

12-2015

# Recovering the Agency of Editors in the Careers of Three Canonical Nineteenth-Century American Authors

David W. Johnson  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Johnson, David W., "Recovering the Agency of Editors in the Careers of Three Canonical Nineteenth-Century American Authors" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1333.  
<https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1333>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact [cclouser@iup.edu](mailto:cclouser@iup.edu), [sara.parme@iup.edu](mailto:sara.parme@iup.edu).



RECOVERING THE AGENCY OF EDITORS IN THE CAREERS OF THREE CANONICAL  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN AUTHORS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

David W. Johnson

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2015



© 2015 David W. Johnson

All Rights Reserved



Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

David W. Johnson

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

---

Todd N. Thompson, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English, Chair

---

Christopher Orchard, D.Phil.  
Professor of English

---

Thomas J. Slater, Ph.D.  
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

---

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research



Title: Recovering the Agency of Editors in the Careers of Three Canonical  
Nineteenth-Century American Authors

Author: David W. Johnson

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Todd N. Thompson

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Christopher Orchard  
Dr. Thomas Slater

The purpose of this dissertation is to recover the agency (in some cases, identities) of editors by examining their roles in the careers of three nineteenth-century canonical authors: Henry David Thoreau, Sara Payson Willis (Fanny Fern), and Walt Whitman. In the study, I argue that critics and literary historians often have ignored the agency of editors, their several roles in bringing canonical works to print, and the possibility of their influence on the authors themselves. The result has been that editors' involvement in literary products has been allowed to remain in the background of scholarship, while the importance of authors has been foregrounded.

At stake is whether the study of nineteenth-century literature is to gain a more complete understanding of processes—and the agents of these processes—by which canonical authors developed their craft, and their works came to be published. In my opinion, recovering the agency of editors provides a valuable perspective that is missing from most criticism of nineteenth-century authors. Without a perspective that includes the agency of editors and the roles they play in the publication process, our understanding of how canonical literary works such as *Walden*, *Ruth Hall*, and *Leaves of Grass* came to print is incomplete.

Important to the broader application of my argument to nineteenth-century authors is that the three authors considered here interacted with the marketplace and its agents in quite different ways. Thoreau resisted not only the necessity of the marketplace, but also its agents—with the



exception of newspaper editor Horace Greeley, who acted as Thoreau's literary agent. When Sara Payson Willis Farrington turned in desperation to writing for newspapers, she recognized the need to engage with the marketplace and soon entered into a successful and profitable arrangement with the editor of the New York *Ledger*, Robert Bonner. By self-publishing and self-promoting *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman circumvented the marketplace to a considerable extent, yet employed, in marketing his book of poetry, techniques that he learned as a penny press editor in New York City. Because of the variety of relationships to the marketplace enacted by these three canonical authors, there is a likelihood that the conclusions of this study may apply to nineteenth-century authors not included here.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research into the lives and works of the three authors in this study began by writing a paper in three courses I took with Dr. Karen Dandurand. She was my advisor and friend. Mindful that I was continuing research involving newspapers that she encouraged because of her own interest in newspapers, I have had a strong motivation to bring the project to an acceptable conclusion. I dedicate this dissertation to her memory.

I was prepared to undertake and complete this study because of guidance I received from three other distinguished scholars: Dr. George S. Rousseau, then of Harvard University, who introduced me to primary source research involving newspapers in the British Museum Library in 1967; Dr. Todd Nathan Thompson of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, who guided me from 2010 to 2015 toward the successful completion of the study, offering many scholarly insights that benefited my work; and Dr. Christopher Orchard of IUP, whose clear explanations and examples of the tools of new historicism helped me to incorporate the theory into my study. I thank Dr. Thomas J. Slater for generously joining my dissertation committee and giving me the benefit of his time and insight as I revised my work. I thank Dr. Veronica Watson for expanding my literary horizons and supporting my work through the comprehensive examinations.

I received invaluable help with my research from staff members at several institutions: Barbara Austen of the Connecticut Historical Society; Conni Manoli and Leslie Wilson of the Concord (Massachusetts) Free Public Library; Amy Hague, Tanya Pearson, Jesse Klein, and Nichole Calero of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College; Kimberly Pelkey, Dan Boudreau, Andrew Bourque, and Susanna Sigler of the American Antiquarian Society; Susan Halpert of Harvard's Houghton Library; Dr. Robert Hudspeth of Claremont Graduate



University; Sara S. Hodson of the Huntington Library in San Mateo, California; Nicole Luongo Cloutier of the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) Public Library; Robin Silva and Carolyn Marvin of the Portsmouth Athenaeum; and Elizabeth A. Slomba, Mylinda Woodward, and Nancy Mason of the Dimond Library at the University of New Hampshire.

My fellow students sustained me with their collegiality and support. Dr. Tracy J. Lassiter helped me to stay connected with the program at a difficult time in summer 2014.

I was able to move forward because of advice and encouragement from my son Matthew D. Johnson, Ph.D, of Grinnell College, and the understanding and support of my son Geoffrey W. Johnson, JD, of Alice Farm, Alexander, Maine.

In addition to my committee members, I am grateful for the support of Dr. David B. Downing, director of Graduate Studies in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Graduate Studies Secretary Margaret Shotts; Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci, chair of the English Department; Assistant Deans Paula Stossel and Hilliary E. Creely in the School of Graduate Studies and Research; administrative assistants Brenda Boal and Lynne B. Troyan in the SGSR; and Lauren K. M. Gaynord and Alexandra Lykissas in the Thesis/Dissertation Office.

To the family members and friends who encouraged me through nine years, I offer my heartfelt thanks. I could not have continued or completed this work without you.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
ONE	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Gatekeeper Role .....	3
	Ideological Role .....	4
	Literary Role .....	5
	Methodology .....	12
	Recovering Agency .....	21
	Marketplace Agency .....	25
TWO	THOREAU AND EDITORS .....	28
	Margaret Fuller .....	33
	William Stevens Robinson .....	36
	Nathaniel P. Rogers .....	45
	James T. Fields .....	59
	Horace Greeley .....	71
	Accounts of Alex Therien .....	79
THREE	FANNY FERNS'S EDITORS .....	87
	Gideon Welles .....	89
	Welles-Willis Relationship .....	93
	Rev. Thomas F. Norris and Mrs. Mary Andrews Denison .....	108
	Robert Bonner .....	134
	Fanny Fern's Books .....	138
	Journalistic Influences on <i>Ruth Hall</i> .....	147
FOUR	WHITMAN AND PENNY PRESS EDITORS .....	158
	Whitman's Universality .....	158
	Whitman at the Center .....	163
	Poetic Events .....	166
	The Penny Press .....	172
	Penny Press Lessons .....	184
	Equal Influences .....	196
FIVE	CONCLUSION .....	205
	WORKS CITED .....	211



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to recover the agency and, in some cases, identities of editors in relation to the careers of three canonical nineteenth-century American authors: Henry David Thoreau, Fanny Fern (Sara Payson Willis Parton), and Walt Whitman. In two cases, the identities of the editors are new in relation to the authors mentioned; in others, my research uncovered additional information about known editors. I include information about editors to support my central argument that critics and literary historians too often omit from the biographical contexts of authors any meaningful consideration of the roles of editors in bringing books and articles to print. The result has been that editors' agency has been pushed from the foreground of scholarship in favor of representing authorship as the activity of a single person.

What do I mean by the term *agency*? I adopt social scientist Philip Pettit's concept that the theory of freedom "suggests that an agent will be a free self . . . so far and only so far as they have the capacity for free action: that is, the capacity to exercise rational control in action" (42). In *A Theory of Freedom*, Pettit conceptualizes freedom as "fitness to be held responsible" (18-25). For the purposes of this study, I mean that agents of the literary marketplace (newspaper and book editors in this study) have the capacity for free action in the context of processes that are customary—and, for the most part, necessary—to bring literary works into print. As literary professionals, they are fit to share in the responsibility for the literary work, whether article, poem, story, or book. I argue that, in the mid-nineteenth-century United States, every writer whose work came to print through a publisher and was offered for sale to the public entered the literary marketplace. In the dynamic environment of the mid-nineteenth-century marketplace, editors became more than printers or bystanders to publication. As



agents of the marketplace, they engaged in several forms of activity contributing to the publication of almost all works, including canonical works such as the ones considered here.

Whitman's self-publication of *Leaves of Grass* was a notable exception; yet, as a writer and editor for penny press newspapers, he also had a relationship with editors that was dynamic. The innovations of the founding editors of the penny press, and the conventions of penny press journalism, affected his writing and view of the world. A commonality linking the careers of Whitman, Thoreau, and Fern is that each wrote journalism as well as imaginative work (I consider several of Thoreau's articles for *The Dial* and his magazine articles as journalism). In recovering the agency of editors in the careers of these three writers, I also will address a weakness in the criticism of the continuities between journalism and imaginative writing that Shelley Fisher Fishkin identifies in *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism & Imaginative Writing in America*:

By glossing over the continuities between [these writers'] journalism and their fiction [scholars] have missed an important aspect of American literary history and biography. By failing to focus on the *discontinuities* between their journalism and their fiction they have lost an opportunity to gain special insight into limits and potentials of narrative forms. (3)

The issue of continuity/discontinuity is related to the agency of editors because, through their active roles in bringing books to print, editors are in a position to encourage and discourage continuities. For example, newspaper editor Robert Bonner encouraged Fanny Fern to continue to write about domestic topics rather than subjects outside the domestic sphere (Parton 65-66).

Recent scholarship, such as Steven Fink's *Prophet in the Marketplace: Thoreau's Development as a Professional Writer*, has studied to the workings of the literary marketplace in the



careers of writers. Editors are agents of the literary marketplace by the very nature of their work. One of their responsibilities is to mediate between the products of writers and the preferences of readers. I argue that editors play significant roles in the careers of writers principally (though not exclusively) in three ways. One is the gatekeeper role. In the mid-nineteenth century, editors such as James Gordon Bennett and James T. Fields often were publishers. As editor/publishers, they exercised a powerful role as gatekeepers who decided which writers, and which works of these writers, should go into print. They had a role in determining article and even book topics, and sometimes the ideology acceptable to the readership of a particular publication in writing about certain controversial topics, such as drinking. Another is the ideological role. In the nineteenth-century, editors were in a position to influence the ideology expressed by writers by suggesting subjects worth writing about (literally and figuratively), and offering or withholding assignments and contracts depending on the ideology of works. For example, the editors of the *New World* would not have paid Whitman for *Franklin Evans* if the novel portrayed drinking in a positive light. In Chapter Three, I give the example of Robert Bonner's accompanying his notes to Fern on subjects she should write about with bonus checks. Thus the gatekeeper and ideological influence are connected. A third is the literary role. Nineteenth-century editors sometimes suggested changes to elements of literary craft in the work, such as form and style.

### **Gatekeeper Role**

Scholars such as Fink have begun to recover the role of editors in the creation and publication of canonical works—a step relevant to our understanding of the continuities and discontinuities between a writer's journalism and imaginative work. In this study, I want to continue the recovery process in regard to the individual editors whose agency affected the careers of Thoreau, Fern, and



Whitman. In *Prophet in the Marketplace*, Fink advances the notion of Thoreau's interactions with agents of the marketplace in this paragraph:

As a public writer who published works during his lifetime through conventional commercial channels, Thoreau was intent not only on finding an audience for his writings but, whenever possible, being paid for them as well. Thus . . . Thoreau found himself grudgingly implicated in the complexities of the literary marketplace . . . . This meant dealing with the middlemen, the entrepreneurs of the literary world (magazine editors, lyceum directors, and book publishers), and it meant dealing more directly with that diverse public whom he had to please, as well as provoke, in his writings and lectures. (4)

Fink describes the process that Thoreau and other authors experienced when they submitted their work to editors, publishers, and other literary gatekeepers such as lyceum directors putting together a program of speakers. But Fink's summary of this process as "the complexities of the literary marketplace" glosses over its importance as the method of refining and improving literary products for publication by generating feedback and encouraging revision. Among the "complexities" is the gatekeeper function by which editors select which works will go into print.

### **Ideological Role**

Critics and literary historians focus on the ways in which imaginative authors introduce social issues into discourse (such the widely circulated, though apocryphal, anecdote about President Lincoln saying to Harriet Beecher Stowe that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* started the Civil War); yet they overlook the role of newspaper editors in shaping discourse. For example, the antislavery writings of Concord editor William Stevens Robinson anticipated by years the antislavery writings of his former



schoolmate Thoreau. Given their mutual opposition to slavery, Robinson would have conversed with Thoreau on antislavery subjects after the Robinsons returned to Concord to rent the Thoreau family's "Texas house." By renting the former Thoreau home, the Robinsons became neighbors and friends of the Thoreau family.

Similarly, Whitman scholarship devotes little attention to the effects on his discourse, as a New York City newspaper editor in the 1840s, of the discourse of the founding editors of New York's first penny newspapers: Benjamin Day of the *Sun*, James Gordon Bennett of the *Herald*, and Horace Greeley of the *Tribune*. Beginning in 1833 with Day, these editors led the movement toward a more democratic form of journalism that focused on the personal, the local, and the sensational; each quality is found in Whitman's later poetry. Day began a revolution in the discourse of mass communications by covering the New York City police court to introduce "human interest" stories into newspapers. Whitman was affected by this revolution as a journalist before he became a poet.

### **Literary Role**

In this study, I build on the work of Fink, Fishkin, and others to identify examples of the literary role of agency. For example, in the chapter on Thoreau I demonstrate that Horace Greeley exerted an influence on Thoreau's writing by educating him on the marketplace requirements of writing a literary profile. Similarly, the penny press editors exerted an influence on Whitman's journalism and later poetry by introducing an innovative new language of journalism that was simple, direct, and often sensational. That the journalistic changes of the 1840s exerted an influence on Whitman's literary style in his poetry of the 1850s is important, yet it is not the only influence that the editors exerted. By broadening the scope of journalism to include police court, violence, scandal, and other sorts of human behavior that had not been deemed appropriate subject matter for the fact-based



work of writers, newspaper editors played a role in the subversive stream of American literature that Reynolds studies in *Beneath the American Renaissance*. In the literary marketplace, editors validate the work of writers in an influential way by choosing to publish some of the work of the writers, and choosing to reject other works. This power of the editor as gatekeeper is bound to enter into a writer's thinking about what subjects to write about, and how to write about them. For example, one of my claims is that Greeley exerted an influence on *Walden* by advising Thoreau to write his profiles in a way that was understandable and interesting to the general reader, rather than as a blend of whatever material Thoreau chose to include. The latter describes—and perhaps explains the lack of success of—*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack*, which is part narrative, and part literary potpourri, while *Walden* is written in a much more consistent voice and engaging style. It is possible that Thoreau evolved independently in this direction as a writer, yet equally likely that Thoreau was more willing to apply Greeley's formula to his writing after *A Week's* failure to sell more than a couple of hundred copies. In his correspondence with Thoreau, Greeley wrote directly to "Friend Thoreau" that if he would do such and such with a profile of Emerson, Greeley would either buy it or find a publisher for it at another magazine. It is a demonstration of Thoreau's stubborn resolve that he persisted in writing on topics that were less in demand in the marketplace than the book of literary profiles that Greeley suggested he write. What sort of influence, other than literary, did Greeley exert on Thoreau? I suggest that Greeley's ability to find publishers who would pay Thoreau—and Greeley's own occasional service as Thoreau's bank—established and maintained Thoreau's connection with the literary marketplace. The advice of a successful editor such as James T. Fields, who was known to be proactive in his interactions with Hawthorne, might have encouraged Thoreau to revise *Walden* also in a direction that would make the book more accessible to the general reader than *A Week* had been.



The arc of Fanny Fern's life in her three biographies suggest that *Hartford Times* editor Gideon Welles played a long-lasting role in the life of Sara Payson Willis through his visits to her school to solicit witty sayings for publication. Fern's biographer Joyce Warren overstates the significance of Willis's writings at that time Welles's when she describes Welles as soliciting "articles" for the newspaper and publishing these articles. There is no evidence that Willis wrote articles that were published in the newspaper, though she may have written, or co-written with Welles, a brief narrative or two. A comparison of Warren's account with Ethel Parton's unpublished account (Parton is the granddaughter of Sara Payson Willis) states that Welles solicited expressions of Willis's wit rather than her organized compositions. Why is this distinction important? It has import because of Willis's later career as Fanny Fern—a newspaper columnist who became known for the same sort of witty epigrams that Gideon Welles first validated as worthy of publication by publishing them in the *Hartford Times*. I do not claim that Welles shaped Willis's writing style in literary terms; my claim is that he shaped her writing by identifying and publishing elements of her style—her witty observations—that were the most likely to succeed in the literary marketplace. Since her witty commentary succeeded in gaining entry to the marketplace when she was a schoolgirl, it is no wonder that Willis returned to a similar style when she re-entered the marketplace as a divorced woman with children to support. Welles's early validation of Willis's writing contributed to her emergence as a literary persona.

In his cultural biography *Walt Whitman's America* (1995), Reynolds refers to another source of influence on Whitman: the culture of promotion that became commonplace by the 1850s. The influence of this culture on Whitman came about through Whitman's learning the value of sensationalism and hyperbole to readership as an editor in the New York penny press (344). In my



chapter on Whitman, I examine the connection between this culture—characteristic of both the penny press and the age— and Whitman’s promotional campaign on behalf of *Leaves of Grass*, which effectively bypassed the editorial gatekeepers in the marketplace.

In summary, I argue that editorial agency was more broadly exerted by nineteenth-century editors and experienced by imaginative writers of the period than the scholarship has acknowledged. For example, editor and publisher James T. Fields claims in his autobiography, *Yesterdays with Authors*, to have persuaded Nathaniel Hawthorne to expand and revise the author’s long story “The Scarlet Letter”—intended to be part of Hawthorne’s second story collection—into the form of a full-length romance so that Fields could publish it separately. A second example involves Whitman and penny press editors, who insisted that newspaper articles be written in a particular style. Day and Bennett demanded brevity, informality, and the use of common words and expressions, organized into simple sentences, so that their own and contributors’ writing style would be accessible to a wide readership, including many newly literate readers. Since Whitman both wrote for and edited penny press newspapers, these editorial requirements affected his writing style. In *To Set This Life Right*—her 2006 book on the antislavery movement in Concord, Massachusetts—Sandra Harbert Petruionis argues that antislavery newspaper editor Nathaniel P. Rogers had an influence on Thoreau’s antislavery ideology. Rogers edited the New Hampshire newspaper *Herald of Freedom* from 1838 through 1844. In April 1844, *The Dial* published in its final issue Thoreau’s laudatory review of both the *Herald* and its editor. In general, contributions of newspaper editors to the production of canonical works has been pushed into the background of literary scholarship, leaving the works of imaginative writers to stand alone in the foreground as scholars define (and redefine) a canon of American literature. At the center of the problem is the long-term evolution of the discipline of English literature



and criticism toward theory, foregrounding imaginative writers and excluding editors and others who fulfill important marketplace functions. Until recently, critics and literary historians focused on the works of individual authors and groups of similar authors without what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “thick description” (27-28) of the people and processes that create the environment in which the works are produced.

At stake in my argument for the agency and traces of influence is whether the study of canonical nineteenth-century authors is to include a more complete understanding of the marketplace processes by which their works came to print. Recovering the agency of editors provides a valuable perspective that is missing from most criticism and literary history of the period. However, scholars of cultural production have undertaken some studies in this area. In *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, Meredith L. McGill examines the twenty-year period of transition during which debates over international copyright law and structural changes in the book trades led to the decline of reprinting British and American literary works, and the growth of a national audience for American literature (218-219). Influential in the promotion of books for this market was the Boston publisher Ticknor and Company (later Ticknor and Fields), especially its junior partner James T. Fields. McGill describes perhaps Fields’s most successful promotion, the marketing of New England writers, Hawthorne in particular: “Responding to the literary nationalist clamor for native writers and deploying some of the same techniques that publishers used to promote popular women’s fiction, Fields sought to market a handful of regional, New England male writers as a national cultural elite” (219). Coinciding with William D. Ticknor and Company’s marketing campaigns was newspaper editor Horace Greeley’s constant publicizing of the transcendentalists and their works. In *Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune*, Adam Tuchinsky writes, “Greeley believed that one of the *Tribune’s*



special missions was to cultivate and disseminate American literature and thought, and the transcendentalists were an important component of that mission” (59). These two separate, yet similar streams of promotion demonstrate the central role editors played in the literary marketplace just prior to the publication of *Walden* in 1854. Later in this study, I argue that both Greeley and Fields supported the revisions of *Walden*.

Thus the popular image of an author as the lone, solitary agent in the production of his or her literary works often is inaccurate. Steven Fink addresses this perception Thoreau in his introduction to *Prophet in the Marketplace*:

He was, according to this perception, a romantic individualist who was indifferent to, and therefore refused to condescend to, whatever audience might choose to read what he wrote. . . . Such a portrait obscures the fact that his principles of self-reliance, however genuine, were always qualified by his literary ambitions: as a public writer and a moral reformer Thoreau simply could not afford to ignore the public; on the contrary, he was anxious to engage in a relationship with American society and elicit some response from it. (3)

Fink examines “the way in which Thoreau’s aims and the literary marketplace itself acted as shaping roles on his writing” (4); yet, in giving an account of Margaret Fuller’s role as editor of *The Dial*, he does not quote or refer to her two letters to Thoreau that accompanied returned manuscripts and contained editorial guidance. Fink’s attention is primarily on the well-known influence of Emerson on Thoreau. Similarly, when discussing Ticknor and Company editor James T. Fields, Fink gives an account of Fields’s efforts, upon the publication of *Walden*, to acquire a British copyright for *Walden* and to promote the book (264-266), yet does not consider the possibility that Fields had an influence



on the literary work itself, despite the fact that Fields was capable of being a proactive editor, as he was in the case of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

Fink discusses newspaper editor Horace Greeley from a similar perspective: as a supporter and promoter of Thoreau's articles who placed some of his work with editors—in other words, his literary agent. In contrast to his account of Fuller, however, Fink quotes literary advice from Greeley to Thoreau in Greeley's letter of May 25, 1848: "Write me something shorter . . . and I will sell it for you soon. I want one shorter article from your pen that will be quoted, as these long articles cannot be, and let the public know something of your way of thinking and seeing" (*Correspondence* 229). According to Fink, Greeley's advice to "write . . . something shorter" was an instruction that Thoreau followed in his first draft of *Walden*. The advice is ambiguous: shorter than what? Greeley also gave advice on the craft of writing in letters to Thoreau that contradicts the "write shorter" axiom; Greeley gave Thoreau specific instructions on how to write a full-length literary profile for magazine publication. In my chapter on Thoreau, I suggest that traces of Greeley's profile advice are noticeable in the difference between the first and final drafts of *Walden*. My reading of the first and final drafts is that Thoreau chose to sketch out pieces in his Journal that he would develop in revisions of *Walden*, rather than to write articles such as the literary profiles that Greeley hoped to sell to popular magazines. From close readings of the way in which Thoreau developed the anecdote of Alex Therien from Journal entry into a full-length profile by the time *Walden* was published in 1854, I argue that Thoreau followed Greeley's advice on craft more than is commonly thought.



## Methodology

My methodology derives from the criticism of Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt and the methods of literary biographers. In the essay “What Is an Author?” Foucault identifies the quasi-religious privileging of authors. He writes, “It seems . . . that the manner in which literary criticism once defined the author—or, rather, constructed the figure of the author beginning with existing texts and discourses—is directly derived from the manner in which Christian tradition authenticated (or rejected) the texts at its disposal” (*Reader* 110). He argues that modern criticism treats the “author function” as a construct that is similar to Christian sainthood. “In order to ‘rediscover’ an author in a work,” he writes, “modern criticism uses methods similar to Christian exegesis when trying to prove the value of a text by its author’s saintliness” (110). Extending Foucault’s analysis, one might anticipate, correctly, that scholarship might privilege certain authors to the point that they are perceived to be above questions of influence. In nineteenth-century American literature, suggest that Thoreau is an example of such an author. His self-sufficiency and “freedom” from emotional bonds to women and most men (his love for his brother John being one exception) lend themselves to the characterization of Thoreau as singular and therefore impervious to the influence of others. Fink’s title *Prophet in the Marketplace* is an example of quasi-religious characterization of Thoreau in the criticism.

