.”<sup>235</sup>

Cameron’s description of what the uniforms hold is not very distant from how the “lady” is to understand her handkerchief in the paper mill advertisement with which I started this project. The handkerchief absorbs material memory of the lady (from being placed on her body to cover the snowy breast) and through this material memory is routed an erotic connection with a lover. Jon Michael Turner, a veteran who speaks of his struggles with PTSD and substance

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<sup>235</sup> Drew Cameron, “About Combat Paper,” *Combat Paper Project*, <http://www.combatpaper.org/about.html>.

abuse, speaks in a youtube.com video about how making paper from his uniforms was transformative for him:

“I really want my voice to be heard because a bunch of my buddies have been over there, they know they’ve done bad things or they’ve seen some serious shit and they don’t speak out about it, and that’s what’s causing them to drink as much as they are and doing the drugs and all that shit. I’ve been to hell and back a couple of times, between Iraq twice and all the pills that were given to me and all the booze... that shit ain’t worth it. Making the whole paper out of my camis has been such a fucking big experience. Dealing with my shit has been great. So much better in just the last couple of days just from doing that.”

Turner notes that the process is heightened by using his own uniforms because they carry his memories: “It’s one thing when you’re pulling someone else’s camis, but I’ve done the whole process with mine. It’s been such a let go. So much weight has been lifted off my shoulders since I started the whole thing.” What Turner says next blurs the line between wearing his uniform and writing his book: “I put... there’s so much history going into that paper, and that’s what I’m going to write my book with.”<sup>236</sup> What exactly does Turner mean when he says “I put... there’s so much history going into that paper”? The “I put...” seems to refer to the parts of himself that went into the uniform during combat. Blood, sweat, dirt, and dust are in the fibers of the camis from his time in Iraq, and so are his memories of what he has seen and done, the “history going into that paper” when he shreds the camis into rags. When he says, “that’s” what I’m going to write my book with does he mean, literally, “this is the paper I will use to write my book”? Or, following the sense of release he feels when making the paper itself, will the words emerge out

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<sup>236</sup> “Combat Paper Making,” *YouTube*, <http://youtube/cM4creJI1OI>.



of the paper, releasing the stories of blood, sweat, dirt, and trauma from Iraq? Is writing, then, a kind of wearing? Drew Cameron describes the process as, “reclaiming... taking something that is... holds a lot of negative history for people... blood, sweat, and tears, horrible experiences, positive experiences. Taking that old uniform and turning it into something of our own, turning it into art... not some old dirty rag sitting in the closet.” The process is a “reclamation... and reconciliation” of “old dirty rags that are full of bad memories.”<sup>237</sup> For both Combat Papermakers and the authors of the paper allegories in this study, rags carry meaning into the material text that must be perceived in order to fully sense or understand the written or printed text on the surface.

Combat Paper is not only about personal experience and personal memory, either. Just as the drawing together of rags figured what I called “paper nationalism” earlier, some Combat Papermakers have found the process to generate materially constituted publics. In his introduction to Greg Delanty’s *The New Citizen Army*, a book of poetry bound in Combat Paper covers, Cameron draws on the material history of uniforms and rags to remind readers of their complicity in war even as citizens at home:

For us at the Combat Paper Project, [collaboration] is our defining characteristic. We utilize the uniforms and remnants of those who have survived conflict and military service to create paper with the traditional hand papermaking techniques. By working with veterans, survivors, citizens and artists, we turn complex and often violent experiences into a collective memory and cultural response to the things we have had to bear witness to.... It strengthens our voice and resolve to allow our honest assessment to never again be disallowed. With this collection of poetry bound in the paper we have made from our combined uniforms, we perpetuate our belief in collective expression.

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<sup>237</sup> “Combat Paper Making.”

This poetry lives in its various ways. It may be our uniforms that you now hold, but in a way they are yours as well.<sup>238</sup>

Cameron shares, or shifts, the burden of bearing witness from his group of friends and other veterans to the community of readers holding the Combat Paper-bound book in their hands. It is as if to say, “we have had to bear witness to war for you.” But the rag paper made of U.S. Army uniforms provides a material trace that refuses the separation of GI and citizen. As the book’s colophon reads:

The Combat Paper covers were produced by John La Falce, Drew Matott, Pam DeLuco, Drew Cameron, Jon Turner and Jerry Kavis using military uniforms. These uniforms carry a lineage of over one hundred military service members, serving from WWII to the current and ongoing conflicts.<sup>239</sup>

When Cameron points out that “it may be our uniforms that you now hold, but in a way they are yours as well,” he reminds his audience that they, as U.S. taxpayers, paid for the cloth that they hold in their hands. The reader is drawn into the “collaborative” process of coming to terms with war – a war that can no longer be distant or abstract for the audience because the reader holds its material remnants in his hand. Thus a community of material relations is drawn together, and manifested in the material text.