In *The Art of Literary Research*, Richard D. Altick grants that influence affecting literary works extends beyond the influence of one author on another author. Altick writes: “Every writer’s total debt as an artist is, on the whole, less to a handful or authors by whom he was especially influenced than to the mingled currents of arts and ideas, traditional or new, in the midst of which he can’t help living” (87). Published in 1963, Altick’s book anticipates later critics’ more specific



considerations of agency and possible influence. In his chapter “Some Scholarly Occupations,” Altick discusses both borrowing and influence. His criteria for determining borrowing are similar enough to his criteria for influence to be useful in explicating both topics. He writes, “The assumption of literary borrowing ordinarily can be well sustained if the internal evidence is sufficiently large and striking to rule out casual resemblance and if external evidence makes it sufficiently probable that the one author knew the other’s works” (89-90). I ask readers to allow for the possibility that external evidence derived from various sources—such as the memoirs, likelihood of personal conversations, and similarities of ideology—can make it “sufficiently” probable that the agency of editors has played an influential role in an author’s career

There are elements of literary biography in my methodology, yet I extend my criticism to biographies of the three authors as well as their works. In addition to writing about these authors, I include sketches of the lives of editors who are minor, unidentified, or invisible characters in the biographies of the canonical writers.

Four examples are William Stevens Robinson and Nathaniel P. Rogers in the chapter on Henry Thoreau, and Gideon Welles and Mary Andrews Denison in the chapter on Fanny Fern. A fifth could be the composite of the founding editors of the penny press—Benjamin Day, James Gordon Bennett, or Horace Greeley—in the chapter on Whitman. There is a biographical reason for including these sketches. As biographer Catherine Peters write in her article “Secondary Lives: Biography in Context”: “Literary biography is . . . an extended act of attention to one person, a canonization of a life and works, a privileging of one existence over others, and an assumption that the life and the writing are intimately bound together” (44). In this study, I seek to recover the roles of a specific class of literary professional—editors—precisely because my research demonstrates that the agency of



newspaper and book editors in the mid-nineteenth century has been neglected in the scholarship. Yet my research also explores a conviction I share with Peters (and, I am sure, other biographers) that the study of “secondary lives” is important to our understanding of the privileged lives of canonical authors. As Peters writes:

The lives lived in the shadow of the main subject, often paralleling or contrasting with it, can be surprisingly illuminating. . . .In recent years some absorbing biographies have been written which have not only surprised us with the amount of intrinsic interest to be found in peripheral lives, but added to our understanding of the major figures who had obscured them. (47)

Though some of my methodology is similar, my study is different from literary biography because the methodology does not include several craft elements that Peters identifies as characteristic of the genre: I pay little attention to genealogy and family history (49); I try to avoid “skewing reality” to shine the spotlight on one figure (46); and am reluctant to include details of marriages, intimate friendships, and personal quirks of a subject’s life (52-53) unless they are necessary to make a literary point. In avoiding these elements of literary biography, I rely instead on the tools of new historicism: unpacking anecdotes; considering discourse; seeking traces of influence on authors in the agency of editors.

The last—tracing influence and agency—has proved to be the most problematic aspect of my study. I argue for a broader definition of influence rather than one that admits only evidence of correspondences in texts and terms of discourse. I look for such correspondences and value them as the most persuasive form of support for arguments of influence, yet believe there are gaps in textual evidence that new historicism addresses by allowing relationship, proximity and cultural context to



support an argument of influence, as Greenblatt does in *Will in the World*, arguing that historical suggestions that John Shakespeare was Catholic may explain Catholicism as an influence on the writings of his son William. I think Greenblatt's method is a persuasive in its support of an argument by bringing together textual evidence, biographical details, and informed speculation for the purpose of recovering a possible truth. As editor John Batchelor observes in his introduction to *The Art of Literary Biography*, "Because literary biography is a pragmatic and historical form, its relationship to literary theory will always be open to negotiation" (8). I negotiate a combination of the elements of literary biography and the tools of the new historicism in an effort to recover the roles of editors in the context of their professional lives. In revising this study, I tried to sharpen my focus on theory rather than biography. I recognize that the study privileges editors, yet it does so in the interest of recovering a perspective that largely is missing from existing scholarship on Thoreau, Fern, and Whitman.

I find that combining biographical/historical research and new historicism is a useful method of exploring contextual information in a way that illuminates authors and their works. For example, both Fink in *Prophet in the Marketplace* (13) and Walter Harding in his biography *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (70-71) mention the 1837 publication of Thoreau's obituary of Anna Jones in the Concord *Yeoman's Gazette's* 1837, but do not provide a context for this first published article. Harding reprints the obituary (70) and speculates that there may be other articles by Thoreau that were published in Concord newspapers (71). Consistent with his characterization of Thoreau as prophet, Fink writes that the fact Thoreau's first publication was an obituary in a newspaper "is appropriate, for an obituary notice represents the peculiar conjunction of the minister's and the journalist's roles" (13). Having reviewed available issues of the *Yeoman's Gazette* from 1833 through 1839, I see that the obituary relates to another type of article that appeared in the newspaper of that time: the ongoing story of the



American Revolution. Only sixty years removed from the Revolution, the newspaper published occasional brief articles about events and persons connected to the Revolution. For example, under the headline “A Revolutionary Heroine,” the paper published an article about a bill before Congress to grant a pension to Benjamin Gannett, widower of Deborah Gannett, a “soldier of the Revolution” who served under the name Robert Shurtleff and was “badly wounded by a musket-ball in a skirmish at Tarrytown (25 Feb 1837, 1). This and another article suggest that Thoreau’s obituary was similar: a restatement of Revolutionary ideology as well as an obituary. Fink focuses on Thoreau’s literary style in the article, calling Thoreau’s description of Anna Jones “a connecting link between the past and the present” and early example of one of Thoreau’s “habitual verbal and ideological constructions.” Fink notes the similarity to Thoreau’s description of his bean field in *Walden*: “Mine was, as it were, the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields . . .” (158)—an example, I suggest, of a continuity between journalism and imaginative writing.

Consistent with new historicism, I ask how the article on Anna Jones came to be printed. My research turned up information that William Stevens Robinson, a grammar school classmate and long-time friend of Henry Thoreau, set type at the *Yeoman’s Gazette* at the same time the obituary was published. From this information emerge two plausible explanations of how the article came to print: the first being that Robinson suggested the idea to Thoreau, who was trying out his wish to write for publication, and the second that Robinson suggested Thoreau as a possible writer to the paper’s publisher George F. Bemis. From my review of the *Yeoman’s Gazette*, Bemis seems to have been inclined to print articles referring back to nobility and bravery of the Revolution’s Colonial participants. Further along in this study, my identification of Robinson, who became an influential New England newspaper editor as well as the Thoreau family’s renter, is useful in the case for



influences on Thoreau's antislavery discourse. Thus I include him as an editor. In Chapter Two, I begin the recovery of Robinson both as an editor and a member of Thoreau's circle of friends and acquaintances of long standing, which included Robinson's wife, Harriet.

In using the tools of new historicism, I build on the work of Stephen Greenblatt, who begins *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* with the communal nature of creating art: "[W]orks of art, however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are the products of collective negotiation and exchange" (vii). In the book's chapter "The Circulation of Social Energy," Greenblatt writes that "No individual, not even the most brilliant, seemed complete unto himself—my own study of Renaissance self-fashioning had already persuaded me of this—and Elizabethan and Jacobean visions of hidden unity seemed like anxious rhetorical attempts to conceal cracks, conflict, and disarray" (2). Like Greenblatt, I believe that even the most gifted or idiosyncratic author produces his or her work in a matrix of historical, cultural, and personal influences.

Analogous to my argument for a broader definition of influence, Harold Bloom argues in *The Anatomy of Influence* for Christopher Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare on the basis of apprenticeship (the type of relationship that suggested my study in the first place) and proximity. Bloom writes:

How do you overcome a great original like Marlowe, with whom you served your apprenticeship? Marlowe and Shakespeare knew each other; they could not have avoided it. Shakespeare, evidently a cautious person dedicated to self-conservation, must have been careful to steer clear of Marlowe: a quick man with a dagger . . . (49)



Bloom's argument is based on his theory of the anxiety of influence among poets, the subject and title of his first book. In it, he argues that "Poetic history . . . is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (5). Bloom's preoccupation with the strong poet leads him to focus on "major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors . . . Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (5). In this study, my concern is with secondary figures who are not necessarily artists themselves, but have an effect on the lives and works of canonical artists. Information gaps are inevitable in research that focuses on secondary figures. Peters notes that "these secondary lives can present almost insurmountable problems for the biographer. Too often the evidence is simply not there . . ." (48). The tools of new historicism are very useful in bridging the inevitable gaps.

In the chapter on Fanny Fern, I apply my methodology to what I call "the anecdote of the editor," which first appears in an unpublished biography of Fern by her granddaughter Ethel Parton. Fern's contemporary biographer Joyce W. Warren includes a version of the anecdote in *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*. Neither Parton nor Warren suggest that the identity of the editor who met with young Sara Payson Willis at the Hartford Female Seminary and published short items that she wrote or dictated to him is known. In the original account, Parton says the items were "published in a leading local newspaper"; in paraphrasing the anecdote, Warren describes Willis meeting "the editor of the local newspaper"—a small, but significant difference in the world of newspapers. My research turned up the information that the editor was Gideon Welles, and the newspaper was the *Hartford Times*—the leading newspaper in Connecticut. From the identification of the newspaper and its editor emerges the possibility of finding items that Willis may have contributed to the *Hartford Times*. The



items I found illuminate the earliest stage in Fern's writing career, analogous to the way Thoreau's obituary of Anna Jones illuminates the earliest stage of his writing career. The ability to read the items from Willis that Welles chose to publish in his newspaper furnishes the reader with important information about both parties, especially since no correspondence between them exists.

Throughout my study, I incorporate additional information from close readings of texts and application of new historicist tools into the existing scholarship to support my argument. For the chapter on Whitman and the penny press editors, I make use of both methods. The text is Whitman's March 7, 1842, article in the *Aurora* under the headline "Mr. Emerson's Lecture." Only two paragraphs long, the article nevertheless provides considerable insight into Whitman's thinking at or near the watershed moment when his literary balance shifted from journalist toward poet. Whitman reported Emerson's lecture on poetry, delivered on Saturday, March 5, at Society Hall in New York City. I also consider Whitman's attendance at the lecture—and commentary on it—as an anecdote that can be unpacked to show how competitive the penny press market was, and how hard Whitman worked to please it in his article. Of the article's two-hundred-twenty-four words, Whitman devoted fifty-three to describing the audience; seventy to *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley's facial expressions and body language as Emerson lectured; and one-hundred-one to the lecture itself. Thus Whitman wrote more about the composition of the audience and Greeley's responses than he did on the lecture. Whitman's attention to social details that would appeal to his penny press readership, rather than thoughtful content that might be of interest to him as a poet, shows Whitman's discipline as a journalist. The *Aurora*'s readership was more interested in the social flavor of the event than the thoughts of the philosopher on poetry.



In keeping with existing scholarship, I borrow my terms for the distinction between journalistic writing and creative writing from Mark Canada, who refers to journalism as “information-based writing,” and uses “imaginative writing” to describe creative literary writing (as does Fishkin). In *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America: Thoreau, Stowe, and Their Contemporaries Respond to the Rise of the Commercial Press* (2011), Canada suggests that a “sibling rivalry” developed between journalism and literature based on competition for readership:

At different times and in different ways, American journalism and American literature have pursued two forms of truth; however, each discipline has come to be associated with one of these two kinds of truth-telling, particularly as the two fields diverged in the early nineteenth century (15).

Putting aside Canada’s claim of “sibling rivalry,” his phrase “two kinds of truth-telling” identifies an important channel of continuity between journalism and literature. Both have the goal of arriving at a form of truth.

Building on Canada’s work, I demonstrate in this study that the lines between his separation of information-based writing and imaginative writing are not as clear he would have us believe. The writers in this study engaged in both types of writing, often simultaneously. In *From Fact to Fiction*, Fishkin speaks of both continuities and discontinuities between information-based and imaginative writing, yet gives examples only of continuities, such as Whitman’s re-use in his poetry of language and content first used in his journalism. I suggest that one factor in the presence of certain discontinuities may be the agency of editors—editing being a stage in the writing process that Fishkin and others do not include in their analyses. The literary marketplace itself does not make as clear a



distinction as critics and literary historians do between information-based writing and imaginative writing, journalism and literature, fact and fiction.

### **Recovering Agency**

Why is recovering the agency of editors important to the study of mid-nineteenth-century literature? I suggest we need to recover this important element of the marketplace process leading to publication in order to understand more completely how works came to be in print. Insufficient understanding of this element can lead to incorrect speculation about the factors that played a role in the development of literary works. For example, in *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, Harding portrays Thoreau as self-contained individualist, influenced only by Emerson and perhaps one or two other members of the Transcendentalist movement. Based on this understanding of Thoreau, Harding claims that “[f]rom 1840 on he tested many of the *Walden* chapters on the lecture platform, revising them carefully on the basis of audience reception” (330). Harding does not cite his support for this claim. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate that Thoreau presented only twenty percent of the chapters of *Walden* as lectures. For eighty percent of the material that became *Walden*, there was no opportunity for the feedback that Harding describes. From my research, I believe it is more likely that advice on craft from newspaper editor Horace Greeley played a role in Thoreau’s revisions than did audience feedback. The name of William Stevens Robinson—who supported antislavery in his first editorials for the Concord *Yeoman’s Gazette* in January 1839 and later conversed with Thoreau on the important issues of the day—does not appear in Harding’s biography.

Another example of an editor remaining in the background is found in the primary biography of Fanny Fern (born Sarah Payson Willis, soon shortening her first name to Sara). In *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*, Joyce Warren summarizes in a few sentences the presence of “the editor of a



local newspaper” who maintained an ongoing acquaintance with young Sara Payson Willis at the Hartford Female Seminary, soliciting writing from her and sometimes taking her dictation (Warren 39). Warren does not identify the editor or his newspaper, or place importance on this interaction other than it “gained her recognition on her own.” As with Harding on Thoreau, Warren focuses on the self-sustaining qualities of the author. As with the interaction of Greeley and Thoreau in Harding, the editor is not granted agency in a productive literary relationship between the editor and aspiring writer that he initiated. In my research, I confirmed that the editor was Gideon Welles of the *Hartford Times*, who solicited commentary from Willis to fill his columns when needed—the same type of witty commentary that later established Fanny Fern as the highest paid newspaper columnist in the United States.

In Chapter Four, I argue that while critics and literary historians have paid attention to Whitman’s twenty-year career as a journalist, they do not place Whitman’s imaginative writing in the context of the news values and writing styles of the New York penny press newspapers for which Whitman worked. Whitman’s journalism career took place in a watershed time in American journalism when newspapers began to cover personal news (police court, scandals, and human interest stories), and wrote about news of this type in a clear, direct style accessible to newly literate readers. As I discuss, Whitman edited a penny press newspaper, the *Aurora*, and aspects of penny press news values and writing style continued into his poetry.

I view my effort to recover the agency of editors in the publication process as analogous to David S. Reynolds’s argument in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, in which Reynolds begins to recover the mass of subversive fiction that lies beneath the most significant literary works of the American Renaissance. If, as Reynolds argues, it is reasonable to conclude that lesser writers of mid-



nineteenth century America had an influence on the works of canonical writers, I believe it follows that a similar argument can be made on behalf of newspaper and book editors. In the title of this study, and often in its text, I use the term *agency* rather than *influence* in order to avoid overstating the role of editors. I use the words *affect*, *effect*, and *exert* to express what I mean when referring to causation that is similar to a strict definition of literary influence (examples are *affecting another author*, *having the effect*, and *exerting an influence* on an author's work).

In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, Reynolds argues that canonical imaginative works arose from a great number of less literary imaginative works; he speaks of reading “hundreds of cheap adventure novels . . . overlooked by previous scholars,” from which emerged such as Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* and Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*. Reynolds suggests these two works had an influence on Melville. In making his argument, Reynolds divides lesser works into two categories: romantic adventure fiction (subdivided into moral and dark), and subversive fiction. Subversive fiction “enacted fully the wild cultural forces that were evaded or glossed over in the other types of adventure fiction” (183). In my study, I parallel the argument of Reynolds by placing the works of canonical writers in the context of an increasingly powerful literary marketplace. Just as Reynolds views canonical works as emerging from many literary products, I view canonical writers as working with editors as agents of the marketplace to bring literary works into print.

Without a perspective that includes the agency of editors, our understanding of how canonical literary works such as *Walden*, *Ruth Hall*, and *Leaves of Grass* came to print is incomplete. Reynolds argues that “[t]he major writers were distinguished among their contemporaries by the breadth of their awareness of the various popular reform movements and by their success in rechanneling the reform impulse imaginatively in their own works” (92). This argument helps to describe the context in which



Thoreau, Fern, and Whitman came of age, and provides a valuable perspective on the three canonical works that were published in 1854-1855. One can see impulses of reform in *Walden*, *Ruth Hall*, and *Leaves of Grass*. All three works express the spirit of an individual not only observing society, but struggling against it to preserve his or her individualism and freedom. Thoreau, especially, was aware of reform movements and channeled his reform impulses into the writing of *Walden*.

Another thread of Reynolds's argument explains the presence of sensational aspects in works such as *Ruth Hall* and *Leaves of Grass*. Reynolds writes, "The major writers were not, as is commonly believed, aliens in a literary culture of prudery or clear moral distinction. Rather, they were responding to a heterogeneous culture which had strong elements of the criminal, the erotic, and the demonic" (169). Regarding Whitman, Reynolds notes the connections (thus continuities) between subversive fiction (Whitman's *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*) and the newspapers: "The right to freedom of the press made possible journalistic reportage of shocking stories that were censored in more repressive societies" (169). In the name of freedom of the press, editors were privileged to include factual and sometimes fictional details in their newspapers that might otherwise be considered too graphic or lurid to appear in print.

As Canada notes, the fields of journalism and literature in America diverged in the early nineteenth century. My study builds on the studies of Canada, Fishkin, Reynolds, and other scholars who examine the intersection of news writing and literature in the antebellum United States. My focus on the agency of newspaper, journal, and book editors on the works of imaginative writers adds a new dimension to this thread of inquiry. In my view, the roles of newspapers editors and book publishers in shaping discourse and influencing information-based writers and journalism has been ignored because the academic discipline of the study of English and American literature privileges imaginative



writing over information-based writing. The discipline of literary studies often leaves consideration of newspaper and periodical editors and book publishers to media history. In this dissertation, I hope to take a step toward returning the agency of editors to literary study.

### **Marketplace Agency**

Throughout this study, I demonstrate that the effects of the literary marketplace, whose agents include editors and publishers, are inevitable on literary products that go into print. A profound change was taking place in the production of books and other publications as printers became publishers. In *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, Michael T. Gilmore writes that by 1850, “A mass market existed for books, and aggressive, highly competitive publishing houses emerged to meet the demand. *The new firms took charge of all details of the business, and authors lost most of their earlier control over publication*” (4). The emphasis is mine. If authors lost most of their control and publishing houses took over that control, there was a shift in the power relationships between the two. The straightforward model of an author entrusting his manuscript to a printer for publication and possible sale was being replaced by a more complex model. In the new model, the publishing house acquired the work of an author and paid the author a percentage of the profits from sales—a “copyright” or royalty. The publisher also promoted the work. Thus the agents of the marketplace played an expanded role in the production of literary works unless a literary work was to remain private forever.

Even such a self-sufficient author as Thoreau surrendered a portion of his rights to privacy to the agents of the new mode. When Thoreau was alive, he delved into his private journals so often in search of material for *Walden* and other published writings that, when he died, the private journals themselves became public through the curiosity of his friends and marketplace interests of his



publishing house. After Thoreau's death in 1862, Emerson asked Sophia Thoreau if he could keep her brother's journals for a year. Emerson made the request not only to satisfy his own curiosity, but also to identify additional material in the journals that he thought was worthy of publication. Beginning with Emerson's interest, an industry developed around Thoreau that led to the publication of his journals, writings, speeches, and correspondence in their entirety. Houghton Mifflin Company published the first complete collected works, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, in the 1894 Riverside Edition. In 1906, Houghton would publish both the plain blue Walden Edition and lavish, green and gold-covered Manuscript Edition. Three editions in twelve years of the collected works of an author who often resisted the dictates of the marketplace was somewhat ironic, though—unlike some transcendentalist writers—Thoreau was not ambivalent about being paid for his writing. Fink writes that “his correspondence makes it quite clear that he that he was not indifferent to payment and that he could reconcile his idealism with the implicit materialism of the professional author” (79). Each author in my study interacted with the marketplace and its agents—editors, publishers, booksellers—in strikingly different ways. The three authors complement each other very well. Thoreau most often resisted the marketplace and its agents – notably Horace Greeley. Gilmore observes: “Thoreau's concern with the trade of authorship dominates his correspondence with Horace Greeley. . . . Their letters are filled with monetary details and accounts of negotiations with publishers, and Thoreau was willing to follow Greeley's advice on how to promote himself to the reading public” (10). When Sara Payson Willis returned to writing under the pseudonym Fanny Fern, she sought to begin a career in the marketplace, and did so, primarily through her business arrangements with the editor Robert Bonner. In publishing and self-marketing his poetry, Walt Whitman circumvented the



marketplace; yet he employed techniques he had learned as an agent of the marketplace to promote *Leaves of Grass*.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THOREAU AND EDITORS

Early in *Walden*, Henry Thoreau writes: “For a long time I was a reporter to a journal, of no very wide circulation, whose editor has never yet seen to fit the bulk of my contributions, and, as is too common with writers, I got only my labor for my pains. However, in this case my pains were their own reward” (*Walden* 18). Interpretations of this passage vary. One is that Thoreau is referring to his personal journal, which he began to keep in 1837. Often he would mine the journal for material for use in his publications, though the majority of entries in the journal were neither published nor intended to be published. A second interpretation is that Thoreau refers to his early contributions to *The Dial*, most of which editor Margaret Fuller rejected because she did not think they were ready for publication. In the “Historical Introduction” to *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, Journal, Volume 1: 1837-1844*, Robert Sattlemeyer is of the opinion that the passage is “doubly veiled”:

In the pages of his Journal, Henry Thoreau commented from time to time on the problems of his craft, but this passage from *Walden* is his only public acknowledgment of the crucial role the *Journal* played in his development as a writer. Characteristically, the reference is doubly veiled: a contemporary audience would have recognized it as an allusion to *The Dial* . . . and its tone of nonchalance and casual self-deprecation masks the disappointment that it confesses. (592)

Sattlemeyer’s reading is consistent with a second passage in the same section of *Walden*, “Economy,” that has been interpreted to refer to another of Thoreau’s early works, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Four paragraphs after the passage about the journal, Thoreau recounts an anecdote of an Indian going house to house selling hand-made baskets. Linck C. Johnson, author of *Thoreau’s*



*Complex Weave*, an analysis of Thoreau's writing process—argues that the basket is a metaphor for *A Week* and its lack of market success:

In a celebrated parable of his life and literary vocation at the opening of *Walden*, Thoreau used an illuminating passage to describe the writing of *A Week*. After telling of an Indian's unsuccessful efforts to sell baskets in Concord, he continued: "I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth anyone's while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them." (Johnson xii; *Walden* 19)

Because of their close proximity and similarity of sentiment, I would argue that the passage about the journal similarly refers to the lack of acceptance of Thoreau's early writings—and that the unnamed journal is *The Dial*.

Despite being "the parent of the American little magazine" (Hoffman 7), *The Dial* never reached as many as three hundred subscribers. However, among its faithful readers was a local newspaper editor who had been Thoreau's schoolmate, William Stevens Robinson (*Pen Papers* 16). In this chapter, I argue that *Dial* editor Margaret Fuller played a role in the development of Thoreau's craft as a writer by insisting that he do a better job of organizing his material; Robinson and his wife, Harriet, contributed to Thoreau's evolving antislavery ideology by their active participation in the antislavery movement in Concord; Horace Greeley played a role in developing Thoreau's craft; and James T. Fields played the gatekeeper role in facilitating Thoreau's access to the marketplace. For example, in 1849, when Thoreau first submitted *Walden* to Ticknor and Company, Fields was junior partner; and in 1854 when Thoreau submitted a revised manuscript—twice the length of first



version—to the same publisher, Fields was about to become a full partner. As an agent of the marketplace, Fields had the most significant role: the power to buy Thoreau’s work and bring it to print.

Before leaving Thoreau’s passage about the journal, I suggest that it is evidence of Thoreau’s awareness of the importance of editors as critical (in both senses of the word) gatekeepers along the path to publication. Editors could accept or decline what was submitted to them, or suggest changes in the work if they thought it would be publishable with improvement. To provide for the possibility that Thoreau’s use of the word *journal* is not specific to either his personal journal or to *The Dial*, I suggest the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. He could be thinking of both his own journal and *The Dial*. When considered together, as I have here, the two passages in the first section of *Walden* reflect the author’s sensitivity to the indifferent response of the literary marketplace (editors, publishers, and readers) to his early offerings.

I extend Linck Johnson’s argument for the “complex weave” of the writing process in *A Week* to the writing process of *Walden*. In *The Making of Walden*, J. Lyndon Shanley writes: “That Thoreau did not write *Walden* at one time has been evident ever since [definitive editions of] his journals were published in 2006. The journals of 1850-54 contain a very considerable body of material that Thoreau used in *Walden*, published in 1854” (1). By matching types of paper in various manuscripts housed in the Huntington Museum, Shanley was able to reconstruct the original pagination of the *Walden* that Thoreau drafted in 1846-1847 and submitted to Ticknor and Company in 1849. Both the 1849 and published versions of *Walden* are contained in *The Making of Walden*.

A comparison of the two passages helps to clarify the subject of Thoreau’s reference. In the 1849 draft, the passage about the journal is only two sentences long, but the second sentence makes a



direct reference to the literary marketplace: “For a long time I was a reporter to a journal of no very wide circulation, and, as is too common, I got only pain for my labor. *Literary contracts are so little binding*” (113, paragraph 27). The emphasis is mine. In the process of revising *Walden*, Thoreau rendered his thought process more opaque by expanding the first sentence and deleting the second sentence completely: “For a long time I was a reporter to a journal, of no very wide circulation, *whose editor has never yet seen fit to print the bulk of my contributions*, and, as is too common *with writers*, I got only my labor for my pains” (Princeton *Walden*, 18). I italicize language that is new to the printed version, which includes the reference to an editor who “has never yet seen fit to print the bulk of my contributions”—perhaps a joking reference to Thoreau himself as “editor” of his journal, but more likely a reference to Fuller. *The Dial* began publication in July 1840, with a second issue in October, so Thoreau’s recollections of the reception of his works submitted for issues edited by Fuller (beginning with the third) were fresh when he began to write *Walden*. In a revision that parallels in kind his mention of an editor, Thoreau inserted “with writers,” making it clear that he was referring to both editors and writers—gatekeepers and contributors. It is revisions like these that lead Johnson to describe Thoreau’s writing as “elaborate and complex” rather than “simple and straightforward” (xi-xii).

Thoreau makes his original thought process specific in the second sentence of the first version: “Literary contracts are too little binding.” As a principal in the family business of making pencils, Thoreau was acquainted with the provisions of business contracts. When his father died in 1858, the county probate court made Thoreau the executor of his father’s estate, and he “assumed management of the family graphite business . . .” (Harding 409). His correspondence from that time supports the fact that Henry stepped up to fulfilling contracts with businesses to which the Thoreau family supplied



graphite, and entering into new relationships upon requests from businesses. Though his taking over the business would come after the publication of *Walden*, Thoreau already had made significant improvements to the pencil-making process in 1843, the year before removing himself to Walden Pond. In and around 1843, he developed a mixture of graphite and clay that could be baked safely and quickly into lead, and designed a saw that could strip the lead to fit grooves that were chiseled into two halves of cedar pencil woods. He also designed a machine that drilled holes in the pencil woods the exact size of the leads, which eliminated the need for halving the woods and gluing the two halves together after lead was placed in the groove (Harding 157). These improvements gave the family a significant competitive advantage in both the pencil and graphite markets. It is interesting that the family business was the manufacture of writing implements. Young Henry would have grown up with a strong identification with this tool of the writer's craft. One can understand that the practical and precise side of Thoreau, which allowed him to engineer devices that improved pencil manufacturing, would become impatient with contract practices of the literary marketplace that were "too little binding"—not as specific or business-like as those in manufacturing.

By the time Thoreau wrote *Walden*, he had lived on Staten Island for several months, during which he attempted to make contacts with editors in New York City. One editor he met, Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, took a special interest in the transcendentalists and was instrumental in the dissemination of their ideology. In *Horace Greeley's New York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor*, Adam Tuchinsky writes:

The *Tribune* . . . played a central role in the spread of Transcendentalism. Recent work in literary history has demonstrated the extent to which the transcendentalists, especially Emerson, Thoreau, and certainly Fuller, owed their national reputations to



the publicity they received in the *Tribune*. . . . Greeley believed that one of the *Tribune*'s special missions was to cultivate and disseminate American literature and thought, and the transcendentalists were an important component of that mission. (59)

Thanks to Greeley acting as Thoreau's agent, some of his articles found their way to editors who were willing to publish them; yet in his correspondence with Greeley, Thoreau often expressed frustration with the terms of these literary contracts and the time it took for editors to decide to publish a submission. Thoreau's impatience with literary contracts would characterize his pre-*Walden* dealings with editors and publishers.

### **Margaret Fuller**

Along with gatekeeper role of editors came the task of explaining the decision to reject and offer advice for revising the piece for possible future publication. Fuller was the first such editor in Thoreau's early career. Seeing an opportunity to create "new literature" (Marshall 147), she volunteered for the position of editor of *The Dial* with Emerson's support. For the first issue, she accepted a short essay and poem from Thoreau because he also had Emerson's support. Putting together the third issue, however, she rejected Thoreau's essay "The Service," which Emerson wanted her to print.

In a letter date December 1, 1840, Fuller sent Thoreau a letter of rejection and advice that appears to be his first interaction with the professional literary marketplace. Somewhat apologetically, she wrote:

I am to blame for the long detaining of your manuscript. But my thoughts have been so engaged that I have not found a suitable hour to reread it as I wished till last night. The second reading only confirms my impression from the first. The essay is rich in



thoughts, and I should be *pained* not to meet it again. But then the thoughts seem to me so out of their natural order, that I cannot read it through without *pain*. I never once feel myself in the stream of thought, but seem to hear the grating of tools on the mosaic. It is true, as Mister E[mer]son says, that essays not to be compared with this have found their way into the Dial. But then these are more unassuming in their tone, and have an air of quiet good-breeding which induces us to permit their presence. Yours is so rugged that it ought to be commanding. Yet I hope you will give it to me again, and if you see no force in my objections disregard them. (*Correspondence* 41-42)

In her biography of Fuller, Megan Marshall writes, “Margaret’s call for standards was unprecedented, a signal of *The Dial*’s high ambitions” (151). Fuller’s letter to Thoreau is an example of her high standards. Her statement that “the thoughts seem to me so out of their natural order, that I cannot read it through without *pain*” demands that Thoreau pay more attention to the organization and structure of his writings.

Fuller accepted one Thoreau poem for this issue of *The Dial*. Ten months later, she rejected another of his poems. In a letter dated October 1, 1841, softening her decision with what appears to be an expression of affection, Fuller writes:

I do not find the poem on the mountains improved by more compression, though it might be by fusion and glow.

Its merits to me are a noble recognition of nature, two or three manly thoughts, and, in one place, a plaintive music. The image of the ships does not please me originally. It illustrates the greater by the less and affects me as when Byron compares



the light on Jura to that of the dark eye of a woman. I cannot define my position here, and a large class of readers would differ with me. . . . I do not know what I have more to say now. Perhaps these words will say nothing to you. If intercourse should continue, perhaps a bridge may be made between two minds so widely apart, for I apprehended you in spirit, and you did not seem to mistake me as most of your kind do. If you find yourself inclined to write to me, as you thought you might, I dare say many thoughts would be suggested to me; many have already by seeing you day to day. Will you finish the poem in your own way and send it for the Dial. . . . (*Correspondence* 56)

In a postscript, Fuller tells Thoreau that Emerson has shown her more of his work, which she has copied. Once again, she refers to the apparent misunderstanding between her and Thoreau that demonstrated “two minds so widely apart”; she extends an invitation to continue communication because “the moment such a crisis is passed we may speak of it. There is no need of artificial delicacy, of secrecy, it keeps its own secret; it cannot be made false. Thus you will not be sorry that I have seen the paper. Will you not send me other records of the good week?” (*Correspondence* 57). The postscript shows that despite their differences, Fuller invited Thoreau’s submission of more of his work to *The Dial*. Thoreau’s apparent reluctance to take her up on her offer is an early indication of his difficulty dealing with editors—a point to which I will return again in this chapter.

Because a fragment of the letter was printed in two auction catalogues, four sentences survive from one more letter from Fuller to Thoreau, dated Sept. 25, 1843. In it, Fuller pays Thoreau a compliment, but to his abilities in the forest rather than to his writing: “Mr. Emerson has written a very fine poem. You will see it in the Dial. Ellery will not go to the West. He regrets your absence.



You, he says, are the man to be with in the woods.” The poem referred to is Emerson’s “Ode to Beauty,” which was printed in the October 1843 *Dial* (*Correspondence* 140).

These passages from Fuller’s letters to Thoreau show that she actively sought to improve the quality of his writing, while at the same time building a positive relationship between editor and writer. After his classical education at Harvard and success as a student essayist, Thoreau must have experienced considerable disappointment, if not something of shock, at Fuller’s mixed opinions of his writing. Beginning with Fuller, he would learn from editors that in order to have his work accepted in the marketplace, he needed to put more effort into organizing and revising it—lessons he still would be learning throughout the writing of *A Week* and as he wrote the first version of *Walden*. Fuller’s criticism focused primarily on the organization of Thoreau’s writing, and thus contributed to the development of his craft.

### **William Stevens Robinson**

Through his early newspaper editorials and later participation, with his wife, in Concord’s antislavery discourse, William Stevens Robinson was in a position to play an active role in the antislavery movement in the town, and thus affect the evolving ideology expressed in Thoreau’s antislavery writing and speeches. In his editorials in the *Yeoman’s Gazette*, Robinson demonstrated that he already held an antislavery position at the time he became publisher of the newspaper in 1839. Though moderate in tone, his editorials endorsing a candidate for congress focused on the candidate’s antislavery position, and preceded Thoreau’s expressing an antislavery position in print by five years.

Unlike Thoreau, William Robinson did not go to college, though Harriet Robinson writes in *‘Warrington’ Pen Portraits* that he “was considered so promising a scholar, that it was often urged upon his father to send him to college at all hazards” (10). Instead, his father thought his younger son



should be able to earn a living as his older brother had done, without going to Harvard as other bright Concord boys might. In 1835, seventeen-year-old William began to learn the printer's trade, becoming an apprentice to the publisher the *Yeoman's Gazette*, George F. Bemis. (14). Two years later, having gained proficiency at typesetting, he went to Dedham, Massachusetts, to work for his brother, E. G. Robinson, who edited the *Norfolk Advertiser*. His older brother "had a great influence over him, and guided him in his reading, and in his first efforts toward editorial writing" (17).

Robinson was twenty when he returned to Concord in 1839 to take over the *Yeoman's Gazette*, which was "committed to the dissemination of Whig principles" (18). Two of his first published articles expressed his support of antislavery ideology. The articles endorsed Fourth District congressional candidate Nathan Brooks over "party machine" candidate William Parmenter. In the fortnightly *Gazette*, the articles were published in two consecutive Saturday editions: January 19 and 27, 1839. In the second of the articles, addressed "To the Whig Abolitionists of District No. 4," Robinson endorses Brooks as the candidate who will "truly and faithfully represent your views on slavery." He writes:

The question is not whether Mr. Brooks is or is not a technical abolitionist; whether he belongs to an antislavery society; whether he subscribes for the *Liberator*; whether he does or does not believe in the honesty and fairness of Garrison and Stanton. A false issue has been raised on these matters, which are wholly beside the point. The real question which you are called upon as honest and fair men to decide, is this – "Will Mr. Brooks truly and faithfully represent your view on the subject of slavery? Will he act and vote as you wish? Do you in all sincerity and fairness believe that he is the friend of justice, liberty, and equal rights, that he is an enemy of slavery and in favor of



its immediate abolition?” If you have full and satisfactory evidence on these points, you can ask for nothing more. (*Yeoman’s Gazette*, 27 Jan. 1837)

Robinson supports his claim by listing five antislavery resolutions passed by the Massachusetts House and Senate while Brooks was a senator. Support of the resolutions was supposed to establish Brooks as an abolitionist and “free soiler”—favoring the abolishment of slavery in the United States District of Columbia, and forbidding any new state to allow slavery.

As the new editor of a newspaper funded by Whigs, Robinson was biased in his politics, yet his appeal to Fourth District voters on the basis of reason rings of youthful idealism. Robinson was 20. His articles were written in response to the opposition’s campaign to portray Brooks as too moderate on the slavery question. Garrison’s *Liberator* published a special supplement headlined “Middlesex Awake!” It claimed that Brooks refused to give his opinions on slavery and was “a secret foe. . . . He disregards your anxiety for the friendless slave. . . .” (qtd. in Petrulionis 13). Petrulionis observes that abolitionists disliked *both* Parmenter and Brooks and met to campaign against both men (14), nominating their own candidates. The presence of abolitionist candidates may have cost Brooks the election. A record number of voters brought to the polls by the protracted, partisan campaign gave the victory to Parmenter (6 April 1839). Total votes were 4,972 for the winner, 4,432 for Brooks, and 512 scattered among abolitionist candidates. After devoting many column inches to the Whig side of the election for weeks, a disappointed Robinson provided no additional coverage of the result in the *Gazette* other than breaking down the vote total by the thirty-three towns in the Fourth District and calling Parmenter’s ten percent margin of victory “small” (6 April 1839).

The parallel path of Thoreau’s and Robinson’s early lives sheds new light on the origins of Thoreau’s antislavery ideology. The issue of slavery was familiar to Robinson from his grammar



school days. Since he and Thoreau were taught by the same grammar school teachers before Thoreau left for Concord Academy, the same pre-conditioning toward antislavery ideology would have been present in Thoreau's early education—a point not noted in previous studies. When Robinson was 12, his teacher in the town school was Reverend John Graham, who became a well-known antislavery activist (9, note 4). When he was 9, another teacher, Reverend Horatio Wood, founded "The Young Declaiming and Debating Society" for boys in the school. The club would pick a new secretary every third week. Robinson was secretary as early as 1830, when the club debated the question "Ought Negroes be allowed to vote?" (10, note 5). As it did with Thoreau, Robinson's grammar school instruction first exposed him to issues of race, slavery, and the possibility of abolition, even the right to vote.

Robinson's friendship with Thoreau extended through most of Thoreau's life. First as a Concord school boy, later as typesetter and then editor of the *Yeoman's Gazette*, and again when he and his wife rented a house from the Thoreau family, Robinson was on friendly terms with Thoreau. From the perspective of literary biography, it is remarkable that Robinson's frequent presence in Thoreau's life has not been noted. Beyond being Thoreau's classmate in grammar school, Robinson was in contact with Thoreau at several other points. Robinson was working for his brother in Dedham when John Thoreau, Jr., and Henry announced their intention to open a new school in Concord in the *Gazette* of September 15, 1838, (Harding 75), but had returned to Concord as editor and publisher of the *Gazette* by the time the Thoreau brothers admitted their first students to Concord Academy in 1839. An 1839 item in the paper mentioned that older brother John Thoreau ran the Concord Academy, assisted by Henry, "the present instructor" (21). On at least one occasion, the brothers took their students on a field trip to the newspaper: "A group of boys was taken to the office of the local



[paper] to watch the compositors setting type” (Harding 83). At a time when publishing and editing a small newspaper had not become separate roles, Robinson would have had to be there to give the visitors a tour. As an informed Concord resident, Thoreau would have been familiar with Robinson’s first editorials in the *Gazette*. Years before, Thoreau would have attended the same classes in the public grammar school as Robinson, and been taught by the same teachers, Reverends Wood and Graham. Thoreau was 11 and Robinson 10 when they parted ways in school. Before continuing his education at the Concord Academy that preceded his and his brother’s school, Thoreau may have belonged to same debating club Robinson did, though he left grammar school before Negro suffrage was the subject of the club’s debates. Both boys were exposed to the same antislavery discourse at the Concord town school, yet Robinson supported the antislavery credentials of a candidate for Congress in the *Yeoman’s Gazette* five years before Thoreau would write a review of the antislavery newspaper *Herald of Freedom* that was published in *The Dial*.

Robinson’s newspaper career began around January 1836, when he went to work as an apprentice to George F. Bemis, who became publisher of the *Yeoman’s Gazette* in 1834. Robinson just had turned 17 (H. Robinson 14). Learning to set type that spring, he well may have put into type one of the most significant contribution to antislavery discourse in Concord, which appeared as a letter to the editor on August 27, 1836. In the letter, signed “ABOLITIONIST,” the writer sets out reasons for a cautious view toward antislavery leaders that anticipates Thoreau’s position of individual moral opposition to slavery rather than organized political movements. Having attended a meeting of the Middlesex Antislavery Society on July 26, 1836, in Waltham, the writer expresses support of abolition, but urges abolitionists to keep a watchful eye on the movement’s leaders:



I have no desire to do or say any thing [sic] which is calculated to check the ardor of a single abolitionist; on the contrary, I would say to each and every one of them, “persevere” in a steady and judicious course. But experience . . . has taught the writer . . . that both in moral as in political reform, it is indispensable that many who honestly engage in such reform should watch with a jealous eye each and every word and deed which the would-be leaders in the reform may say or do. I am led to these reflections from the consideration that a great question is in agitation, and on its decision depends the fondest hopes and expectations of many, very many of the wisest and most virtuous citizens in our country. I would say to these *be cautious how you place too much confidence in those who are considered leaders or agents; for if the reform is to be consummated by the use of the moral lever, the moment you apply the political lever, you undo one half which the moral lever has performed.* (3, emphasis mine)

The reason for the letter was the writer’s concern that the Waltham meeting agreed to join forces with the American Antislavery Society to raise money for speakers who would lecture “in all the principal towns” of Massachusetts. The writer feared that the speakers would take advantage of these forums, as they had in Waltham, to criticize Whig candidates by name, including presidential candidate Daniel Webster and gubernatorial candidate Edward Everett, for lacking commitment to abolition. Though the purpose of the letter was political, the writer’s argument for skepticism toward “would-be-leaders in the reform” is similar to Thoreau’s favoring individual moral suasion over organized opposition to slavery. Having reviewed ABOLITIONIST’s letter, Petrulionis adds that “it may reflect . . . an example of the fact that the early years of the antislavery movement were marked by dissension among those who were more cautious in their rhetoric and felt that Garrison and his group were too



extreme . . .” (e-mail). What the letter makes certain is that when Thoreau expressed a public position on abolition in his review of the *Herald of Freedom* in 1844, his position was consistent with antislavery discourse circulating in Concord as early as summer 1836, specifically ABOLITIONIST’s letter and the antislavery writings of Nathaniel P. Rogers, who edited the *Herald of Freedom* in nearby Concord, New Hampshire.

On July 15, 1840, when Robinson bought the *Gazette* and changed its name to the *Republican*, he committed the paper “to the support of sound *republican principles* [and] to the fair and candid discussion of public measures and public men” (20). Though supportive of the agenda of the Whig party, Robinson had a literary side. He reprinted some of Emerson’s poems and Hawthorne’s stories. Having attended grammar school with the Thoreau brothers, he remained in communication with them, and later with their parents. In 1842, Robinson sold the *Republican* to become assistant editor of the *Lowell Courier and Journal*. When he and his wife, Harriet Jane Hanson Robinson, returned to Concord in 1854, the couple rented John Thoreau, Senior’s “Texas house” on Belknap Street while William commuted by train to Boston to work on the *Telegraph*. As a journalist and politician, Robinson was active in antislavery discourse. Harriet Robinson was a founder of the Concord Ladies’ Antislavery Society.

Since Robinson worked at the *Yeoman’s Gazette* when Thoreau’s obituary of Anna Jones was published, the former schoolmates communicated on that occasion. Thoreau’s obituary differs from other obituaries in the *Gazette* in that it connects ideology with the life of the subject. Thoreau’s signaled his future relationship to power. The subject, Jones, was one of the last Concord residents to have lived during the Revolutionary War. She was 86 when she died in the Concord poorhouse. Thoreau writes:



After a youth passed amid scenes of turmoil and war, she has lingered thus long amongst us as a bright example of the Revolutionary woman. She was as it were, a connecting link between the past and the present—a precious relic of the days which the man and patriot would not willingly forget. . . . *Poverty was her lot, but she possessed those virtues without which the rich are but poor.* (25 Nov. 1837, quoted in Harding 70, emphasis mine).

The article represents Jones as an exemplar of the ideals of the Revolution. Central to Revolutionary ideology was resistance to the power of the English state and government—in particular the power to levy taxes on the American colonists. Brief though it is, the Jones article offers the first glimmer of Thoreau’s attitude toward taxation that funded immoral causes (slavery and the US-Mexico War) and the unimportance of material possessions.

Building on the idea of resistance to power implied in the article, in *Walden* Thoreau calls attention to his personal resistance to government in the anecdote of his “arrest” (a night spent in jail):

One afternoon, near the end of the first summer [on Walden Pond] when I went to the village to get a shoe from the cobbler’s, I was seized and put into jail, because, as I have elsewhere related, I did not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house. I had gone down to the woods for other purposes. But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate, odd-fellow society. (171)

The evolution of Thoreau’s principle of the necessity of a moral individual’s resistance to an immoral government shows the way in which he developed his ideas in speeches and essays. Following the



anecdote of his arrest, he refers readers of *Walden* who might want additional explanation of his reasons for resistance to an earlier published essay “Resistance to Civil Government.” That essay evolved from a Concord Lyceum talk first delivered on January 26, 1848 as “The Relation of the Individual to the State,” which he gave again in slightly revised form on February 16, 1848. After learning of the lectures, Elizabeth Peabody solicited a manuscript of it for her new periodical, *Aesthetic Papers*. Though busy with the arrival of proof sheets of *A Week* that publisher James Munroe and Company was sending him in batches, Thoreau complied. The essay appeared in the publication as “Resistance to Civil Government” on May 14, 1849—fifteen months after Thoreau gave his second lecture. In “Thoreau’s Lectures Before *Walden*: An Annotated Calendar,” Dean and Hoag write that because of the relatively short time frame, “we can assume that Thoreau made relatively few changes to the lecture text before submitting it as printer’s copy to Elizabeth Peabody” (Myerson 153-155). The title by which the essay is best known, “Civil Disobedience,” first appeared in 1866—four years after Thoreau’s death—when it was included in the book *A Yankee in Canada, with Antislavery and Reform Papers*.

The connection between Robinson and Thoreau has received insufficient attention. Though we do not have correspondence between Thoreau and Robinson to let us know what Thoreau might have thought of Robinson’s writing, an historian asserts that Robinson was very persuasive in print. In *Money, Morals, and Politics: Massachusetts in the Age of the Boston Associates*, William F. Hartford enumerates persuasive strategies that Robinson used in his journalistic writing: “Robinson was a gifted editorialist whose knowledge of Massachusetts politics, adept use of invective, and talent for exposing the inconsistencies in an adversary’s argument or conduct made him one of the state’s most respected political writers” (171). Indeed, contemporaries noted the connection between Robinson and



Thoreau. The first sentence of Robinson's March 1876 obituary in the *Concord Freeman* notes that he was "a year and a half younger than his school-mate, Henry Thoreau . . ." According to the obituary, Robinson, like Thoreau, "was a bright boy, a great reader and a frequenter of the lyceum" (*Boston Journal*, March 13, 1876). A description in the same obituary of Robinson's character and intellect suggests similarities in the styles of expression and argumentation used by Robinson and Thoreau in their writings:

He was frank to a fault and spoke his mind on paper and in conversation with so much freedom that he offended those who did not see that his motive was pure. It was in his nature to say sharp things, but in his heart there was no bitterness. He was a critic without selfish purposes. He detested sham . . . He gave severe political blows, but he received the shots of his antagonists with Roman firmness. No one can attribute to him . . . any base or unworthy intent.