Drew Matott, one of the founders of the Combat Paper Project, also imagines a different kind of community growing out of the movement, the People’s Republic of Paper. Documentary videos of the early days of the movement show groups of veterans getting together to work on the Combat Paper Project, and in the process talking, joking, laughing, and socializing with one

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<sup>238</sup> Drew Cameron, “Foreword” in Greg Delanty, *The New Citizen Army* (Burlington, Vermont: Combat Paper Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>239</sup> “Colophon” in Greg Delanty, *The New Citizen Army*, 68.

another. In one clip, Drew Cameron toasts a gathering of maybe ten veterans and he says, “We’ve determined this is the largest IVAW [Iraq Veterans Against War] group that we’ve had together in a long ass time.” He continues, “I have this dream now. We have this pretty small group of veterans here that are actively engaged in art making. The People’s Republic of Paper and its approach will be a production paper mill of radical anti-war veterans, and that just makes me so excited!”<sup>240</sup> In another clip, Phil Ailiff says “having the opportunity to hang around and work on a project with my fellow vets, no matter what we’re doing... is always positive and beneficial to me.” Matott adds:

“The People’s Republic of Paper is going to be a papermaking hub of activity of veterans. There’s going to be veterans making paper all over the country. The goal would be to have enough people who know how to make paper, and their objective will be to teach other people how to make paper, so that they’ll just continue to teach. And the veterans will be able to share their experiences, pass the torch that way.”

It’s clear that the Combat Paper Project provides a productive outlet for these veterans to gather together in community. In each of their statements, they speak to the project’s ability to bring them together, to bind them. Just as the colophon emphasizes collaboration, and the materiality of the *New Citizen Army* covers comingles the uniforms of generations of American veterans and the citizens who sent them to war, the Combat Paper Project imagines pulling more pulp into the mill and binding it together in a sheet. And this is just what the Project has become in the intervening years. Combat Paper Project artists now drive around the U.S., stopping at colleges, community centers, and artist workshops holding papermaking sessions for veterans and others. As they travel, they pull more and more pulped remnants of war into their network of remade

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<sup>240</sup> “Combat Paper – Paper Over Iraq,” *YouTube*, <http://youtube/wUtXYCihavw>.

paper. The “each one teach one” notion that Matott endorses expands the anti-war counterpublic by collecting more and more rags and bringing “the republic” together person by person in paper.

In the ream wrapper for the E.W. Curtis Paper Mill, a Native American and a Euroamerican face off across a divide mediated by the figure of Columbia, the U.S. flag, and the federal eagle (see Figure 18). The Native American stands in “the West” with its empty, uncultivated landscape while the Euroamerican comes from “the East” with commerce and ships. He looks with determination toward the West, and the Native American returns the stare, somewhat threateningly, because he is armed with a bow. It turns out that the Euroamerican is armed, too, but you have to look very closely to see what with. He holds a rectangular package that has the word “REAM” printed on one side of it. In this prefiguring of the ideology of manifest destiny, paper is the weapon of choice. The oncoming of Western culture, literature, and forms of law and government will depend, as we’ve seen, on those reams. Non-alphabetic native languages face eradication and the incursion of colonial knowledges, epistemes, and languages. No surprise, then, that Chief Simon Pokagon published his “Red Man’s Rebuke,” a pamphlet to be distributed at the 1893 Chicago Columbian World’s Fair, on birch bark instead of paper. “In behalf of the my people, the American Indian, I hereby declare you, the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands and homes, that we have no spirit to celebrate with you the great Columbian Fair now being held in this Chicago city, the wonder of the world.” “My object in publishing the ‘Red Man's Rebuke’ on the bark of the white birch tree is out of loyalty to my people,” Pokagon explains:

and gratitude to the Great Spirit, who in his wisdom provided for our use for untold generations, this most remarkable tree with manifold bark used by us instead of paper, being of greater value to us as it could not be injured by sun or water. Out of the bark of



Figure 15: Ream wrapper for the E.W. Curtis Paper Mill, Pepperrell, Massachusetts. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

this wonderful tree were made hats, caps and dishes for domestic use, while our maidens tied with it the knot that sealed their marriage vow; wigwams were made of it, as well as large canoes that out rode the violent storms on lake and sea; it was also used for light and fuel at our war councils and spirit dances. Originally the shores of our northern lakes and streams were fringed with it and evergreen, and the white charmingly contrasted with

the green mirrored from the water was indeed beautiful, but like the red man, the tree is vanishing from our forests<sup>241</sup>