If the same paragraph were written about Thoreau, it would ring true. Thoreau was frank and "spoke his mind on paper and in conversation" freely enough that his remarks sometimes gave offense. His writings were (and are) well known for their pithy criticisms and comments. He certainly punctured pretense, or "sham," when he found it. Yet he was well loved by his family and friends—more so than was the case with Robinson, who made enemies—because he was perceived to be honest about his philosophy of individualism and, for the most part, without guile in presenting it.

As Harriet Robinson makes clear in her memoir, the Robinson and Thoreau families had a cordial relationship, and her husband and Thoreau were friends. I hope this study will contribute to the recovery of William Robinson as a newspaper editor whose views had an effect on a canonical author. Published in 1877, Harriet Robinson's memoir also predicts *Walden's* enduring significance. She



writes that the book's publication in 1854 "drew many visitors to the little hut by the shore of the pond where the philosopher had lived on three cents a day, planted his beans, and written his immortal pages" (68). She then quotes her husband's high opinion of *Walden*, as expressed in one of his many newspaper opinion pieces published over the pen name of "Warrington":

It is fortunate for literature that Thoreau lived, and built his house on the shores of Walden Pond, when he did. If his birth had been postponed twenty years, we should never have had his most delightful book, and one of the most delightful of all American books. 'Walden' is as good of its kind as anything in American or English literature. It is, on the whole, the best book ever written in Concord. (68)

William Robinson's assessment of *Walden* as "best book ever written in Concord" is high praise in a community where Hawthorne and Emerson also wrote books. Harriet Robinson added that "Mr. Robinson thought Thoreau's poem 'Sympathy' evidence of true genius" (68).

The attention paid by both Robinsons to *Walden* is evidence of their interest in his writings. Having returned to Concord in 1854, William Robinsons was in contact with Thoreau during the time he was developing antislavery works such as "Slavery in Massachusetts" and "A Plea for Captain John Brown." The first began as a speech Thoreau delivered at an "antislavery celebration" in Framingham, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1854 (*Reform Papers* 331). Thoreau did not deliver the full speech as written, but William Lloyd Garrison published a full text in *The Liberator* on July 21, 1854. Horace Greeley published the text in the New York *Tribune* on August 2, 1854 without paragraphing or comment (331). Also developed as a lecture, "A Plea for Captain John Brown" was first printed in the anthology *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, published in 1860 (341). In Concord, discourse on the John Brown affair no doubt circulated among the Robinson and Thoreau families.



## Nathaniel P. Rogers

Thoreau's first written evidence of antislavery ideology appeared in the April 1844 issue of *The Dial* in a six-page essay praising the antislavery weekly *Herald of Freedom*, which was published in Concord, New Hampshire (119). Thoreau scholar Wendell P. Glick writes that *Herald* editor Nathaniel P. Rogers's advocacy for individual moral opposition to slavery, rather than organized political opposition, matched Thoreau's ideology of individualism. In "Resistance to Civil Government," Thoreau expresses his ideology in two sentences: "This American government—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will" (*Reform Papers* 63). Glick writes in "Thoreau and the 'Herald of Freedom'":

Thoreau's insistence . . . upon a calm approach to the slavery issue, without malice, without rant, accounts for his willingness to praise the abolitionist Rogers and his reluctance to associate himself firmly with the abolitionist Garrison, who . . .

formulated the philosophy of reform upon which radical abolitionism was based. (202).

Glick argues that Roger's "firmness and . . . moral indignation" exerted an influence on Thoreau's position on antislavery (195). There is evidence of this influence in Thoreau's admiration for Rogers in *The Dial* review:

We do not know of another notable and public instance of such pure, youthful, and hearty indignation at all wrong. . . .

Mr. Rogers seems to us to occupy an honorable and manly position in these days, and in this country, making the press a living and breathing organ, to reach the hearts of men . . . No other paper that we know keeps pace so well with one forward



wave of the restless public thoughts and sentiment of New England., and asserts so faithfully and ingenuously the largest liberty in all things. (*Reform Papers* 49-50).

What does Thoreau mean by “an honorable and manly position”? In “Resistance to Civil Government,” he writes, How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today? I answer that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave’s* government also” (67). From these quotations, one can see the similarity between Robinson’s and Thoreau’s positions on slavery.

Recent scholarship has begun to recover the influence of Rogers’s antislavery ideology on Thoreau. I use the word *recover* because Petrulionis refers readers of *To Set This World Right* all the way back to Glick’s 1949 article for a more complete consideration of Roger’s influence on Thoreau (176n9). As editor of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Reform Papers* (which includes “Resistance to Civil Government,” “Slavery in Massachusetts,” and “A Plea for Captain John Brown”), Glick is an authority on Thoreau’s ideological writings. In the “Textual Introduction” to Thoreau’s review of *Herald of Freedom* in *Reform Papers*, Glick suggests that Rogers’s influence on Thoreau continued even after Rogers died. Glick writes that Rogers’s death in October 1846 “may have revived [Thoreau’s] interest in the man and his work” because Thoreau “scribbled” two pages of notes on Rogers that he expanded to four unpublished pages, quoting a Rogers editorial in the *Herald of Freedom* from September 2, 1842 (289). While not an editor who knew Thoreau, Rogers was an editor for whom the case has been made that he exerted an influence on Thoreau’s ideology.

First a lawyer who practiced for twenty years in his native Plymouth, New Hampshire, Rogers moved to the state capital, Concord, to edit the *Herald of Freedom*. He was editor from June 1838 to December 1844. Thoreau’s acquaintance with the *Herald* began around January 1842 (Glick 195),



when his mother and sisters began subscribing to the paper. By his own account, Thoreau had been reading the paper “occasionally, for several years” at the time he wrote his review (*Reform Papers* 49). Noting that Thoreau’s review “has been dismissed by most Thoreau scholars as having little intrinsic worth or extrinsic significance” (193), Glick makes the argument that Thoreau gave his unqualified approval to only three men: abolitionist orator Wendell Phillips, who addressed the Concord Lyceum three times in 1845 and 1846; John Brown, of whom Thoreau said, “A man of rare common sense and directness of speech, as of action; a transcendentalist above all, a man of ideas and principles” (“A Plea for Captain John Brown,” *Reform Papers* 115); and Rogers. Glick writes:

All three of these reformers . . . had assumed unequivocal [sic] positions with regard to a society with which they did not agree. But none was more adamant than Rogers, and Thoreau's admiration for his granite-like firmness and his uncompromising moral indignation points strongly to the conclusion that Rogers' position toward society in 1844 was Thoreau's own. For Thoreau apparently felt that the Herald of Freedom [sic] exemplified the proper attitude of the transcendentalist toward the corrupt institutions about him, and the proper method by which he could discharge his social obligation to reform them. Hence his philosophy of reform can be well defined by an analysis of the major aspects of Rogers' thinking, all of which Thoreau openly espoused and went out of his way to praise. (195)

After praising Rogers and his newspaper in *The Dial*, Thoreau sent a copy of his review to Rogers. (198). Knowing little about the author other than his name, Rogers reprinted Thoreau’s article in the *Herald of Freedom* of May 10, 1844, along with his grateful response: “I had been praised before—generously and beautifully. . . But this was not an abolitionist, noticing the Herald of Freedom, nor a



personal friend—but a stranger . . . who has been pleased, as a literary reviewer. . .” (199). It makes sense that Rogers had not heard of Thoreau because the “Herald of Freedom” review was Thoreau’s first public support of an antislavery position.

In early 1842, around the time he began to read the *Herald of Freedom*, Thoreau went from finding it difficult to have his work accepted by *The Dial* to becoming one of journal’s frequently published contributors. Editor Margaret Fuller had resigned in March 1842 over the journal’s low circulation and her lack of remuneration for two years’ hard work. During that time, she had published four poems and a translation by Thoreau. After replacing Fuller as editor in March, Emerson solicited a long essay from Thoreau, “The Natural History of Massachusetts,” which appeared in the July 1842 issue. In contrast to the total of four poems Fuller printed, Emerson’s October 1842 issue contained eight of Thoreau’s poems. Because of Emerson’s heavy lecture schedule, he asked Thoreau to edit the April 1843 issue in consultation with him. When Emerson returned as editor for what would be the last three issues of the original *Dial*, he was a less attentive editor than he had been in the past. Recognizing serious problems with Thoreau’s essay “A Winter’s Week,” he wrote in his journal that “Channing declared the piece excellent: but it makes me nervous and wretched to read it . . .” (qtd. in Harding 118). Yet instead of carefully editing the piece, Emerson deleted passages he was uncertain about and published the rest of the essay in the October 1843 issue of *The Dial*. Even Thoreau had misgivings about his essay. In the same issue, Emerson included a poem that Fuller had rejected. Perhaps Emerson’s lax editorial had—along with his own newfound importance to *The Dial*—gave Thoreau the opportunity to praise Rogers extravagantly:

There is . . . more unpledged poetry in his prose, than in the verse of many an accepted rhymers; and we are occasionally advertised by a mellow hunter’s note from his



trumpet, that, unlike most reformers, his feet are still where they should be, on the turf, and that he looks out from a serener natural life into the turbid arena of politics. Nor is slavery always a somber theme with him, but invested with colors of his wit and fancy, and an evil to be abolished by other means than bitterness of sorrow and complaint. He will fight this fight with what cheer may be. (*Dial* 508, *Reform Papers* 50)

On the same grounds that Fuller criticized Thoreau's essay "The Service," one can criticize his review of *Herald of Freedom* for its lack of organization. Six lengthy excerpts from the newspaper that Thoreau includes in his review interrupt the flow of his own writing. The essay appears not to have been edited. For example, in the passage above, an editor might have taken a closer look at the vague, clichéd language of its second sentence ("mellow hunter's note," "feet . . . on the turf"). Similarly, the concluding paragraphs, as they appeared originally in *The Dial*, are wordy, using two or three adjectives where one might do, and strained in syntax:

We deem such *timely, pure, and unpremeditated expressions of a public sentiment, such publicity of genuine indignation and humanity, as abound everywhere in this journal*, the most generous gifts a man can make, and should be glad to see *the scraps from which we have quoted, and the others which we have not seen*, collected into a volume. It might, perchance, *penetrate into some quarters which the unpopular cause of freedom has not reached*.

Long may we hear the voice of this Herald. (512)

When the essay was reprinted in 1866 in *A Yankee in Canada, with Antislavery and Reform Papers*, the text contained significant alterations that Thoreau may have approved prior to his death (*Reform Papers* 290). If so, the author shortened the paragraph to a single sentence: "Such timely,



pure, and premeditated expressions of a public sentiment, such publicity of genuine indignation and humanity, as abound every where [sic] in this journal, are the most generous gifts which a man can make” (56). The wordy language of the original essay provides a starting point from which to measure the extent to which Thoreau would refine his writing style and find his authorial voice by the publication of *Walden* ten years later. This sample of the relatively unedited Thoreau writing of 1844 supports my claim that attention to Thoreau’s writing from more attentive editors than Emerson influenced the gradual improvement in his literary style.

In *To Set This World Right*, Petrulionis writes that antislavery discourse in Concord circulated among “a small coterie of committed individuals who provoked their neighbors to action, the moral urgency of abolishing slavery their sole objective” (3). Thoreau was not to be counted among the committed individuals. He was a supporter of the antislavery movement, but not an activist. For a decade after his article praising the *Herald of Freedom*, Petrulionis continues:

Similar to townsman Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau lingered on the sidelines of Concord’s antislavery movement, yet ultimately he gravitated to the most extreme abolitionists, an evolution effected through years of persistent effort by determined neighbors around him. . . The majority in their community maintained a practiced detachment from the plight of the enslaved, but these committed women and men at last prevailed on the philosophers of self-culture to accept the responsibility of their reputations.” (4)

Summarizing her point, Petrulionis writes that “The story of ‘Henry Thoreau, Abolitionist’ is . . . inseparable from that of ‘Concord, Antislavery Town’” (4)—meaning that Thoreau’s becoming an



active abolitionist was influenced by antislavery discourse among the “small coterie” of Concord residents.

There is evidence to support the argument that circulating antislavery discourse, which included Rogers’s stream of articles in the *Herald of Freedom*, influenced Thoreau’s ideology on the antislavery issue. Thoreau would have been home from Harvard when ABOLITIONIST’s letter was published in August 1836. In early 1837, a correspondent “For the Yeoman’s Gazette” reported on the quarterly meeting of the Middlesex Anti-Slavery Society at Wesson’s Hotel in Concord on January 24 1837. At 2 p.m. the meeting reconvened in Reverend Ripley’s meeting house, where Ripley “offered the resolution ‘Slavery in all its features is sinful, and justly calls down the rebuke of heaven . . .’” In making the resolution, he said that prayers were necessary “that our country may be delivered from a sin, which of all others, is the most heaven daring.” The meeting passed eleven abolitionist resolutions that day. After conducting the society’s business, members listened to a talk from a young black man, Amos Dresser, “who was lynched in Nashville” (27 Jan. 1837). Antislavery discourse continued to circulate in Concord and surrounding towns throughout 1838 and 1839 as rhetoric in the congressional contest grew more heated as supporters of Parmenter attacked Brooks on the grounds that he was not a bona fide abolitionist. During the campaign, Thoreau was exposed to constant antislavery discourse from his immediate family, printed materials such as the *Yeoman’s Gazette* and *Herald of Freedom*, and conversations with neighbors and friends.

In *To Set This World Right*, Petrulionis foregrounds the night of February 16, 1851, when runaway slave Shadrach Minkins passed through the Concord branch of the Underground Railroad after being rescued from jail in Boston by an abolitionist mob. Petrulionis suggests that news of the



Boston rescue circulated among Concord abolitionists even before they learned that Minkins stayed overnight in their town:

Perhaps . . . [neighbors] Ann Bigelow, Mary Brooks, and their husbands whispered their predawn excitement to trusted compatriots. If so, the Whitings and Thoreaus just down the road would likely have been among the first to learn that the baffling disappearance of Shadrach Minkins had involved their town. An impromptu diatribe on slavery that day [February 16] suggests that Henry Thoreau had been apprised of his neighbors' morning work. (82)

Editing the *Lowell American* at the time, Robinson wrote of Minkins' rescue by a mob that included black Bostonians, enabling Minkins to disappear in the crowd, that "the black men of Boston had the courage and humanity to attempt and successfully carry through that rescue, in spite of the majesty of law with which the United-States bloodhound commissioner had clothed himself" (Petrulionis 82). Thoreau's February 16 journal entry and Robinson's newspaper editorial demonstrate that both were part of the circulating antislavery discourse in Massachusetts; one difference was that Thoreau kept his "diatribe" to himself while Robinson published his opinion.

Evidence of Thoreau's private commitment to antislavery activism is contained in his journal entry of October 1, 1851. In it, he writes that he assisted a fugitive slave from Virginia who took the name "Henry Williams." Williams hid in Boston until the night of September 30, when police looked for him at the Corn Hill Coffee-House. (*Journal 2*: 8-39). Williams fled on foot to the Thoreau family in Concord, bearing letters from a Cambridge abolitionist and William Lloyd Garrison. According to Henry's account, the Thoreau family took action, with Henry at its center:



He lodged with us, and waited in the house till funds were collected with which to forward him. Intended to dispatch him at noon through to Burlington [Vermont], but when I went to buy his ticket, saw one at the depot who looked and behaved so much like a Boston policeman that I did not venture that time. An intelligent and very well-behaved man, a mulatto. (39)

A paragraph on birch withes (slender shoots) interrupts the account, followed by a puzzling paragraph on a slave—or is it slaves? Thoreau leaves the reader uncertain whether he makes a specific reference to Williams, or discusses the behavior of fugitive slaves in general:

The slave said he could guide himself by many other stars than the *north star*, whose rising and setting he knew. They steered for the *north star* even when it had got round and appeared to be in the south. They frequently followed the telegraph when there was no railroad. The slaves bring many superstitions from Africa. The fugitives sometimes carry a turf in their hats, thinking that their success depends on it. (39, emphasis mine)

With this leap from the specific to the general, Thoreau leaves the question of what happened to Williams unanswered. From the Journal entry's first sentence, one could surmise that Williams did not leave Concord by train, but on foot. There is no further mention of him. In researching her book, Petrulionis found evidence that Henry Williams managed to escape to Canada, where he became a waiter in Montreal and had a family (93).

Complicating the matter of Thoreau's stance toward antislavery activism is the following passage from the 1854 *Walden*, included in the "Visitors" section:

Men of almost every degree of wit called on me in the migrating season. Some who had more wits than they knew what to do with; runaway slaves with plantation



manners, who listened from time to time like the fox in the fable, as if they heard the hounds a-baying on their track, and looked at me beseechingly, as much as to say –

“O Christian, will you send me back?”

One real runaway slave, among the rest, whom I helped to forward toward the northstar. (152)

The passage does not appear in the first version of *Walden*, and thus was added in one of the revisions. One wonders what the author is trying to convey. The reader is left unsure of what Thoreau’s generalization of “runaway slaves with plantation manners” (an indirect, euphemistic reference to servility and fear) is based on, especially since he writes that he met only “One real runaway slave. . .”

Thoreau’s reference to the North Star is a specific example of circulating antislavery discourse being present in his language. In the *Herald of Freedom* of December 7, 1839, Nathaniel Rogers praises the poem “Fugitive Slave’s Apostrophe” from a Unitarian minister, which he published two weeks earlier. Rogers writes: “John Pierpont has turned all *free* eyes to this glorious little arctic luminary, which is henceforth to be the queen of the night firmament” (82). Rogers calls the poem “a star in the sky of poetry, that shall be gazed at as long as the language it is clothed in endures . . . ,” and later laments “But, O! shame to New England, that the fugitive cannot rest amid her hills! that he must be fugitive still—along her bold streams! There is no rest for the tired foot in all her borders” (84). Typically, Thoreau takes a more analytical approach to fugitive slaves’ following the North Star; yet the evidence of shared discourse is clear.

The appearance of the same reference to the North Star in the *Walden* passage and the second Journal passage suggests that the runaway slave in both passages is Henry Williams. If so, the *Walden* passage is a good example of fluidity of time in the “complex weave” that Johnson argues is



characteristic of Thoreau's writing: the incident that Thoreau represents as taking place during his two years on Walden Pond in fact took place four to six years later. If time can be so fluid in Thoreau's writing, his account of the events surrounding the arrival and departure of Henry Williams might also be fluid. If Thoreau was in fact entrusted with putting Williams on the train to Burlington, Vermont, did his anxiety and imagination cause the failure of his mission? Thoreau writes only that he "saw one at the depot *who looked and behaved so much like a Boston policeman* that I did not venture that time"—or apparently at any other time. The emphasis is mine. It appears that Henry Williams was left to his own resources to find his way from Concord to the next way station of the Underground Railroad. Thoreau's actions in 1851 reflect ambivalence toward antislavery activism rather than commitment. What led him to overcome his private ambivalence and become a public activist?

One explanation is that William and Harriet Robinson returned to Concord in August 1854 to be near William's elderly mother, thus surrounding Henry with friends and family who themselves were becoming activists. The explanation is supported by Petrulionis's argument in *To Set This World Right*, which "frames the evolution of Thoreau's antislavery ideology as a product of his community's activism" (3). The Robinsons rented the so-called "Texas house," named after the Texas Street development where it was built, from Henry Thoreau, Sr. (H. Robinson 65). Henry senior and Henry had built the Texas house on a lot west of the growing town's new railroad station—a location perhaps conducive to Henry Williams seeking out the Thoreau family. The family had lived in the Texas house for many years. What made their move to a larger house possible was the increased profitability of the business pencil business from 1844 onward due to innovations in manufacturing introduced by Henry David (Harding 261). Profits continued to rise when a Boston printer began buying ground lead from Henry senior to use in the printing industry's new electrotyping process



(261). With the urging of his wife, who wanted to live closer to the center of town, Henry senior was able to purchase a large house at 73 Main Street (263). When William and Harriet Robinson returned to Concord, Thoreau “quickly renewed his acquaintance with Robinson, called on him, and invited him to the annual melon party” (264). The melons were products of Henry David’s own garden.

In “*Warrington*” *Pen Portraits*, Harriet Robinson expresses her view that by 1854 “Concord had now become the center of progressive thought in New England . . .” (66). As evidence, she cites the presence in town of Emerson, the Bronson Alcott, Ellery Channing, and Hawthorne (though the author of *The Scarlet Letter* was in England after being appointed consul to Liverpool by his Bowdoin College classmate, now President, Franklin Pierce). Through the Robinsons’ committed participation in antislavery discourse, their return to Concord created a new opportunity to persuade Thoreau—in conversation of by example—of the importance of his becoming more public in his opposition to slavery. Harriet Robinson reports:

There were frequent opportunities of seeing Henry Thoreau, as he often came to work the land belonging to the [Texas] house. . . . His meditative figure was often seen walking across the sunny meadows . . . He sometimes called on Mr. Robinson. He was as great talker, sitting with his head bent over, and carrying on the “conversation” all by himself. On one occasion we had a visitor who had written several town histories, and was learned in Indian matters. Thoreau called while he was there; and, the conversation soon turning to Indian affairs, Thoreau talked our friend dumb in a very short time. (67-68)

Harriet Robinson’s recollection provides a window on the political discourse that took place among her husband, Thoreau, and other informed citizens, such as the unidentified town scholar who was



“learned in Indian matters,” entered into conversation. The example suggests that similar discourse would have taken place when the Robinsons and Thoreau discussed issues of special interest to the Robinsons, such as antislavery activity. It is clear from Thoreau’s *Dial* article on the *Herald of Freedom* and his January-February 1848 lectures on rights and duties of individuals in relation to the state that he was sympathetic to the abolitionist cause; yet Thoreau’s position differed from more organized antislavery activists in two ways. First, he preferred expression of antislavery through the rights of the individual rather than through organized opposition—which explains his support of the Rogers’s approach to antislavery. Second, Thoreau’s individualism did not focus as much on a single issue as it did on a general principle of individual freedom. For example, when he refused to pay the poll tax and spent a night in jail in 1846, his unwillingness as an individual to fund the US-Mexico War as a fear that that the war would create additional territory that permitted slavery. The influence of circulating antislavery discourse on Thoreau was significant, but not to the point that he became a public activist in the 1840s, when other citizens of Concord were becoming active.

Petrulionis writes that the week after his night in jail, “Thoreau extended his abolitionist identity as well as his relationship with the Concord Female Antislavery Society” (60) by inviting its members and guests at his cabin site on August 1, 1846 celebrate the second anniversary of West Indian emancipation. William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* urged “all who love freedom and hate slavery” to attend. Though the next week’s *Liberator* proclaimed the event a success, the *Concord Freeman* (despite its name, a town rather than abolitionist paper) reported a low turnout (61). The majority of townspeople were either unaware of the gathering or indifferent to it. Based on the *Freeman* report, the celebration may be the occasion that Thoreau writes about in the “Visitors” chapter in *Walden*. The gathering included notable men and women from the town: “It is surprising



how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies, at once under my roof . . .” (140) From my visits to the scale replica of Thoreau’s cabin that occupied the Walden Pond site, it is difficult to imagine so many people in the single room at one time—and even more difficult to imagine that “we often parted without being aware that we had come very near to one another.” Yet an occasion that attracted visitors from the region as well as the town may explain the curious number of cabin occupants and their relative unfamiliarity with each other.

Similar to his views on individual resistance, Thoreau’s antislavery views continued to evolve. Exerting significant influence toward antislavery were the women in and around the Thoreau family, and later the antislavery discourse circulating in among the many like-minded residents of Concord. Maria Thoreau, the sister of Thoreau’s father, “had a deep social concern and was active in many ‘causes,’ particularly those devoted to antislavery” (Harding 21). Aunts Maria and Jane Thoreau were frequent visitors to their brother Henry’s household after he and his family returned to Concord from Boston in 1823. While Henry David attended college, Mrs. Joseph Ward and her daughter Prudence moved to Concord to live with Maria and Jane Thoreau. Mrs. Ward was the widow of a colonel in the American Revolutionary army (73). In spring 1837, Henry senior and his wife, Cynthia, brought the two Thoreau households, including the Wards, together in one house. Also in 1837, the Women’s Antislavery Society organized in Concord; its charter members included Cynthia Thoreau and her daughters Sophia and Helen, and Mrs. Ward and her daughter (73-74). Two charter members were close friends of the Thoreau and Ward women: Mrs. Mary Merrick Brooks, who lived next door, and Mrs. John Wilder, wife of a local minister (74).



Harding notes that “the Concord ladies gathered sixty-one members into the group and eventually numbered more than one hundred.” The Concord Society contributed more to William Lloyd Garrison’s antislavery activities than any other local society in New England. Harding records that the Wards and Cynthia Thoreau took the lead in protesting the mistreatment of Cherokees in Georgia, *persuading* [italics are mine] Emerson to write a public letter to President Van Buren on Cherokees. Harding concludes: “It was unquestionably the Wards, mother and daughter, who aroused the interest of the Thoreau family in the antislavery movement and in turn planted the seeds in the young Henry’s mind that were later to yield some of his most memorable words and deeds” (74). My point is that Thoreau’s views were influenced by the women closest to him.

In *Pen Portraits*, Harriet Robinson offers her account of the organization of the Concord Women’s Antislavery Society in 1837 (the year of Thoreau’s graduation from Harvard). Seventy women of Concord formed “a woman’s antislavery society”; a schism in the society after William Lloyd Garrison’s attacked the churches as “the bulwark of slavery” reduced its numbers; but a new organization of “radical abolitionist who sympathized with Garrison” continued to carry on antislavery work in the town. She writes, “This society was in active operation during Mr. Robinson’s residence in Concord; and, though its membership was small, it met regularly, kept busily at work, and through it Concord was represented at the annual subscription festivals and the antislavery fairs” (73). Two circumstances in addition to the active participation in antislavery discourse of the Robinsons may have encouraged Thoreau to leave the sidelines and become an active abolitionist: first was that when the society met for tea at the houses of members, men were invited; second was that the membership in 1857 included Mrs. R. W. Emerson and Miss Sophia Thoreau—Henry’s beloved sister. “If not an antislavery town, Concord was a famous antislavery center,” Robinson



writes in her memoir, “and a depot of the ‘underground railroad,’ which carried so many colored citizens on their way to freedom” (71).

### **James T. Fields**

New Hampshire native James Thomas Fields was a fourth editor in a position to have an effect on Thoreau’s career. Fields’s primary roles were those of the gatekeeper who sought to publish *Walden*, and—after Thoreau’s death—the curator of Thoreau’s unpublished manuscripts. In this chapter, I document a professional acquaintance between Fields and Thoreau that was more frequent and of longer duration than previously acknowledged.

Fields’s father had been master of the schooner *Syren* that sailed from Portsmouth, New Hampshire; he died of fever while at sea when his son was two (Tyson 4-5). In 1831, Jamie Fields finished high school in Portsmouth at thirteen—“not an unusual age for a boy in that day to graduate; what was unusual was to be a graduate at all” (15). Needing to help support his mother, he left for Boston to go into business (2, 16). Through the recommendation of a family friend, he was able to work at the Old Corner Bookstore (17), where he gained a reputation as a knowledgeable clerk. He kept more than two hundred volumes in his room in a boarding house on Otis Street. In 1874, when he spoke to students at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, fifteen miles from his birthplace, Fields told them he identified with students: “I consider myself a scholar, a seeker after knowledge and the true meaning of things” (qtd. in Annie Adams Fields, *James T. Fields, Biographical Notes*). A year after the young Fields moved to Boston, the original owners sold the bookstore to the partnership of Allen and Ticknor (27). Fields went to live with junior partner, William D. Ticknor. When Allen retired in 1834, leaving Ticknor as sole proprietor. Ticknor and Fields began an historical business partnership that enriched American literature.



After ten years in the bookselling business, Fields's knowledge of books and finance was rewarded with a promotion in 1843; he became a junior partner. By 1854 when the corporate name changed to Ticknor and Fields on June 6, 1854, the publishing house had become known as the leading "literary" publisher in United States (Houghton Library note). Thoreau happened to submit *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in February 1849—a time when the firm was in the process of making a transition from Ticknor and Company (1843-1849) to Ticknor, Reed and Fields. Reed came into the company with a financial interest, and also became a junior partner. He left in 1854 (Austin 16). In writing to Ticknor and Company in 1849, Thoreau informed the publishing house that he soon would have a second book ready for publication, *Walden*. By the terms of his co-partnership with understanding William Ticknor (Whipple 256), Fields no doubt took part in deciding the firm's response to Thoreau's offer of *A Week* and a second book. Writer Edwin W. Whipple recalls, "Fields from the start had deliberately formed in his mind an ideal of a publisher who might profit by men of letters, and at the same time make men of letters profit by him" (256). His vision likely was responsible for the company's offer to publish one of the books at the publisher's expense.

What is striking about Ticknor and Company's letter of Feb. 8, 1849, is that the company passed over any mention of *A Week* in order to make an offer to publish *Walden*:

We find on looking over publishing matters that we cannot well undertake anything more at present. If however you feel inclined we will publish "Walden or Life in the Woods" on our own account, say one thousand copies, allowing for 10 percent copyright on the retail price on all that are sold. The style of printing & binding to be like Emerson's Essays. (Correspondence 236)



According to Harding, “10 percent copyright” is a 10 percent royalty (246). Though Thoreau’s reply of is missing, Harding believes that Thoreau was adamant about publishing *A Week* first (246), out of respect for the memory of his brother John, who took the trip with him. Thus in its letter of Feb. 16, 1848, Ticknor acknowledged Thoreau’s reply of Feb. 10 and gave him an estimate of \$501.24 to print and bind a thousand copies of *A Week* (*Correspondence* 237); for his part, Thoreau needed to send the publisher \$450 in order to print all the sets of pages and bind half of them for the first edition (238). The company’s clear choice of *Walden* over *A Week* demonstrates that the partners had sufficient information about the second book to make a business decision and put their offer in writing. It is unlikely that two business-minded publishers would make a firm offer without having seen the existing manuscript. Fields already was known for his good judgment. As Whipple writes in “Recollections of James T. Fields” in the August 1881 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, “the proofs multiplied that he was, among American publishers, one of the most sagacious judges of the intrinsic and money value of works of literature. . . .” (255-256). In his six-page article, Whipple discusses the attributes that contributed to Fields’s success as an editor and publisher; these explain why Fields would take an active interest in publishing Thoreau’s second book, and not his first.

According to Whipple, the publisher’s outstanding attribute was his certainty about the sort of books he wanted on his list:

He had early formed a complete scheme of publishing a class of books the characteristic of which was that they addressed tastes which clearly existed in his own mind, and which he supposed must exist in thousands of persons who had enjoyed opportunities of culture superior to his own. He . . . argued that if he found a particular delight in works which primarily appealed to the aesthetic sense—the sense of beauty



and the sense of form—there must be somewhere be a public . . . which would cordially respond to an enterprise which had such a possible public directly in view. . .

By persistently carrying out his plan, and by a judicious liberality in his dealings with authors, Fields gradually drew to his firm most of the prominent American writers of the time. (255-256)

Whipple lists Bryant, Emerson, Hawthorne, Holmes, Longfellow, and Lowell as prominent writers; in 1881, Thoreau's reputation had not risen to their level of prominence. However, Whipple calls Fields "a genuine admirer of genius" (257). Thus it is reasonable to suppose that Fields's awareness of the distinctive circumstances and aesthetic sensibility of Thoreau's second book, he wanted to publish it. By the time Thoreau resubmitted *Walden* in 1854, Fields had ample time to exert whatever influence he could to assure that the book would succeed in the market.

Ticknor and Company's carefully worded expression of its willingness to publish both books, though on different terms, proved moot. In 1849, Thoreau did not have the \$450 that the publisher asked to cover the publication costs of *A Week*, so Thoreau went back to Munroe and Company, to which he had submitted *A Week* in 1846 (Harding 246). In fact, in 1846 he had offered the manuscript of *A Week* to three publishers: to Wiley and Putnam and to Munroe and Company in Boston, and to Crosby and Nichols in New York. Each publisher said it would publish *A Week* if Thoreau would underwrite the cost of publication. In 1849, when Thoreau promised a second book, Munroe and Company improved on its first offer, agreeing to pay publications costs for *A Week* out of sales if Thoreau would guarantee to cover the full amount over time. Since, under the new terms, Thoreau did not have to put up any money, he accepted Munroe's offer (246). Munroe published *A Week* on May 26, 1849, with little publicity and ultimately total sales of less than three hundred copies (Borst 3). In



October 1853, Munroe and Company delivered 218 unsold bound books and 450 unbound sets of printed sheets to Thoreau (*Correspondence* 305), who stored them in his attic bedroom (Harding 255). In one of his last letters, transcribed for him by his sister Sophia on Feb. 24, 1862, Thoreau offered 146 bound copies and the 450 unbound sets of pages to Ticknor and Fields, adding, in response to a query from the publisher, that he was agreeable to a new edition of *Walden* (*Correspondence* 637-38).

One might ask what the complicated path to publication of *A Week* has to do with Fields's editorial agency in the production of *Walden*. First, the time line establishes that Ticknor and Company became aware of the existence of *Walden* in February 1849. What is more, the partners had made the decision of publish the book when it was finished. This fact easily can become lost in the several submissions and offers. Whether Ticknor and/or Fields saw the manuscript of *Walden* as it existed in 1849 is not known, yet more likely than not. Based on Thoreau's decision to go with Munroe and Company to publish *A Week*, Fields may have assumed that Munroe would publish the second book as well. In fact, Munroe assured Thoreau that once *A Week* was published, it "would follow it with *Walden*" (Harding 246). When this did not happen, Fields would have noticed; he would have seen that his company was still in the running to publish what he already had decided was an appropriate book for its list. I demonstrate in the conclusion to this study that Fields was a proactive editor who took steps to acquire literary works by New England authors such as Hawthorne even before they were ready for publication. That Fields would act to acquire a potentially significant work by Thoreau is in keeping with his editorial philosophy. Since Fields made suggestions to Hawthorne for developing *The Scarlet Letter* based on reading an early version of the story, it is possible that he made similar suggestions to Thoreau after reading the early version of *Walden*.



Second, Fields and Thoreau were cordial acquaintances. In his 1877 article in *Baldwin's Monthly*, "Our Poet-Naturalist," Fields mentions having had conversations with Thoreau. Of one he writes, "I remember he once described to me, on that very road, a favorite cow which he had the care of thirty years before, and if she had been his own grandmother he could not have employed tenderer phrases about her (James Fields, *Thoreau in His Own Time* 98). The subject and tone suggest a level of familiarity between the two men. Later in the article, Fields recalls of Thoreau:

He had lived so much under the open heavens that somehow he always seemed a part of the outdoors. I used to think that I could tell when he was in Boston by a kind of pine-tree and apple-tree odor that preceded him, and accordingly counted on a call from him that day. . . . When Thoreau came to Boston from Concord he brought a rural fragrance with him from his native fields into our streets and lanes. Spicy odors of black birch, hickory buds, and pennyroyal lingered about his garments and made his presence welcome and sweet. (98)

Though the language is fanciful, this passage makes clear that Thoreau traveled to Boston on occasion (possibly a number of occasions) to call on Fields. In *James T. Fields, Biographical Notes*, Annie Adams Fields recalls her husband using the same phrase: "I like to see him come in . . . he always smells of the pine woods" (102)—likely repeating the phrase that James Fields had used in his magazine article for years earlier.

Third, when Thoreau completed the seventh draft of *Walden* in February and March 1854, he submitted it to a single publisher: Ticknor and Fields (Harding 331). By this time, the firm's roster of American authors included Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Whittier. Though written years after Thoreau's death, the "pine woods" phrase expresses Fields' affectionate characterization of



Thoreau's nature writing—apparently a taste that William Ticknor did not share. Harding writes, “Although Ticknor was not particularly enthusiastic about *Walden*, Fields, the more literary of the two partners, was” (331). Literary though he might be, Fields also was a publisher and business man. He made tangible the value he placed on Thoreau's writing, offering him a fifteen percent royalty for *Walden* at a time when most of publishing house's authors received ten percent (331 and Tryon 170). Given his ambition to build a list of American literary authors, Fields had good reason to pursue Thoreau's singular book about “life in the woods.” Thoreau's two years on Walden Pond had aroused curiosity in Concord that Thoreau saw as an opportunity to deliver public lectures on the experience. No doubt Fields and his wife, Annie, had heard of Thoreau's experiment from at least one of Ticknor and Company's own authors, Ralph Waldo Emerson. If Fields had read the manuscript of *Walden* that existed in 1849, which Ticknor and Company's letter of offer of Feb. 8, 1849 strongly suggests that he did, by 1854 he would have noticed significant improvement in the book. Aware as Thoreau was of a book editor's role of gatekeeper to publication—and Munroe's lack of effort and/or success in promoting *A Week*—the author may have taken a more active interest in his connection with Fields that began in 1849. Thoreau's calls on Fields in Boston may well have included conversations about the book. Spurred to raise the level of his craft as a writer by the stinging failure of *A Week*, Thoreau would have taken note of editorial suggestions for the book even though he might not acknowledge them. With the exception of one letter, correspondence between Thoreau and Fields is noticeably absent. This is not as unusual as it might at first seem. Biographer W. S. Tryon notes that Fields preferred oral agreements to written ones—often a source of frustration to his writers. Tryon says that it was “the addiction of Fields to unwritten agreements rather than formal contracts with his authors which constituted the most dubious, or at best, the most careless of his customs” (171-172). Tryon's



blunt characterization of Fields' careless approach to doing business suggests that Thoreau may have had Fields in mind when he wrote "Literary contracts are so little binding" in the 1849 draft of *Walden*. For his part, Thoreau maintained an active correspondence with friends, yet was terse in business communications. The combination of Fields' preference for unwritten agreements and Thoreau's often terse letters when writing about the business of writing helps to explain the absence of letters between the two. However, they *did* do business, which strongly suggests that they talked to each other in Fields' office. If conversation took place between 1849 and 1854, Fields' input may have exerted an influence on one of Thoreau's many revisions of *Walden* (Updike x), though not as dramatically as Fields saying he influenced Hawthorne's expansion of the long story version of "The Scarlet Letter" into a novel. However, an editorial suggestion to expand is a possibility: between 1849 and 1854, Thoreau doubled the length of the book.

How often might Thoreau have visited Boston on business? Towards the end a long journal entry for Wednesday, August 2, 1854, Thoreau appended this information: "Fields today sends me a specimen copy of *Walden*. It is to be published on the 12th *inst.*" On Wednesday, August 9, Thoreau writes: "*Walden* published. Elder-berries. Waxwork yellowing" after a note that he traveled that day to Boston. Brief though they are, these two entries are persuasive evidence that Fields and Thoreau maintained ongoing communications about the *Walden* project. The brevity of the entries is consistent with the fact that Thoreau includes very little personal information in his journals (Sattlemeyer 592); yet he documents that Fields sent him an advance copy of his book, and notes next to the date and day of August 9 entry—a Wednesday—his destination: "To Boston" (*Writings* 12: 429). Based on their relationship as publisher and writer, the most likely reason that Thoreau traveled to Boston was to meet with Fields so that he could obtain copies of the new published book due to him as its author.



Clearly, though he still a junior partner in Ticknor and Company, Fields was the person at his publishing house with whom Thoreau communicated. In addition, Fields was the partner who took responsibility for securing a British copyright for *Walden*. Soon Fields would become a full partner in the publishing house, and its corporate name would change to Ticknor and Fields.

Fields sailed for England in June 1854 with the proof sheets of *Walden* that were necessary to his mission of applying for an English copyright. If that could be accomplished, he hoped to place the book with an English publisher. Senior partner William Ticknor explained the details of the copyright process to Thoreau in a letter to Thoreau dated June 10, 1854:

Our Mr. Fields who left by the steamer of the 7th for England [brought with him] the proof sheets of *Walden*—In order to secure a copyright in England the book must be published there as soon as here and at least 12 copies published and offered for sale. If Mr. F. succeeds in making a sale of the early sheets, it will doubtless be printed in London so as to cause very little delay here but if it be necessary to print and send out the copies it will delay us 3 or 4 weeks. Probably not more than three weeks. You will probably prefer to delay the publication that you may be sure of your copyright in England. (328)

Unfortunately for the planned English publication of *Walden*, Fields became so seasick after departing Boston that he had to debark from the ship in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, Harding and Bode annotate the June 10 letter to include information that after returning from Halifax

. . . [Fields] continued his efforts on behalf of *Walden*. He recommended the book to the London publisher Richard Bentley, as Emerson had done, and he added: "The book



is sure to make a noise in the literary world." Fields also wrote his firm's agent . . . asking him to dispose of the English rights to some publisher, Bentley preferably. In the . . . letter Fields said of *Walden*: "It belongs to the same class of works with Mr. Emerson's writings & will be likely to attract attention . . . . *Walden* is no common book. (328)

Lacking an English copyright, *Walden* was not published in England until 1884. Based on the plan outlined to Thoreau by Ticknor in his letter, and Fields's enthusiasm for the book, *Walden*'s publication would have taken place decades earlier if Fields had been able to complete the ocean journey and conduct his business in London as he and William Ticknor had planned.

It is probable that such a proactive publisher as Fields maintained a keen interest in the manuscripts of *Walden* from the time he became aware of the book. He must have believed that Thoreau's distinctive blend of nature writing with commentary on the human condition suited the 1850s marketplace. In its 1849 letter to Thoreau, Ticknor and Company demonstrated its confidence in this work over *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, which the company offered to publish only if Thoreau paid for it.

Fields's professional ambitions as a literary publisher point toward the probability that he kept in touch with Thoreau about *Walden* from 1849 onward. That Fields proactively sought to acquire the most significant works of male New England authors whom he deemed literary is the thrust of his recollection of soliciting work from Hawthorne, which is recorded in *Yesterdays with Authors* (1882). In the memoir, Fields makes the case for his influence on *The Scarlet Letter* while calling on Hawthorne in Salem in the 1840s. He recalls:



I found him alone in a chamber over the sitting-room of the dwelling. . . We fell into a talk about his future prospects and he was, as I feared I should find him, in a very desponding mood. “Now,” said I, “is the time for you to publish, for I know during these years in Salem you must have gotten something ready for the press.”

“Nonsense,” said he; “what heart had I to write anything when my publishers . . . have been so many years trying to sell a small edition of ‘Twice-Told Tales’? . . . Who would risk publishing a book for *me*, the most unpopular writer in America?” “I would,” said I, “and would start with an edition of two thousand copies of anything you write.” (49-50)

Only as Fields hurried down the stairs to catch his train did Hawthorne hand him the first chapters of a long story, “The Scarlet Letter.” Before this interaction with Fields, Hawthorne’s intent was to publish the story along with others in a volume called *Old-Time Legends*—a story collection that would be similar in structure to *Twice-told Tales*. Instead, Fields persuaded Hawthorne to develop the long story into a full-length romance, to be published as a single work. It is worth noting that once Fields identified a shorter work that showed promise, he encouraged the author to develop it into a longer work. Suggesting to Thoreau that he develop the shorter version of *Walden* into the longer version would be consistent with Fields’s method of creating literary product for his publishing house to market. Fields’s agency is the critical one of recognizing unfinished works with potential in the marketplace, and urging authors to finish them. As Gilmore states, “By 1850, when over 90 percent of adult whites could read and write, the United States boasted the largest literate public in history. . . . Publishing had become an industry, and the writer a producer of commodities for the literary marketplace” (4). In order to succeed in the marketplace, publishing houses and their editors began to



pursue marketable authors aggressively in order to make a profits. Ticknor and Fields's profits from Thoreau came largely after his death, when the company brought to print previously unpublished works. In a letter from Fields to Hawthorne on November 9, 1863, Fields mentioned to Hawthorne that he planned to visit Sophia Thoreau, Henry's literary executor, about "some business matters" (Austin 233). In addition to his partnership in Ticknor and Fields, Fields was now editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, which Ticknor learned he had purchased at auction for \$10,000 when he turned out to be the only bidder. Ticknor's purchase of the *Atlantic* proved a professional windfall for his partner Fields, and eventually an important part of Ticknor and Fields's marketing campaigns. Austin writes, "Though Fields had nothing to do with the purchase . . . he almost immediately took charge of the magazine" (29). In May 1861, after editing the June issue, incumbent James Russell Lowell relinquished the editorship of the *Atlantic* to Fields.

As editor, Lowell had solicited work from Thoreau in 1857 and, in 1858, published a series of three articles on Thoreau's 1853 trip to Maine in the June, July, and August issues that later would become a book. Those were the only articles by Thoreau that the magazine published in his lifetime. Editing the second installment, Lowell offended Thoreau by deleting part of a sentence in the proofs, which Thoreau then indicated should remain in the article by marking the proof "stel"—proofreading shorthand that the deleted copy should remain as written. Lowell's decision was ideological. He edited out Thoreau's assertion that a pine tree "is as immortal as I am" on the grounds that it was too pantheistic for his readers (Harding 393-394). When Lowell stuck by his decision without informing the author, Thoreau strongly objected to Lowell in writing and never submitted to the *Atlantic* again while Lowell was editor. Beginning with the July 1861 issue, Fields took advantage of ownership of the magazine to promote Ticknor and Fields titles in two ways: by reviewing them favorably and



publishing excerpts. According to Austin, “Book reviewing in the mid-nineteenth century actually amounted to large-scale advertising; the press reception of a book often resulted from its backer’s influence and had little connection with the quality of the book. . .” (17). Consequently, as both book publisher and magazine editor, Fields was in a position to influence Thoreau’s posthumous “career” by reviewing *The Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod*, and *Letters to Various Persons* in the magazine. For articles of ten to twelve pages written by Thoreau for the *Atlantic* toward the end of his life, Fields paid \$100, putting Thoreau on the same scale as Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and James Parton, who became Fanny Fern’s third husband. Though Fields’s roles were primarily those of gatekeeper and curator, there possibility remains that he urged Thoreau to expand *Walden* just as he had urged Hawthorne to expand *The Scarlet Letter*.

### **Horace Greeley**

A fifth editor whose agency had an effect on Thoreau was New York City newspaper editor Horace Greeley. Greeley devoted considerable effort to introducing Thoreau’s writings to the literary marketplace. In *Prophet in the Marketplace*, Fink argues that Thoreau made a sustained attempt to engage with the marketplace in both Boston and New York. Fink devotes a chapter, “Now Goes Our Brave Youth: Thoreau in New York,” to Thoreau’s unhappy months spent tutoring the young son of William Emerson—Ralph Waldo’s brother—on Staten Island in 1843. Thoreau felt the move was necessary for two reasons: after little success beginning a writing career, he needed to find another means of support, and wanted (with encouragement from Emerson and Hawthorne) to make contacts and sales in the country’s center of magazine and book publishing (92). So much pressure was on Thoreau that “When the venture resulted in failure, it became a momentous failure and modified his entire professional career” (Fink 91). Fink adds that the failure was not completely Thoreau’s:



“Thoreau failed in the New York marketplace not so much because he had nothing to say about or to the people of the city, but because the marketplace itself could not easily accommodate or support a new, relatively unknown writer” (92). Hawthorne introduced Thoreau to an editor, John L. O’Sullivan of the *Democratic Review*, who published two of his articles, but Thoreau’s most enduring connection was with Horace Greeley. Fink writes:

In the long run, Greeley was probably the most valuable professional contact Thoreau ever made aside from Emerson. An unwavering believer in Thoreau’s genius, he acted, after 1846, as Thoreau’s unofficial literary agent, placing his pieces, securing his payments, announcing his works and lectures in the *Tribune*, and *untiringly offering professional advice*; but their relationship yielded not tangible results during Thoreau’s stay in New York. (93)

The emphasis is mine. Having arrived in New York the first week of May 1843, Thoreau returned to home at Thanksgiving to give a lecture, “and by December he was back in Concord to stay” (120).