Pokagon, who by now has witnessed the decimation of American forests by the wood-pulp paper industry, prints his “rebuke” on thin sheets of birch bark because the bark, as a medium, connects the book with forms of community and belonging that Pokagon identifies with his people (see Figure 19). As the “white man” destroys the forest to make more reams of paper, Pokagon sees birch bark as the more advanced technology – even if it appears more “primitive.” The birch bark can be recycled into other uses, it withstands the elements, and its use transmits traditional communal knowledges about shelter, transportation, clothing, and cooking. Pokagon’s use of birch bark is a strong critique of U.S. imperial power, but at the same time it revives an “antiquated” media practice in order to draw a community together, and to represent that community within the pages of a material text. I end with the generative, inclusive, and critical ideas of the Combat Paper Project and Simon Pokagon because they present a critique of U.S. nationalism (“you are not my enemy”) and the fetishization of war by its perpetrators (“It may be our uniforms that you now hold, but in a way they are yours as well”) while still demonstrating how it is that the material text powerfully organizes people into (re)publics. A ream of paper is not a weapon, but a space in which to affiliate with others in community.

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<sup>241</sup> Simon Pokagon, “The Red Man’s Rebuke,” in *American Indian Nonfiction: An Anthology of Writings, 1760s-1930s*, ed. Bernd Peyer (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 233.

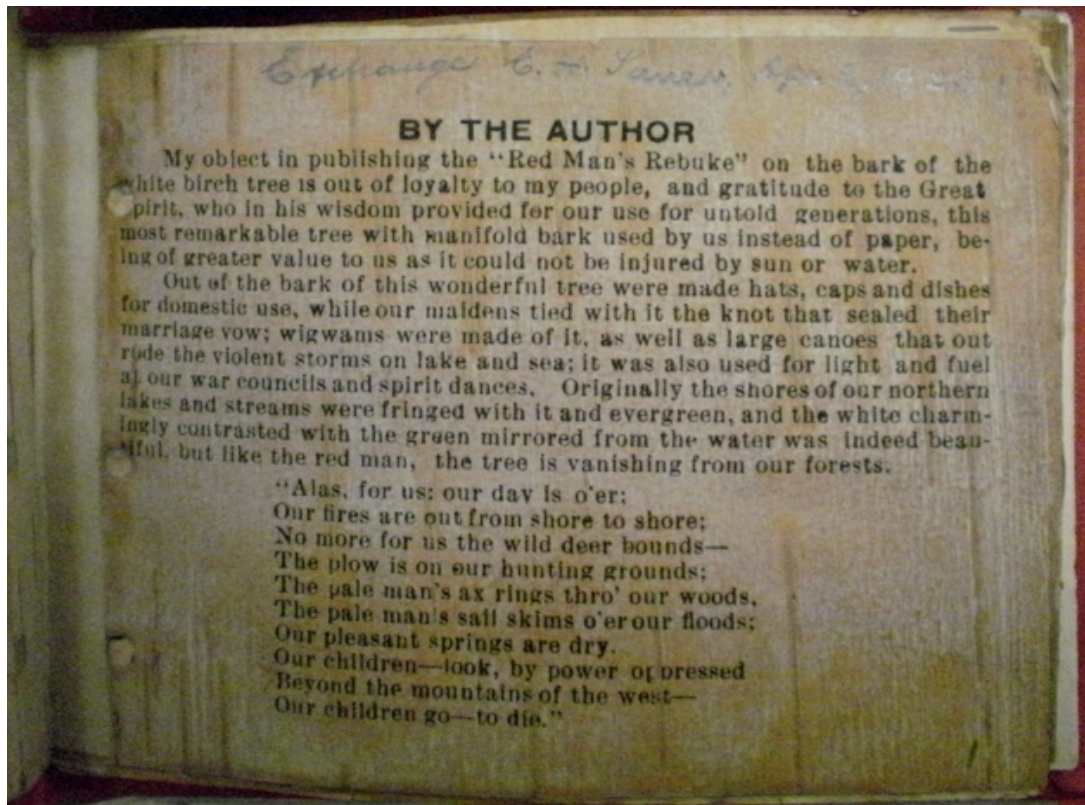


Figure 16: "BY THE AUTHOR" page of Simon Pokagon's "The Red Man's Rebuke" shows the thin sheets of birch bark upon which the pamphlet was printed. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

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