During his months on Staten Island, Thoreau renewed his acquaintance with Greeley. The two men first met on December 19, 1842, when Thoreau invited Greeley to speak in Concord at a conference on “Protection and Free Trade.” Thoreau was twenty-five, five years out of Harvard, and had published “some articles” in *The Dial*. He was “a budding surveyor who worked in his father’s pencil factory.” Within the next few months, Greeley became Thoreau’s literary agent in New York, a function he would perform for more than a decade. As with Emerson and Fuller, Greeley would publicize Thoreau’s work in the pages of the *Tribune*, place his articles in the best new literary magazines, collect his fees, and pay him (Williams 82). An important example of Greeley’s efforts on behalf of Thoreau was the editor’s placement of Thoreau’s essay on Thomas Carlyle by writing to



George R. Graham, editor and publisher of *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* in summer 1846. Greeley promoted the piece as “a brilliant as well as vigorous essay...” If Graham would publish it, Greeley would advertise it in the *Tribune* (84).

Moving back with his parents in December 1843, Thoreau continued to contribute to *The Dial*, delivered a lecture “Concord River,” which he developed into the first two chapters of *A Week*, and prepared to move to Walden Pond in July 1845. In February 1846, he gave a lecture on “The Writings and Style of Thomas Carlyle” that he reworked into the essay “Thomas Carlyle and His Works” (Fink 131). Returning to town after two years and two months on Walden Pond, Thoreau realized that many residents of Concord were interested in the circumstances and apparent success of his experiment in sustainable living. Their curiosity encouraged Thoreau to deliver lectures that made use of his journal entries while living on the pond. The vocation he had struggled to find since graduating from Harvard now was coming together in the form of his lectures and writings.

Greeley's correspondence with Thoreau, beginning August 16, 1846 (*Correspondence* 169), shows that Greeley wrote to a number of editors and publishers in attempts to place Thoreau's work. In the August 1846 letter, Greeley informed Thoreau that a Philadelphia publisher named Griswold already had put in type Thoreau's article on Carlyle that would “be paid for liberally” (171). On February 5, 1847, Greeley reported similarly that an article accepted by *Graham's Magazine* already was in type and would be the leading article in the next issue of the magazine. Greeley then offered three paragraphs of sound business advice. The letter is an example of Greeley acting as Thoreau's literary agent, which can be thought of as an aspect of the gatekeeper role since an agent brings literary work to the attention of an editor, who can bring the work to print. Greeley writes:



Now don't object to this, nor be unreasonably sensitive at the delay. It is immensely more important to you that the article should appear thus (that is, if you have any literary aspirations), than it is that you should make a few dollars by issuing it in some other way. As to lecturing, you have been at perfect liberty to deliver it as a lecture a hundred times if you had chosen—the more the better. It is really a good thing, and I will see that Graham pays you fairly for it. But its appearance there is worth far more to you than money.

I know there has been too much delay, and have done my best to obviate it. But I could not. A magazine that pays, and which it is desirable to be known as a contributor to, is always crowded with articles, and has to postpone some for others of even less merit. I do this myself with good things that I am not required to pay for.

Thoreau, do not think hard of Graham. Do not try to stop the publication of your article. It is best as it is. But just set down and write a like article about Emerson, which I will give you \$25 for if you cannot do better with it; then one about Hawthorne at your leisure . . . I will pay you the money for each of these articles on delivery, publish them when and how I please, leaving to you the copyright expressly. In a year or two, if you take care not to write faster than you think, you will have the material of a volume worth publishing, and then we will see what can be done. (*Correspondence* 174)

In the letter, Greeley makes several points to Thoreau about the manner in which he should approach the business of writing if he wants to be successful in the marketplace. In the first paragraph, Greeley spells out—and repeats in the paragraph's final sentence—the central point that if Thoreau has any



literary ambition at all, he needs to understand that the visibility that he stands to gain in the marketplace by having an article published in *Graham's Magazine* “is worth far more to you than money.” Greeley urges Thoreau to stop thinking that a delay in publication of an article cost him money that he could have made by using the article as lecture material. The appearance of the article in print would advance his literary career—and he can give lectures any time he wants. In the second paragraph, Greeley makes an effort to have Thoreau see the marketplace from the point of view of an editor: a respected magazine which offers decent payment always will receive more publishable submissions than space will allow it to print. In other words, “You are fortunate to have your article accepted. Do not quibble about when it will appear.” The third paragraph makes Greeley’s role as Thoreau’s agent in the literary marketplace clear—and possibly his own agenda as an editor. In hopes of receiving highly marketable articles that only Thoreau can write, Greeley encourages him to capitalize on his friendships with Emerson and Hawthorne by writing articles about them. The letter is the first of several attempts by Greeley to turn toward more marketable writing and get to put together a different sort of book—one of literary profiles rather than appreciations of nature.

In Greeley’s later instructions to Thoreau on the proposed Emerson article, we get a sense of his specific editorial advice to an author whom he sees as a promising source of material:

I wish you to write me an article on Ralph Waldo Emerson, his Works and Ways, extending to one hundred pages, or so, of letter sheet like this, to take the form of a review of his writings, but to give some idea of the Poet, the Genius, the Man, - with some idea of the New England scenery and home influence, which have combined to make him what he is. Let it be calm, searching, and impartial; nothing like adulation, but a just summing up of what he is and what he has done. (*Correspondence* 279)



Greeley's statement of editorial requirements is clear and specific. It reflects the journalistic value of objectivity—a value that was in the vanguard in Greeley's day and well into the next century. His prescription for a profile of Emerson "the Poet, the Genius, the Man" would be accepted in today's newsroom as getting the story behind the story and telling the reader what makes a great man tick. Greeley's subsequent advice to include "some idea of the New England scenery and home influence, which have combined to make him what he is" might be rephrased today as fleshing out the profile with regional and personal "color": details that will enable readers to understand how the man became who he is. The principle remains the same: make the subject of the profile come alive to the reader.

Along with his advice, Greeley offers to Thoreau a specific plan for publication of the article, with payment upon submission—which was, and still is, uncommon in the world of magazine and book publishing.

I mean to get this into the "Westminster Review," but if not acceptable there, I will publish it elsewhere. I will pay you fifty dollars for the article when delivered; in advance, if you desire it. Say the word, and I will send the money at once. It is perfectly convenient to do so. Your "Carlyle" article is my model, but you can give us Emerson better than you did Carlyle. I presume he would allow you to write extracts for this purpose from his lectures not yet published. I would delay the publication of the article to suit his publishing arrangements, should that be requested.

Thoreau's early biographer Sanborn dates the letter to April 3, 1852. Whether Thoreau made use of these instructions in the writing of other pieces is unclear. Greeley's stated journalistic principles apply most directly to the profile; yet Greeley's summary sentence describes the tone of a significant portion of Thoreau's later writing, including the final version of *Walden*: "Let it be calm, searching,



and impartial; nothing like adulation, but a just summing up of what he is and what he has done.” In *Walden*, Thoreau’s life on the pond was the subject of his own impartial writing, yet in writing studies of other individuals, such as the woodchopper Alex Therien, Thoreau may have been affected by Greeley’s advice on writing for magazines. In the privacy of his journal entries, later to be revised for publication in *Walden*, the inflexible Thoreau may have been more receptive to Greeley’s instructions and occasional demands. An example of a demand from Greeley, which Thoreau appears to have ignored, is contained in Greeley’s letters of March 6 and 23, 1854, written in anticipation of the publication of *Walden* later that year. In the first letter, Greeley strays from his usual avuncular tone, asking Thoreau to “do something on *my* urgency. I want you to collect and arrange your ‘Miscellanies’ and send them to me. Put in “Ktaadn,” “Carlyle,” “A Winter’s Walk.” “Canada,” etc., and I will try to find a publisher who will bring them out at his own risk, and (I hope) for your ultimate profit” (*Correspondence* 323-24).

Apparently not receiving a reply, Greeley wrote again on March 23, prefacing his request for the Miscellanies with the promise that he will do his best to promote *Walden* when it is published:

I am glad your “Walden” is coming out. *I* shall announce it at once whether Ticknor does or not. I am in no hurry about your Miscellanies; take your time, select a good title, and prepare your articles deliberately and finally. Then if Ticknor will give you something worth having, let him have this, too; if proffering it to him is to glut your market, let it come to me. But take your time. (324)

There is no surviving response from Thoreau. An absence of responses to editors, with the exception of several responses to Greeley, is noticeable in Thoreau’s correspondence with editors in general—though perhaps such responses were written. Thoreau’s letters to “Friend Greeley,” as he addressed



him in epistolary salutations, did sometimes reflect a willingness to listen to Greeley as an experienced editor who wanted to help Thoreau place his articles in leading magazines of the day. In their early letters, Greeley wrote to Thoreau that he wished to put together a book from Thoreau's articles that would include yet-to-be-written profiles of Emerson, Hawthorne, and other literary figures. Unwilling to take advantage of his friendships with New England literary figures, Thoreau did not respond to the proposal; so by 1854, with the publication of *Walden* on the near horizon, Greeley reduced the scope of the proposal to a collection of previously published articles.

Flexibility was not in Henry Thoreau's character. Commentators such as F. B. Sanborn, who knew Thoreau and Emerson, and Emerson himself comment on Thoreau's tendency to monopolize conversations and be contrary. Sanborn recalled that, upon first meeting Thoreau, he was annoyed because Thoreau seemed to imitate Emerson in both gestures and tone of voice, "though he said many good things" (Sanborn 198). In correspondence with Greeley, who was helping him, Thoreau chose to be noncommittal toward Greeley's ideas rather than to reject them. For his part, Greeley almost always sounded positive and persistent in his letters, as his proposal to Thoreau about writing a miscellany, instead of a book of profiles, demonstrates. By actions such as refusing to engage with Greeley over a commission to write a hundred-page article on Emerson, which Greeley guaranteed he would be able to publish, Thoreau's correspondence creates the impression that he was above the editorial agency of others; yet I argue that Thoreau followed editorial advice given to him by Greeley on how to write a profile without acknowledging Greeley's advice. Instead, he applied Greeley's editorial suggestions to some of the writing in his Journal. Edward Sattlemeyer observes in his "Historical Introduction" to the Journal:



The Journal . . . went through a distinct evolution, and its relation to his literary career shifted over the years, [changing] from a kind of display case for his readings, his poetry, and his original thoughts and aphorisms to a writer's workbook. . . . The Journal rarely reveals Thoreau's personal reactions in this period of extraordinary change and growth as he moved slowly toward the themes of his maturity, but its development predicts what would be very difficult to discern from the uncertainty and frequent failure in the outward life. (592-93)

The Journal's transition from a "display case" to a "writer's workbook" seems to mean that Thoreau began to work out his ideas in the Journal before putting them into more permanent form, which is what he did with his written sketches of the Canadian woodchopper Alex Therien that evolved into a profile in the published *Walden*.

### **Accounts of Alex Therien**

The elements that make a difference in such a personal, internal struggle are impossible to specify. However, I believe that one element in Thoreau's gradual rebuilding of his career after the New York failure was a reassessment of his approach to writing. More than two years spent in a cabin near a pond gave him ample time for such reflection. I suggest that Greeley's advice: to write shorter pieces; to include "some idea of the New England scenery and home influence"; and to write in a style that was "calm, searching, and impartial . . . just a summing up of what he is and what he has done" offers an appropriate description of Thoreau's emerging style. To understand what was occurring in Thoreau's writing, it is helpful to examine how Thoreau's development of literary style can be found in writing and revisions of an excerpt focusing on a single person: Alex Therien, the woodchopper.



Therien first appears in the pages of the Journal on July 14, 1845, soon after Thoreau settled on Walden Pond:

Who should come to my lodge right now but a true Homeric boor, one of those Paphlagonian men? Alek Therien, he called himself; a Canadian now, a woodchopper, a post-maker; makes fifty posts—holes them, *i.e.*—in a day; and who made his last supper on a woodchuck which his dog caught. And he too has heard of Homer, and *if it were not for books, would not know what to do rainy days*. Some priest once, who could not read glibly from the Greek itself, taught him reading in a measure—his verse, at least, in his turn—away by the Trois Rivieres, at Nicolet. And now I must read to him, while he holds the book, Achilles' reproof of Patroclus on his sad countenance.

“Why are you in tears, Patroclus, like a young child (girl)?” etc. etc.

[four lines of Homer's verse]

He has a neat bundle of white oak bark under his arm for a sick man, gathered this Sunday morning. “I suppose there's no harm in going after such a thing to-day.”

The simple man. May the gods send him many woodchucks. (Journal I, July 1845, 365-366)

This is the full text of the original Journal entry devoted to Therien. Its length, including the four lines of Homeric verse, is twenty-one printed lines. By the time Thoreau wrote the first version of *Walden* in 1846-1847, he expanded the original anecdote into a short profile of about one hundred lines. The narrative of the anecdote is the same, but the language, still choppy, has more flow and bits of Therien's speech in quotation marks. The neat bundle of white oak bark becomes a *great* bundle of white oak bark—a much more dramatic image. Thoreau returns to Therien's hearing about Homer at



the end of the anecdote, adding: “He had heard of Homer. Homer was a great writer, though what his writing was about under the sun he did not know” (170). What has become a short article on Therien is included in the “Visitors” section of the first version of *Walden*.

By the 1854 publication of *Walden*, the profile of Therien had doubled in size to about two hundred lines—consistent with the doubling of size of the versions of *Walden* between 1846-1847 and 1854. Though similar to the original anecdote, the narrative has become more self-consciously literary in language and style.

He, too, has heard of Homer, and “if it were not for books,” would “not know what to do rainy days,” though perhaps he has not read one wholly through for many rainy seasons. Some priest who could pronounce the Greek itself taught him to read his verse in the testament in his native parish far away; and now I must translate to him, while he holds the book, Achilles’ reproof of Patroclus for his sad countenance.—

“Why are you in tears, Patroclus, like a young girl?” (144)

As Thoreau did in developing the Journal anecdote into the first *Walden* version, he introduces new material between the two *Walden* versions, taken from a growing number of encounters with Therien. One paragraph of new material captures the parable-like quality that is present in the 1854 *Walden*’s narrative, and the high literary style of Thoreau’s writing:

I heard that a distinguished wise man and reformer asked him if he did not want the world to be changed; but he answered with a chuckle of surprise in his Canadian accent, not knowing that the question had ever been entertained before, “No, I like it well enough.” It would have suggested many things to a philosopher to have dealings with him. To a stranger he appeared to know nothing of things in general; yet I



sometimes saw in him a man whom I had not seen before, and I did not know whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him of a fine poetic consciousness or of stupidity. A townsman told me that when he met him sauntering through the village in his small close-fitting cap, and whistling to himself, he reminded him of a prince in disguise. (148)

A close reading of three successive versions of Thoreau's account of Alex Therien reveals that Thoreau's writing increasingly resembled the product of Greeley's advice on writing profiles of authors. After the publication of Thoreau's profile of Carlyle, Greeley had written, "Thoreau, if you will only write one or two articles, when in the spirit, about half the length of this, I can sell it readily and advantageously. The length of your papers is their only impediment to their appreciation by the magazines. Give me one or two shorter, I will try to coin them speedily" (*Correspondence* 222-23). What Thoreau wrote about Therien in the 1854 *Walden* is very similar to the kind of short magazine article that would have pleased Greeley both as reader and Thoreau's agent. I suspect that, upon reading *Walden*, Greeley might have recognized that his advice on how to write a personal profile had been absorbed by Thoreau and exerted an influence on his development as a professional writer. Of course, Thoreau went well beyond Greeley's journalistic instructions to become an imaginative writer. Greeley could also take satisfaction that his success in placing Thoreau's articles in magazines would help to sell the new book. As Greeley wrote to Thoreau on November 19, 1848, "You may write with an angel's pen, yet your writings have no mercantile, money value till you are known and talked of as an author. . . . I believe a chapter from one of your books printed in *Graham* or *The Union* will add many to the readers of the volume when issued . . ." (232). As with Fuller's solicitous offer to



consider more of Thoreau's work for the *Dial*, Greeley's plain talk about the financial realities of the literary marketplace was intended to help Thoreau's career.

In conclusion, Greeley affected Thoreau by acting as his agent, opening the gates of the magazine market to him. From Thoreau's evolving accounts of Alex Therien in his *Journal* and in the two versions of *Walden*, I argue that Greeley also affected Thoreau's approach to profile writing. As editor of the *Dial*, Margaret Fuller was Thoreau's first exposure to an editorial agent of the marketplace, though within the parameters of a specialized philosophical journal targeted to an elite of like-minded people. Through his editorials and personal conversations with Thoreau that were part of the circulating antislavery discourse on Concord, William Stevens Robinson had an effect on Thoreau's antislavery ideology. The writings of Nathaniel P. Rogers in the *Herald of Freedom* influenced Thoreau's antislavery ideology. Similar to Greeley's effect on Thoreau, James T. Fields acted as a gatekeeper to the marketplace of professionally published books, since Thoreau's publication of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* was self-published (through Munroe) and unsuccessful.



## CHAPTER THREE

### FANNY FERN'S EDITORS

A close reading of Fanny Fern's novel *Ruth Hall* shows that Fern's memory of a newspaper editor's interest in publishing her writing stayed fresh for more than two decades. In Chapter 56 of the novel, when Ruth decides to turn to writing to make a living, she recalls the positive attention that the editor gave her writing in her boarding school days. The memory is triggered by a carrier slipping the morning newspaper under the door across the street.

A thought! why could not Ruth write for the papers? How very odd it had never occurred to her before? Yes, write for the papers – why not? She remembered that while at boarding-school, an editor of a paper in the same town used often to come in and take down her compositions in short-hand as she read them aloud, and transfer them to the columns of his paper. She certainly *ought* to write better now than when she was an inexperienced girl. She would begin that very night . . . (Fern 115)

Given the autobiographical nature of the novel, this excerpt supports my argument that the validation of Sara Willis's writing skills by a newspaper editor gave her the confidence to return to writing as a possible career. This chapter focuses on three newspaper editors (and a possible fourth editor) who strongly affected the career of Sara Payson Willis. Her work became well known to mid-nineteenth century readers under the pseudonym Fanny Fern.

The first editor, referred to in the excerpt from *Ruth Hall*, is Gideon Welles of the *Hartford Times*, who played primarily a gatekeeper role. The second editor is the Reverend Thomas F. Norris of the Boston *Olive Branch*, who in 1851 published Sara Willis Farrington's first articles after she separated from her second husband, Samuel Farrington, and decided to support herself by writing. Her



first husband, Charles Eldredge, had died of typhoid fever in 1846 (Warren 74). In addition to giving the writer who became Fanny Fern her start, Norris required contributors to the *Olive Branch* to “say much in a few words. . . . Persons gifted with a concise, forcible, yet graceful and easy style, never fail of success. Daguerreotype your subject, and leave your reader to study the picture” (qtd. in Warren 90). Norris’s comments encapsulate distinctive elements of Fanny Fern’s style with great accuracy. I argue that Norris played primarily a literary role. The third editor was Robert Bonner, the publisher of the *New York Ledger*, a very successful family newspaper for which Fern wrote under contract from January 9, 1856, to her death on October 10, 1872 (Warren 185, 287). I argue that Bonner played both a gatekeeper and ideological role. At its peak in 1860, the *Ledger* achieved a circulation of 400,000. Extrapolating from Bonner’s target audience of families, one can project the *Ledger*’s readership in 1860 to more than a million people. The possible fourth editor was Mary Andrews Denison, whom I will include in my section on Norris and the *Olive Branch*. From my research, I believe Denison may have played a literary role through her editorial partnership with Norris.

### **Gideon Welles**

In *Ruth Hall*, Fern foregrounds, more than twenty years after she left boarding school, the instrumental role her first editor played as the gatekeeper who gave her entry to the literary marketplace. That the editor and his newspaper were not identified until this study supports my argument that the agency of newspaper, periodical, and book editors on canonical authors largely has been ignored. Recovering the identity of Fern’s first editor (and his newspaper) responds to Fishkin’s claim that critics and literary historians “have missed an important aspect of American literary history and biography” by paying insufficient attention to the continuities and discontinuities between the journalism and fiction of canonical authors. I argue that this editor played a role in Fern’s career equal



to that of the famous Bonner by encouraging and validating young Sara Payson Willis as a talented writer whose compositions deserved to go into print. In this chapter I also examine how Welles's influence on Sara Willis, which is documented through a passage in Ethel Parton's unpublished biography of Fern, came to be diminished in the published biographies by Warren and Walker. The successive alterations and reductions to what I identify as "the anecdote of the editor" offer an illuminating illustration of the process by which critics and literary historians have pushed editors into the background.

The process of determining Welles's identity is an example of my methodology, which combines elements of literary biography and the tools of the new historicism to recover the roles of editors in the context of their professional lives. According to the Connecticut Historical Society, there were five newspapers active in Hartford in the four-year period from 1828 to 1832—roughly when Sara Willis attended the Hartford Female Seminary. The editor of the *New England Weekly Review* was George D. Prentice. The *Connecticut Mirror* was edited by John Greenleaf Whittier and, in 1830, P. B. Goodsell. The *American Mercury* was edited by George F. Olmstead, and the *Hartford Times* by Gideon Welles. The *Courant* was published by Goodwin & Sons, but the Historical Society was not able to identify its editor. From preliminary research, I concluded that Welles and the *Hartford Times* most closely matched the descriptions of the editor and newspaper given by Warren and Parton. I was able to confirm that the editor was Welles by comparing his handwriting in the autograph book Sara Willis kept at the Seminary—a gift from her brother N. P. Willis—to the handwriting in two letters written by Welles in 1829. Welles was editor of the *Hartford Times* from 1826 to 1836. He became Secretary of the Navy in President Abraham Lincoln's cabinet during the Civil War.



As she recalls in *Ruth Hall*, Sara Willis made the acquaintance of Welles while she was a student at the Hartford Female Seminary from May 1828 through April 1831 (Warren 26). According to Parton, Miss Willis and Mister Welles met at one of school founder Catharine Beecher's social gatherings, where local notables and students mingled (39). Warren describes the social meeting and subsequent editor-writer meeting as follows:

Sara . . . met the editor of the local newspaper at one of the levees. Her sayings and compositions had excited notice among her schoolmates and were often passed from hand to hand. In this way the editor had come upon some choice articles to put in his paper. Soon he was coming to the seminary to ask for "Miss Willis's latest," or, if he needed material to fill a column and "Miss Willis" had no new composition at hand, he would come directly to Sara in the schoolroom and, sitting beside her, write down what she dictated as fast as he could write. (39)

Warren's account is a paraphrase of the anecdote of the editor from Ethel Parton's "Informal Biography," an unpublished manuscript in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College. Parton was the granddaughter of Fanny Fern and her third husband, James Parton. She was a writer and literary assistant who began to write children's books at 70. The information she collected on her grandmother is invaluable to research because it records the fact of Fern's earliest publications and preserves their context. Parton's account placing an unmarried male newspaper editor in his twenties in the schoolroom of a female boarding school, taking dictation from one of the school's students who was known for her exuberant behavior, leads one to ask, what were the circumstances of the visits? In her biography of Fern, Warren does not raise this issue. She asserts that "Sara Willis received no pay for this service. She did not even think of asking for it. It was simply a way of helping an editor. She had



often done the same for her father for his publications” (39). However, the circumstances were different. It is unlikely that the head of a boarding school, acting in loco parentis, would grant Welles repeated visits with one of her students—and access to the student’s writing—without the knowledge of her family. As the child of a newspaper household, Sara would have written to her parents and/or brother that her writings were appearing in print. She had participated in the family business from age twelve as a proofreader and writer (Warren 39, 45-46).

Ethel Parton’s account provides more detail. Since it is the original source of the anecdote of the editor, I quote it in full in order to contrast it with Warren’s account:

Hartford had come to hear of [Sara], to know her by sight, to laugh at her and to like her. First noticed as a sister of the poet, N. P. Willis, she had become a personality in her own right. Her sayings were quoted in social circles, her compositions copied and passed from hand to hand, paragraphs from them published in a leading local newspaper. The editor had made her acquaintance at a levee. Sometimes, wanting to fill in a too-short column or sprinkle in a bit of spice, he came directly to the school to ask for Miss Willis’s latest. When she had nothing available he is known to have sat beside her in the school-room with paper and pencil at one desk, while she at the next one dictated as fast as he could write. She thought little of this kind of success. Helping an editor was what any good-natured Willis would naturally do. Besides, she only wrote nonsense—nothing to be proud of. It was not such writing as Catharine Beecher’s, who brought honor to the Seminary by her essays on moral and educational subjects . . . (70-71)



In her paraphrase of Parton, Warren leaves out the “nonsense” sentence (perhaps Parton’s projection of what the young Sara might be thinking) and makes no reference to N. P. Willis. Parton reports that Sara’s relationship to her poet brother was the reason that her presence in Hartford came to the attention of society outside the Seminary. Warren’s paraphrase increases the size of Willis’s contributions to the newspaper. Warren writes that the editor solicited not only enough “material to fill a column,” but also pieces of writing as long as a “composition” or “article” (39). Parton, on the other hand, writes that the editor counted on Sara to supply filler and “a bit of spice”—perhaps light-hearted witticisms.

The characterization of these writings as “compositions” comes from Fern herself in the brief passage in *Ruth Hall*. Yet in fiction, Fern called the contributions compositions to strengthen the case for Ruth’s literary talent that is established in the first chapter. The chapter takes place on the eve of Ruth’s wedding. In a “reverie,” Ruth recalls that it was her writing ability that drew other girls to her in her boarding school years:

Composition day was the general bugbear. Ruth’s madcap roommates were struck with the most unqualified amazement and admiration at the facility with which “the old maid” executed this frightful task. They soon learned to put her services in requisition; first, to help them out of this slough of despond; next, to save them from the necessity of wading in at all, by writing their compositions for them. (15)

Finally, Warren uses the word “articles”—as in full newspaper articles—in regard to Fern’s contributions to the *Hartford Times* while at Catharine Beecher’s school. Neither Parton in her biography nor Fern in *Ruth Hall* uses the word “articles.”



## Welles-Willis Relationship

Warren suggests that the origins of the Welles-Willis relationship may have been attention paid to Sara's writings within the school. Ethel Parton suggests that the fact of Sara's brother being N. P. Willis might have caught an editor's attention, as it did the attention of other members of Hartford society. If one or the other possibility is correct, an ambitious young man such as Welles may have shown a professional interest in a fellow editor's daughter as a gesture of professional courtesy. Supporting the second possibility (that Welles already was aware of the senior Nathan Willis) is that as editor of the *Hartford Times* until 1836, one of Welles's editorial responsibilities was receiving copies of other newspapers and mailing out copies of the *Times* in exchange. Prior to syndication and wire services, maintaining an active exchange list exchange list *Times'* large newspaper exchange list allowed papers to supplement local news (and fill space when local news was in short supply) by reprinting articles from other newspapers. Welles and the *Times* exchanged papers up and down the east coast and westward as far as Missouri, increasing the likelihood that Welles would have been aware of Nathaniel Willis. As evidence, the *Hartford Times* of Monday, August 3, 1829, includes a reference to N. P. Willis by name on page one in the upper left corner of column one, immediately below the masthead. Willis's name appeared in the introduction to the poem "Mary," which the editor of the Boston *Gazette* had written when republishing the poem after its original publication in the *American Monthly Magazine*, edited by N. P. Willis:

We are pleased to find that the last number of the Boston Monthly gives very general satisfaction. In truth, the Editor [WILLIS] has paid great regard to the public taste, and has wisely excluded every thing which could serve as a peg on which a rival worshipper at the shrine of the muses could hang a lampoon or a malicious criticism. . .



The brackets appear in the *Times*, possibly inserted by Welles to name the editor in the earlier reference. Both the republication and the prominence of its display on the front page of the *Times* confirm that Welles not only was aware of N. P. Willis, but held a high enough opinion of him to republish the positive comment about him from the *Gazette*.

The combination of professional and political awareness helps to explain how Welles rose from being one of a number of contributors to the *Times* to becoming its editor in a single year. According to biographer John Niven, “Doing much of the work himself—editorials, political correspondence, sketches, and exchange articles—he added vigor and variety to the four-page journal” (36). After taking over editorial direction of the paper, Welles made a name for himself in Hartford and throughout Connecticut by writing strong political editorials and leading the movement to establish the Democratic Party in the state. The responsibilities of editing a newspaper and establishing a political party required almost all of his time and effort.

From my research, I learned there was an additional reason why Gideon Welles may have pursued an acquaintance with Sara Willis. He may have expressed an interest in reading Willis’s writings for possible publication in the *Hartford Times* as a way of getting to know an attractive young woman of approximately eighteen. During the scant personal time in Hartford that remained to him during the late 1820s and early 1830s, Welles and Sara Willis met at a Seminary soirée. Such invitations were extended to Welles because he had begun the study of law with an eminent Hartford lawyer, William W. Ellsworth, who also was a member of Congress. When the prospectus for the Hartford Female Seminary was first published in Hartford newspapers, it announced that “Several gentleman of the city of Hartford, have formed an association for the support of a Female Seminary in that place . . . .” (*Connecticut Mirror* and *Connecticut Courant*, 5 March, 1827). William Ellsworth’s



name was among the eleven citizens who funded the construction of a school building and engaged Catharine Beecher to run it. Ellsworth was at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Welles, but Welles's association with the congressman helped the young man from Glastonbury cross a social boundary and gain access to Hartford society. Niven writes, "Being a student of Ellsworth had its compensations . . . if not in the professional, at least in the social sense—entrée into the tight little social circles of Hartford, teas at the Ellsworth's, literary afternoons at the Sigourneys, solemn assemblies at the City Hall" (22).

Among the "compensations" for a young man were invitations to attend social events at the Hartford Female Seminary. Gideon Welles was an eligible bachelor—a man disappointed in love who was subject to increasing family pressure to find a suitable woman to marry. In Chapter 10 of the biography, "A Persistent Suitor," Niven writes that although Welles was confident in his professional achievements, he often was shy and awkward in person, especially in the company of women (151). He had spent his own secondary school years in a military academy in Vermont. Responding to family and peer pressure to find a wife (150), he may have used his introduction to an eligible, attractive young woman who wrote well to express an interest in her writing as a means of pursuing the acquaintance without conducting a courtship. This is speculation, but consistent with what we know of Welles's relations with the opposite sex.

Niven writes that Welles looked at women "with a critical eye, perhaps too critical, for his flirtations were never more than that" (151). In the biography, Niven does not mention Sara Willis, or a prior connection between Welles and Catharine Beecher, yet describes how Welles arranged for his cousin Mary Jane Hale to be admitted to the Hartford Female Seminary in 1834—three years after Willis left the school. Family pressure on Welles to find a suitable marriage partner and his eventual



marriage to a young cousin, after arranging for her education at the Hartford Female Seminary, may help to explain his recurring visits to the intelligent, pretty Sara Willis. The little we know of his relationships with eligible women suggests that he was drawn to women in their late teens. He spent time with Sara Willis when she about eighteen. His marriage to Hale took place in July 1835, just after her eighteenth birthday (166).

Several points supporting my claim that Welles as an editor exerted primarily a gatekeeper influence on Sara Willis (later Fanny Fern) can be drawn from the anecdote of the editor. In her biography, Warren uses the interest of the editor in Willis's writing to validate the writing's quality. Warren's inclusion of the anecdote foregrounds the editor-writer relationship as important only to the early recognition of Willis's writing talent. Her contributions to the *Hartford Times* were her first professional writings because they appeared in a publication that was not owned and edited by her father. Thus the contributions' appearances in print were an endorsement of their value in the literary marketplace. Second, Warren's use of the anecdote makes clear that Warren accepts what was reported by Ethel Parton: that the meetings between Willis and Welles took place over a period of time—possibly much, if not most, of Willis's final year at the Seminary.

During her time at the Seminary, Sara Willis kept company with several current and future writers of both genders. Catharine Beecher's younger sister, Harriet, was the same age as Sara. Harriet was a teacher at the Seminary as well as a student. As Harriet Beecher Stowe, she would write the enormously influential novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Lydia Huntley Sigourney was a prominent member of the small social circle formed by Hartford's social and literary elite. Sigourney sometimes attended school levees, "and Sara also remembered seeing her . . . working among the pinks and peonies outside her house in Hartford" (Ethel Parton 70-71). Welles's acquaintance with Sara Willis widened



her understanding of newspapers and their editors beyond working with her father. Catharine and Harriet Beecher's brother, Henry Ward Beecher, was an occasional visitor to the Seminary, which kept a stable of horses for the girls to ride. Years after taking Sara horseback riding, (Warren 32), he recalled her as "quite a bewitching little creature. One of the prettiest girls in Hartford" (letter to James C. Derby, qtd. in Warren 33).

A successful newspaper editor recognizing Sara's talent and publishing her work would provide external validation of her success as a writer within the school. Nancy Walker writes that Willis's best academic subject was composition, and that the school community publicly recognized her talent: ". . . her skill at writing . . . produced a comic essay about her problems with mathematics . . . which was selected to be read at Annual Exhibition in the summer of 1829. In this, her first public foray into humor, Sara was a big success with her classmates . . ." (9-10). Commenting on its "sprightly tone," Walker concludes that "this early essay is indicative of the talent for satire and invention that would later win her many devoted readers" (10).

By its place in the timeline of the "Informal Biography," Parton's account of the meetings between Sara and the editor seems to indicate that Sara's writing began to appear in the *Hartford Times* in her final year at the Seminary (70), rather than throughout her attendance there; this would limit the range of time of her writing for the newspaper to between the summer-fall of 1830 and the spring of 1831. The masthead of the February 6, 1832 issue of the *Times*—a year after Willis left Hartford to rejoin her family in Boston, but while Welles was still editor—states that the *Times*' office is located on the third floor of 3 Central Row in Hartford, a short walk from the Hartford Female Seminary. This explains Welles's ability to drop by the school at his convenience to visit Willis and solicit items for the paper.



The content of the February 6 edition is typical of the *Times*. The paper is four pages long—standard for newspapers of the time. On each page there are six columns of type. Four of the six columns on page one consist of public notices of legislative acts, communications from government agencies to the public, and legal notices, with more of these notices on pages two and three. Other elements on page one are a news digest of seven items from New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Franklin County, Alabama, where a woman died one day after her marriage from a too-tight corset that suffocated her; an advertisement for another “purely Democratic” paper, the *Weekly Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*; a Bank Note Table listing bank note rates from around the country; and a poem, “The Parting Year.” The attribution of authorship of the anonymous poem to “For the Times” suggests that contributions from freelance writers can be anonymous and used as filler, as reported in Parton’s account of her grandmother’s contributions. A brief “For the Times” article appears on page three; puzzlingly, the article is based on a report in the (*Methodist*) *Advocate and Herald* of January 6, 1832, about a Tennessee conference on Cherokee affairs. Mortuary (death) notices also are published on page three. Page four—the back page—is filled entirely by advertisements for drugs and medicines, wines, pure sperm oil, real estate, books, want ads, hats, shoes, and sundry other products and services. The *Times* was a well-organized newspaper consisting primarily of public notices, with local news items about Hartford and a roundup of news from newspapers with which it exchanged copies. Its overall tone of this edition is serious and official. There is no light-hearted or frivolous content other than the odd news item about the woman suffocated by her corset.

Beginning January 4, 1830, the paper published, under its nameplate *The Hartford Times*, the statement: “In this Paper, the Laws, Resolves, Public Treaties, etc. of the United States are Published



by Authority.” The statement indicates that the *Times* had become the paper of record for the state of Connecticut—a special status that explains the considerable volume of government communications and other public notices in each edition. The *Hartford Times* was a serious newspaper.

However, on page one of the edition of December 30, 1830, two-thirds of column four, halfway down the column, begins a series of light-hearted articles and brief items under the headline “Courtship and Marriage.” Toward the bottom of column four is a witty saying suggestive of the writing style of Fanny Fern: “A WIFE—No sensible man ever thought a beautiful wife was worth as much that could make a good pudding. I wish the girls all knew this for I feel a great interest in their welfare.” The second sentence is noteworthy in its use of the first-person singular pronoun “I” in a medium whose stylistic convention is to use first-person pronouns rarely, and always the editorial “we.” The American Antiquarian Society’s collection includes approximately twenty issues from the period when Willis attended Catharine Beecher’s school. In my review of the 1828-1831 editions, I did not find another instance of using the first-person singular. One finds a remark similar to this item in Fern’s newspaper column “A Whisper to Romantic Young Ladies,” published on June 12, 1852, in the *True Flag* (Warren, *Ruth Hall and Other Writings* 229-230). In it, the author instructs advises young women that after the honeymoon is over and wedding dress put away, “if you can get your husband to *smile* on anything short of a ‘sirloin’ or a roast turkey, you are a lucky woman” (229).

Directly below the first brief item is a second item, serious rather than witty, yet directly related to Fanny Fern’s frequent “Fern Leaves” pronouncements on the qualities of men in general, and husbands in particular:

The main and principal thing which constitutes a good man is a sincere aim and intention to do right. Nothing can supply the place of this, and with it a man has all the



ingredients of virtue and righteousness. It is the pivot upon which every thing turns, and a man is valuable and worthy of confidence and esteem, just in proportion as he is governed by a sincere desire to do right.

There is no attribution of this item to a source outside the *Hartford Times*. Gideon Welles was careful to attribute information that came from outside sources, notably exchange newspapers. This suggests that the second item also is written by someone affiliated with the *Times*—the editor or a contributor. This raises the possibility that the second item was written by Welles or Willis, or both.

Above these items in column four, immediately under the “Courtship and Marriage” headline, are two probably fictional articles in the form of anecdotes encapsulating two courtships. Since no source outside the *Times* is identified for the first anecdote, its writer may have been someone affiliated with the *Times*—possibly a collaboration between Sara Willis and Gideon Welles, or the work of Willis alone:

It is told that Abernethy, while attending a lady for several weeks, observed those admirable qualities in her daughter which he truly esteemed to be calculated to render the married state happy. Accordingly, on a Saturday, when taking leave of his patient, he addressed to her the following purport—“You are now so well that I need not see you after Monday next, when I shall come and pay you my farewell visit. But, in the meantime, I wish you and your daughter seriously to consider the proposal I am about to make. It is abrupt and unceremonious, I am aware; but the excessive occupation of my time, by my professional duties, affords me no leisure to accomplish what I desire by the more ordinary course of attention and solicitation. My annual receipts amount to \_\_\_\_\_ and I can settle \_\_\_\_\_ on my wife; my character is generally known to the public,



so that you may readily ascertain what it is. I have seen in your daughter a tender and affectionate child, an assiduous and careful nurse, and a gentle and lady-like member of a family; such a person must be all that a husband covets, and I offer my hand and fortune for her acceptance. On Monday, when I call, I shall expect your determination; for I really have not time for the routine of courtship.” In this humour, the lady was wooed and won; and, we believe we may add, the union has been felicitous in every respect.

The narrative frame of the courtship anecdote, which revolves around the unusually direct nature of the suitor’s proposal, is similar to the frame of the anecdote that follows it; the times attributes the second anecdote to a translation done for the New York *American* of an article originally published in *Furet de Londres*—a French-language newspaper in London. Here is a quote and paraphrase of the anecdote:

A sudden engagement.—One evening, a gentleman at Haymarket was suddenly smitten with a very pretty girl in the box next to him.” [The gentleman passes a note asking if her affections are disengaged; she confers with her mother and replies that she is disengaged; he states his income “a thousand pounds sterling a year”; she is taken “with the frankness and novelty of the declaration,” and accepts his proposal, provided her parents approve. They marry a few days later.]

The appearance of the two anecdotes consecutively on the same page offers an opportunity to speculate that that Willis and Welles—possibly Willis alone—wrote the unattributed “Abernethy” anecdote, modeling it on the anecdote of the young gentleman and pretty girl that first appeared in another newspaper. Why would an editor run similar anecdotes like these back to back? One answer is



to fill column inches, which matches granddaughter Ethel Parton's account of the meetings between Willis and Welles: "Sometimes, wanting to fill in a too-short column or sprinkle in a bit of spice, [Welles][ came directly to the school to ask for Miss Willis's latest."

A possible earlier Willis contribution appears in the *Hartford Times* of Monday, September 28, 1829. In this edition, the contents of page one include two columns of advertisements filling columns one and two, poetry and "Miscellaneous" items in column three, texts of government circulars from the Treasury Department and Post Office in columns four and five, and an article "Complete Treatise of Horses" running the length of column six. I believe the following question and answer appearing at the bottom of column three under "Miscellaneous" may be associated with Willis:

Why are the females of the present day, like the lily in the Scriptures?

"Because they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all glory, was not arrayed like one of these."

I suggest that this bit of humor might have arisen from schoolgirl discourse among students of Catharine Beecher's school, which Willis passed along to Welles—what Parton calls "a bit of spice."

In my reading of these items, Welles plays a more important role in Willis's career than Warren allows in her biography. As Ethel Parton, suggests, the writings of Willis were filler; they were not "articles." That they were published in the newspaper was a matter of editorial whim, rather than the quality of the writing. Occasional publication of whimsy is a prerogative newspaper editors exercise to make the paper more entertaining. Welles's exercising this editorial prerogative in favor of publishing Sara Willis's bits of spice encouraged Sara Willis Farrington to return to writing for newspapers after her divorce. In adapting Parton's anecdote of the editor, Warren inadvertently lowered the stature of the newspaper and its editor, calling Welles "editor of the local newspaper"—a



characterization indicative of a small town with only one newspaper, and that the content of the one paper was “local” rather than official notices from the governments of the capital and state of Connecticut. In Parton’s account, she describes the *Hartford Times* as “a leading local newspaper” (70, emphasis mine), which is more in keeping with *Hartford Times*’ status as the paper of record in Connecticut. In a third biography, Nancy Walker’s *Fanny Fern*, published in Twayne’s United States Authors Series, there is no mention of visits by a newspaper editor during Willis’s time at the Hartford Female Seminary. This progressive reduction of information in the biographies exemplifies my claim that critical and historical studies of canonical nineteenth-century authors largely have ignored editors. In Parton’s account, we read about a leading newspaper editor who has agency; in Warren’s account, he becomes a local editor with little agency; instead, Warren uses his presence to validate Willis’s talent as a writer; and in Walker’s biography, the editor and his role in bringing Willis’s writings to print have disappeared.

Finishing her formal education in April 1831, Willis returned to her family in Boston to “learn the ‘Lost Arts’ of bread-making and button-hole stitching” (qtd. in Walker 10 and Warren 43). Walker writes, “When she left the Hartford Female Seminary, it was to go home to await the next stage of her life: marriage” (10). Walker and Warren both mention that Willis continued to assist her father. Nathaniel Willis began publishing “the first children’s periodical in the country” in 1827. He continued to publish periodicals after Sara Willis returned home to Boston in 1831, having finished at the Hartford Female Seminary. *Youth’s Companion* was an important part of the printing and publishing periodical business that Nathaniel Willis founded in September 1812, after moving back to Boston from Portland, Maine, to which he had been recruited to publish a Republican newspaper, the *Eastern Argus* (Warren 8-9). Back in Boston, Willis was first a printer primarily of religious books;



then he started the *Boston Recorder* in January 1816, which, according to Warren, was “the first religious newspaper in America” (9).

Sara Willis began to learn the craft of writing on these two periodicals. Warren writes:

From the time that she was twelve, she had done proofreading for her father’s *Recorder* and *Youth’s Companion*, and when she was older wrote copy as well. *Like the editor of the Hartford newspaper* (emphasis mine), Nathaniel Willis asked Sara or one of his other children to write a paragraph or a longer article when he needed something to fill up a page. It was easy for Sara to dash off an article, and she never thought of receiving pay for it any more than she would have thought of receiving pay for the sewing or cooking she did for her mother. (Warren 45-46)

The source of this information is Ethel Parton’s informal biography. Warren continues:

Ironically, whereas the domestic work was regarded by her families and contemporaries as necessary training for her future career as a wife and mother, no one—least of all Sara Willis herself—would have dreamed that this unpaid labor was providing useful training for a future career as a journalist. (46)

Walker emphasizes her earlier point about Sara’s waiting to be married:

Yet while she was courted by a number of young men, she continued to hone her literary skills by writing pieces for her father’s publication *The Youth’s Companion*, then in its early years of circulation. *No doubt Nathaniel Willis welcomed the assistance of his talented daughter, but clearly she was merely marking time until the right suitor came her way.* (10, emphasis mine)



Walker paraphrases Warren, as Warren paraphrased Parton. I include these excerpts to illustrate that level of detail in the original anecdote lessens as each biographer paraphrases the information, and speculative reading of the anecdote increases. This is the same process by which editors lose their agency during repeated studies of canonical authors.

The time between Sara's returning home from Hartford and her marriage in Boston to bank cashier Charles Eldredge was six years—April 1831 to May 1837. The summary of that time period from a chronology in Walker's biography is succinct: "1829-1837 . . . Lives at home in Boston, doing domestic chores and proofreading and writing articles for her father's newspapers" (xiii). The biographers do not attribute much importance to Willis's return to work on her father's publications, yet this additional period of her learning the value of her editorial skills helped to lay the groundwork for her success in the literary marketplace when circumstances forced her to return to it in 1851.

Willis's fourteen years in the domestic sphere were tumultuous and tragic. She married; gave birth to three daughters; lost five of the people closest to her (sister, mother, oldest daughter, sister-in-law, and husband) in the space of two years; struggled to support herself and her children; remarried a widower with children; and separated from him in a punitive, judgmental divorce that alienated her from her family. In Chapter 6 of her biography, "The Birth of Fanny Fern," Warren summarizes the pivotal decision made by Willis when, after leaving second husband Samuel Farrington, she found herself even more impoverished than she was before her remarriage.

It was then that she decided to write for the newspapers. Her father was an editor, and although he would not help her (he disapproved of and discouraged her attempts at writing), she had the experience of writing and reading proof for his papers. She also remembered how the editor of the Hartford paper had eagerly printed her articles. (90)



How was it that Willis continued to have confidence in her abilities as a writer after so many years away from writing? I suggest that writing for newspapers provides writers with powerful positive reinforcement in the form of immediate publication—the literary equivalent of instant gratification. With newspapers, the publication cycle is brief, unlike the publication of a book or an article in a journal. If Willis’s father called upon her to write “a paragraph or a longer article when he needed something to fill up a page,” her writing of filler copy would have taken place toward the end of the publication cycle. Willis would see her handwritten words transformed into print in the matter of a few days.

For an aspiring writer, to see one’s words in print so soon after one has written them provides validation—especially if one has been asked to write them, as Willis was by Gideon Welles. When Walt Whitman published “a piece or two” in the fashionable *New York Mirror* at around age 15, his seeing the brief articles in print gave him the first thrill of authorship. “How it made my heart double-beat to see *my piece* on the pretty white paper, in nice type,” he recalled (Allen 23). It is likely that Sara Willis experienced pleasure and excitement similar to Whitman’s upon reading her words in the *Hartford Times*—more so than for bits of copy written on command to fill space in her father’s publications. The person who introduced Willis to the literary marketplace was Gideon Welles—perhaps because he was shy man who was looking for a suitable wife. Niven writes that “Welles was a highly sensitive individual, a reticent man, who preferred the background to the limelight. Yet at the same time he was fiercely ambitious” (vii). He describes Welles as a “shy moralist” and “compulsive writer,” and reports that when Welles passed through Hartford in 1833 with President Andrew Jackson and his party, his future wife, Mary Jane Hale, “had been dazzled by her cousin’s importance” (159). A tall man, more imposing than handsome, Welles was an impressive individual



whose approach to writing would be informed and serious. Coming from a newspaper family and receiving positive feedback on her writing at school, Willis was open to instruction from an established writer. As editor of the *Hartford Times*, Welles was able to validate Willis's literary talent in even more lasting form than praise: he published some of her writing for all Hartford to read.

It is no wonder, then, that an older Sara Willis recalled Welles's positive effect on her at a crisis point in her life. In Chapter 56 of *Ruth Hall*, Ruth's decision to try to make her living as a writer concludes with an expression of pleasure and excitement. "This means of support would be so congenial, so absorbing" (115). Writing will be a pleasant alternative to her current occupation as a seamstress: "At the needle one's mind could still be brooding over sorrowful thoughts" (115). At the same critical juncture in the author's life, Willis found that publication of her early writings in the *Times* had given her confidence in her writing ability that negative comments by her father and brother N.P. Willis could not undermine. Welles's effect on Willis's life went well beyond her seeing her writing in print. As editors do as a profession, Welles no doubt made suggestions and edited Willis' work. Her schoolroom meetings with him at the Seminary were the equivalent of a professionally taught workshop on writing for newspapers—an education that Willis would pick up again when she went to work with Thomas F. Norris, editor of the *Boston Olive Branch*, and his assistant editor, Mary Andrews Denison.

#### **Rev. Thomas F. Norris and Mrs. Mary Andrews Denison**

On February 25, 1852, Samuel Farrington placed a notice in the *Boston Daily Bee* that he was no longer responsible for any of his wife's expenses: "I hereby forbid all persons harboring or trusting my wife, Sarah P. Farrington, on my account, from this date having made suitable provisions for her support." Farrington provided no further support and soon left Boston. (qtd. in Warren 86). Fern's



family and father-in-law would not help. Shamed and impoverished, she and her daughter moved from Boston to a Brattle Street boarding house across the Charles River in Cambridge. Cut off by her family and in-laws, the former Sara Willis was forced to assess her employment prospects. It was at this juncture that she considered giving journalism another try. Warren writes, “Her father was an editor, and although he would not help her (he disapproved of and discouraged her attempts at writing), she had the experience of writing and reading proof papers. She also remembered how the editor at the Hartford paper had eagerly printed her articles. She bought an old inkstand at a second hand shop and determined that she would try to earn her living by writing” (90).

Willis began to write in an attic room of the boarding house in spring 1851. After writing a number of articles, she put her work in her handbag and crossed the river to Boston, where several newspapers were published. In interviews with prospective employers, she had to respond to questions about her personal life that caused her considerable discomfort. However, one newspaper, the *Boston Olive Branch*, had advertised that it was interested in contributors; on May 3, 1851, its editor, Reverend Thomas F. Norris, a Methodist minister, published advice to current and potential contributors in an article on the editor’s page of the *Olive Branch*. Willis soon called on Norris in his office, and in June 1851, the editor bought her essay “The Model Husband” for fifty cents, payment upon publication. The article appeared on June 28, 1851, and was reprinted the next day in “a prominent Boston paper” (92)—probably the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, whose editor Epes Sargent was an admirer of the *Olive Branch* (see below). Around the same time, Willis’s brother N. P. responded to her request for guidance and possible introductions to editors who could help her. In an undated letter, N. P. Willis wrote:



Your writings show talent, but they are in a style that would do only in Boston. You overstrain the pathetic, and your humor runs into dreadful vulgarity sometimes. . . . The only chance is with the religious papers, which pay for a certain easily acquired kind of writing. Your education might enable you to do something like this. But in other literature *I see no chance for you – unless, indeed, you can get employed by the editors you write for already.* (93, emphasis mine)

In fact, Sara did succeed in getting Norris to publish a second article, “Thoughts on Dress,” on July 19, 1851. The article was signed “Tabitha.” On August 2, the *Olive Branch* printed two Tabitha articles, and two more articles on August 9 and 16 (97). On September 16, 1851, the *Olive Branch* published the first article signed by “Fanny Fern.” It was “The Little Sunbeam.”

Encouraged by her success, Fern asked Norris for advice on other publications that might be interested in her work. Unlike her brother, Norris was willing to help her. He directed her attention to a new weekly, the Boston *True Flag*, and the *Flag* printed her long story “The Governess” on November 29, 1851. This was the beginning of the rise of Fanny Fern. Before long, Warren writes, “Fern’s articles were being printed in newspapers all over the country and across the Atlantic. Readers wrote to the *Olive Branch* and the *True Flag* . . . demanding to know who Fanny Fern was” (101). *True Flag* editor William U. Moulton kept her identity a secret, as did Norris.

Writing two columns for Norris and one for Moulton, by spring 1852 Fern earned six dollars a week. Not all of her writings were published. According to Warren, Fern needed to write five to ten articles a week to earn this money. Her payment was on publication, rather than at the time of acceptance. As long as she kept writing, she had a means of supporting herself and her family. More than the gratification of seeing her work in print again, Fern’s decision to pursue a career in writing



was validated by her first payments from Norris. Such positive reinforcement would be influential in sustaining her ambitions. As her editor, Norris was an agent (and paymaster) in this ongoing validation.

In addition to being Sara Willis's first employer other than her father—and first editor since Welles—Reverend Norris urged his contributors to follow his prescription for successful newspaper articles. On May 3, 1851—weeks before Fern called on him in his office—Norris published on page two, in column two, a summary of his guidelines for good newspaper writing under the heading “Writing for a Newspaper”:

There are few persons who do not think themselves fully competent to such an act. Comparatively few, however, are able to write so as to be read. Before writing, know exactly what you desire to do, and what you wish to say; have the whole compass and detail of your subject in your mind, say it in plain old English, use the most easy words and forms of speech in your power, do not use obsolete or out of the way terms, use no exordium, come directly at what you aim, and give the largest possible number of ideas in the fewest possible number of words. Use no circumlocution, and when you have done, stop; an article is never too short when the writer has comprehended his subject; any verbose additions only take from the force of an article. We have more than fifty regular or occasional contributors to our paper, which is issued but once a week. Wordy articles from all these would fill two daily papers of the size of the Olive Branch. We beg our contributors all to learn to say much in a few words. This is one of the most difficult parts of the art of writing, especially of a good newspaper writer.



Persons gifted with a concise, forcible, yet graceful and easy style, never fail of success. Daguerreotype your subject; and leave your reader to study the picture.

Norris's principles are: 1) know the rhetorical purpose of your article, and what you want to say; 2) say what you have to say in common speech, using familiar words; 3) get to your point using the least number of words possible; and 4) avoid circumlocution and verbosity. Norris's instructions are consistent with the writing style that Fanny Fern developed to her considerable success.

Warren dismisses the possible influence of Norris's article on Fern. She writes that "One does not know if Fern saw this article and was guided by it in her early writing or if, *as seems more likely*, it was simply a case of Norris being attracted to her writing because it fit his definition of good writing" (98, emphasis mine). This assertion of likelihood is arbitrary and, in my view, inaccurate. A more plausible explanation is readily available: the reason for Willis's visit to the editor of the *Olive Branch* is that she read his article of May 3, whose content was directed toward contributors and potential contributors. He offered them advice on how to write well. Norris noted that the *Olive Branch* had more than fifty contributors, yet the subtext of his article is that he was open to more contributors who could meet his standards.

In a second article on page two, in column three, "Editorial Courtesy of Contemporaries," Norris reprints six notices from exchange newspapers such as the Waterbury (Ct.) *American* and Boston *Daily Evening Transcript* praising the *Olive Branch* for adopting a new type face and making design changes to give the paper a cleaner look. Claiming that the article represents only the second such reprinting of favorable exchange notices about the *Olive Branch*, Norris writes,

Some one hundred and fifty of the editors of papers with which we exchange, have very kindly noticed us and our paper, since the present volume commenced. They have



our sincere thanks for their kind offices. We have never, but in one instance, transferred any one of those notices to our columns, which we find a very common practice with many of our best exchanges; under the temptation, perhaps, of a little vanity, and justified by high example, we transfer a few notices of cotemporaries this week. (2)

The Waterbury *American* of April 18 writes:

This admirable paper just donned a beautiful new dress, though its late suit was little worse for wear. The Olive Branch differs from the ordinary school of literary weeklies by the manliness of its tone, its practical essays, and the general sweep of its articles, embracing most that is interesting in the current topics of the day. No mawkish sentimentalism or fashionable foolery finds a corner in its columns, though the matter is chiefly original. The editor is the Rev. Mr. Norris, a Methodist clergyman, assisted by Mrs. M. A. Denison, a most able and captivating writer, decidedly the best lady editor of whom we have any knowledge. Her editorials possess masculine shrewdness, with the finish and grace of a refined feminine intellect. We cheerfully commend the Olive Branch to the reader.

Once again, the item contains evidence of the literary talents of Mary A. Denison: that she was “a most able and captivating writer” and “the best lady editor” known to the writer—presumably the editor of the Waterbury newspaper.

The editor of the *Daily Evening Transcript*, Epes Sargent, whom Norris introduces as “one of the best literary writers of our times,” supports his colleague’s opinions in the *Transcript* of April 3:



The Rev. Mr. Norris's popular Saturday newspaper appears the present week in an entire new suit of type from the Boston foundry, and presents, in every department, additional claims upon the public favor. Mrs. Denison, who is engaged as assistant editor, is one of the most graceful and gifted of American feminine writers. Both her prose and poetry bear the genuine impress of talent, and a fresh, sympathizing intelligence. The Olive Branch numbers many excellent original contributors; and as it keeps pace with the competition of the day, it bids fair not only to "hold its own" but to go on extending in circulation and usefulness.

The "good poet" John G. Saxe writes in the Burlington (Vt.) *Sentinel* of April 11: "The Olive Branch, one of the ablest and best conducted family journals in Christendom, came to us, last week, arrayed in a brand-new suit of type. Mrs. Denison, whose articles in prose and verse are so much admired and so widely quoted, still remains as associate editor with Mr. Norris, and both." Notices from the New England *Farmer and Saturday Rambler*, Norfolk (Roxbury, Ma.) *Gazette*, and Plymouth *Rock* echo the complimentary opinions of the first three notices. Their editors describe the *Olive Branch* as "widely-circulated" (*Farmer and Saturday Rambler*), having "an immense circulation" (*Gazette*) and "a list of subscribers numbering about twenty-five thousand" (*Rock*). The *Rambler* mentions that Norris is assisted by Mrs. Mary A. Denison, and the *Gazette* generously characterizes her importance to the *Olive Branch*:

In addition to the host of popular writers already employed, we notice that the name of Mrs. Mary A. Denison appears as assistant editor. A better selection we are confident could not have been made. A more easy, graceful and finished writer than Mrs. Denison it would be difficult to find and we heartily congratulate friend Norris and his



hundred thousand readers in securing the services of so gifted and accomplished an “assistant.”

Editor Moses Bates, Jr. of the Plymouth *Rock* focuses on Norris’s editorship:

The last number of this valuable family and parlor paper comes to us in an entire new dress, making it one of the neatest, as it was before one of the most interesting of our exchanges. Mr. Norris, by his indomitable energy, has raised his paper to its present high standard, and [we] appreciate his efforts. With an able corps of contributors and a high moral character, the Olive Branch is of infinitely more value than many papers of greater pretensions.

Taken as a group, these notices are evidence of widespread contemporary recognition among newspaper editor of the quality of the *Olive Branch*’s editorship and editorial content. Based on this sampling, the newspaper appears to have been read by a variety of New England newspaper editors.

One should consider contemporary opinions in order to recover the *Olive Branch*’s reputation in the newspaper business of the time. Contemporary opinion offers an alternative view to Warren’s negative portrayal of Norris (Warren 92); misleading description of the *Olive Branch* as a small religious newspaper of limited circulation (100); and passing mention of Mary A. Denison as one of several well-known writers “who also wrote for the *Olive Branch*” (102). If Sara Willis saw Norris’s article on writing for newspapers, she also was likely to have read the notices appearing in the next column as a way of finding out more about the newspaper. The combination of Norris’s advice to contributors and positive reviews from other editors of his efforts would have encouraged her to approach him. After all, she was the daughter of a well-known Boston religious publisher. From her early experiences contributing to her family’s publications and to Gideon Welles’s *Hartford Times*,



she had acquired confidence that she wrote well enough to be published, and could meet Norris's standards. The notices from other newspapers are particularly valuable for two reasons. First, the presence of a highly regarded female assistant editor might have encouraged another woman to write for the newspaper. Second, in 1851 the *Olive Branch* had a circulation numbering in the tens of thousands. It was not a small paper. Newspapers estimate readership as a multiple of circulated copies in the belief that three or four people read each copy of the paper. This explains the estimate in the *Gazette*'s notice of one hundred thousand *Olive Branch* readers—a startlingly high figure, but more understandable when one considers it is based on circulation of twenty-five thousand newspapers. In this way, the apparently different numbers cited by the *Gazette* and the *Rock* are consistent with each other.

Mention of these respectful notices from other editors for the *Olive Branch*'s editors, contributors, and journalistic standards is absent from Warren's description of the newspaper in her biography of Fanny Fern. Warren writes,

The *Olive Branch* was a weekly newspaper, which, as the inscription under the masthead declared, was "Devoted to Christianity, Mutual Rights, Polite Literature, General Intelligence, Agriculture, and the Arts." It was a modest newspaper with a small circulation. During the almost two years that Fanny Fern wrote for the newspaper, its circulation soared. (100)

The six notices reprinted in the *Olive Branch* of May 3, 1851, are evidence that Reverend Norris's publication was a respected religious newspaper with a healthy exchange list and possibly a wide circulation. The Norfolk *Gazette* notice states that "Mr. Norris, the editor and proprietor, understands to a T what the million want to read, and hence the great success he has met with in his paper. The



Branch and its editor are too well known throughout the country to need any encomium from us.” Warren does not provide a source for her statement that “circulation soared” with Fanny Fern’s arrival, so one must consider it to be speculation. She does not mention the article “Editorial Courtesy of Contemporaries.” Her account thus focuses on Fern’s remarkable success while understating the importance of the roles of editors who published her early work. In describing the manner in which Sara Willis ventured to Boston to sell her articles, Warren writes that “the soon-to-become Fanny Fern took little [daughter] Ellen by the hand, and, putting the articles into a flat, shabby reticule [handbag], she walked the streets, climbing up and down stairs and confronting the rude looks and comments of men who were not accustomed to seeing a woman in a newspaper office” (92). The account is dramatic, yet speculative. Without questioning the fact that Willis’s experience of shopping around her articles to male-dominated newspaper offices was a very challenging one, one needs to balance this perception of a hostile environment against the respectful praise that New England newspaper editors extended in their notices about the *Olive Branch* to Mrs. Denison, who was assistant editor of the at the time Willis was making her office visits. Because of her editorial responsibilities at the paper, Denison often would have been present in the *Olive Branch* office, if not on the occasion of Willis’s first visit, then during Willis’s subsequent visits. In my review of editions of the *Olive Branch* from May 3, 1851 (the date of Norris’s article on “Writing for a Newspaper”) to September 27, 1851 (three weeks after Willis began using the pseudonym Fanny Fern), Mary A. Denison was assistant editor throughout. My research uncovered sufficient evidence to conclude that she is a writer and editor deserving of more serious attention.

Denison began her career as a published writer in 1848 by winning the hundred dollar prize in a contest sponsored by the religious newspaper *New-York Organ*. Her fifty-four-page novella titled



*Gertrude Russel, or Parental Example* was serialized in the paper and published separately in 1849 by Oliver and Brother. The volume includes three short works by Lydia H. Sigourney that appeared originally in the *Organ*. Thus Denison was in good literary company. *Gertrude Russel* is a temperance work in which Gertrude marries Lorenzo, who is addicted to wine. After several lapses, the couple's child dies, but Lorenzo is saved (51-55). Twenty-two when she won the contest, Denison was married to Rev. Charles Wheeler Denison, who was seventeen years older.

In its early years, Denison's career was parallel to that of Fanny Fern. Unmentioned in the scant scholarship on Denison is that she published volumes of collected newspaper writings similar to Fern's in 1853 and 1855. The first, *Home Pictures*, came to print in the same year as *Fern Leaves*. According to the preface by the Reverend C. W. Denison, most the seventy-eight stories had appeared in the *Olive Branch*, "where their writer has been engaged for several years as the assistant editor." Rev. Denison writes that all the stories have been "carefully revised, in some cases almost re-written"—again similar to Fern. The chronology in the preface suggests that Mary Denison had been assistant editor of the *Olive Branch* since 1850 or earlier by the time Fern approached the newspaper for possible work. The stories in *Home Pictures* are connected sketches of family life as experienced by a country girl who marries a merchant. Like the stories in Part I of *Fern Leaves*, Denison's sketches are as sentimental and moral as their titles often suggest: "'About the Minister,'" "Kitchen Troubles," "The Inebriate's Wife," "Little Herbert's Transgression," "The Untimely Death," and "Alice's Confession." As she does in her prize-winning novella, Denison ends the collection with a family reunited and the narrator sentimental: "I wish all the world were as contented and happy as I am today" (417). The happy ending had its desired effect on readers. In the copy I read, which had belonged to the Worcester Country Mechanics Association's Library, four readers were moved to



pencil comments on the final pages: “Beautiful. All is well that ends well,” “Pretty good,” “Splendid,” and “Very good indeed, excellent” (416-H17).

In titles and subject matter, Denison’s first volume is similar to Part I of *Fern Leaves*, published in the same year. In Part I, Fern writes on “The Widow’s Trials,” “The Wail of a Broken Heart,” “A Talk about Babies,” “How Husbands May Rule,” “Lilla, the Orphan,” and “A Word to Mothers.” Differences between the sensibilities of Denison and Fern become pronounced in Part II of *Fern Leaves*. Fern’s writing begins to exhibit the energetic, satiric view of relations between women and men for which she became famous. Titles include “Bachelor Housekeeping,” “The Weaker Vessel,” “Men’s Dickey’s Never Fit Exactly,” “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony,” and “The Bore of the Sanctum.” In “The Weaker Vessel,” for example, responds to an epigram: “A witty French writer says, ‘When a man has toiled step by step, up a flight of stairs, he finds a woman at the top of it.’” Fern addresses the column itself to a fictional French man. “My dear Monsieur, that’s Gospel truth, but only a gallant Frenchman like you would own it” (337). In terms of craft, Fern’s use of an unusual point of view is one element that distinguishes Part II of her first collection from Denison’s counterpart.

Introducing Denison’s second volume, *What Not*, in a preface, her publisher describes the author in terms different from any that might be used to describe Fern at the same point in her career. The publisher writes, “As a closely reasoning moralist, an earnest teacher of truth for the truth’s sake, and a sweet and touching delineator of the good and beautiful in humanity, there is no superior to Mrs. Denison in the galaxy of female writers that now brightens the American literary firmament” (3). The volume includes one-hundred-sixty-five brief sketches with sentimental and moral titles similar to those in the first volume. Yet the first sketch, “What Is a Boy?” is so similar to the writing of Fern that



it could be mistaken for it. It begins with an epigram and, in a lively tone, describes the early battle of the sexes. The epigram is “A very uncertain, mysterious, inexplicable creation is a boy—who can define him?” In response, Denison writes,

I will try. A boy is the spirit of mischief embodied. A perfect teetotum, spinning round like a jenny, or tumbling heels over head. He invariably goes through the process of leaping over every chair in his reach; makes drum-heads of the doors; turns the tin pans into cymbals; takes the best knives out to dig worms for bait, and loses them; hunts up the molasses cask, and leaves the molasses running; is boon companion to the sugar barrel; searches all the pie preserves left from supper, and eats them; goes to the apples every ten minutes; hides his old cap in order to wear his best one; cuts his boots *accidentally* if he wants a new pair; tears his clothes for fun; jumps into the puddles for sport, and for ditto tracks your carpets, marks the furniture, pinches the baby, worries the nurse, ties fire-crackers to the kitten’s tail, drops his school-books in the gutter while he fishes with a pin, pockets his school-master’s “specs,” and, finally, turns a sober household upside down if he cuts his little finger.

He is a provoking and unprovokable [sic] torment, especially to his sisters. He don’t pretend to much until he is twelve. Then begins the rage for frock-coats, blue eyes, curly hair, white dresses, imperfect rhymes, and dickies. (13-14).

In style, the writing very much resembles the extended, breathless sentences that James Parton describes as Fern’s trademark style.

On the subject “Men and Women,” Denison begins with a quotation about a woman’s wish to show off a gold purse in order to frame her sarcastic argument that men are much the same:



Men never do such things. They are very willing to appear afflicted with poverty. Men never dress in the fashion, or look in looking glasses, which it is said women wear out by constant use. . . . It's a moral impossibility for men to tell secrets; they are perfectly innocent of the sin of curiosity. Were you to tell them you knew a plan by which thirty thousand dollars could be made—they wouldn't ask you how.

In fact, all these minor things are saddled upon our shoulders, though they are none of the broadest.” (131-132)

In “How Women Should Do,” Denison urges mature women to protect younger women against the temptations of men that she wrote about in a preceding column, “The Fast Young Man” (244): “When you see a fair young girl, overstepping the bounds of prudence . . . they should go to her instantly, and remonstrate with her, instead of exposing her fault and making it matter of unkind gossip” (247) In “It Takes Two To Make a Quarrel,” Denison advises women that:

It takes two to get a quarrel fairly going, so hold your tongue the moment the storm is brewing, and you are without the pale of discord

“What! allow my husband to tyrannize over me, and in a fit of anger, regardless of my feelings, accuse me of neglect when I am striving my very best to please him?”

Well, let us see. He comes home—maybe worried with business that has gone all wrong; for, notwithstanding some spiteful bodies would fain teach that men never have any trouble, or any hard work to do, a few of the sterner sex are industrious, and sometimes, even they get as tired as poor persecuted women. (375)



In this excerpt, Denison addresses a subject familiar to readers of Fern, yet is more sympathetic than Fern in her treatment of the possible pressures on men as they make the transition from the business of the public sphere to marital interactions in the domestic sphere.

In revisiting Denison as an editor and writer, it is important to understand that a distinction exists between her dime novels and more serious novels, published in hard-cover editions. The latter have literary merit, and are beginning to receive attention. In the end matter to *Old Hepsy*, a novel I return to in my conclusion, the publisher advertised the book as:

Powerful anti-slavery romance . . . characters and incidents founded on fact. . . . It is confidently expect that the sale of “Old Hepsy” will exceed that of any other book published in 1858. The author has been seven years collecting facts on which to found the main features of this book. Publisher A. B. Burdick seeks a thousand agents to sell Old Hepsy . . . Liberal inducements given.

Denison’s other hard-cover novels (to distinguish a number of titles from her dime novels) also have literary merit.

In *Opposite the Jail*, published in 1858, Denison’s writing demonstrates that the author is mastering her skills as a novelist. She had been writing publishable fiction for a decade. *Opposite the Jail* opens with the effective establishment of a disquieting, somewhat Dickensian mood:

The clocks had all chimed the hour of midnight, and the city was still. As dreams upon the people, so fell the black shadows on the long deserted streets. Outwardly all was peace, but in how many homes struggled ghastly disease, and pale death triumphed? The quiet was not broken by the ringing steel of the assassin, neither was the ear startled by the cry of murder; but murder was being done. The stars, each with a single



eye to God's glory, looked calmly down and saw, if they could penetrate the crowded roofs, unholy mirth, horrible revelry, crime of all hues, despair, and long between whiles the sweet sleep of the innocent.

Such as the slumber of Alice Graylynn. (4-5)

The plot is convoluted, yet sufficiently compelling to keep a reader turning pages. The characters are believable, if somewhat stereotypical. The central character, Alice, is accused of stealing a diamond ring, jewels, and bank bills from her niece and aunt after having been summoned by her uncle to their house. She is put in jail. Living in "a handsome house" opposite the jail are General and Mrs. Littlejohn. Like Denison and her husband Charles, Mrs. Littlejohn is much younger than the general. Denison uses the change of scene to the jail to describe the "bleared and haggard faces" of the inmate population (35), and the redemptive role of Christian faith. Mrs. Littlejohn is "chaplain, comforter, and friend" to the inmates. Under her influence and by reading the Bible, an accused forger changes for the better: "His face had grown human again; his light hair was combed smoothly from a fair brow, and a mild, calm light shone in his blue eyes" (178).

Events outside the jail favor Alice. Presumed missing at sea for twelve years, her father returns on board a ship commanded by his daughter's betrothed. The captain fought off pirates to defend the property on board, some of which belongs to General Littlejohn. In gratitude, the general invites Alice's father and the captain to dinner. At the same moment, two Irish servants, Lorine and Caddie, are discussing what should do with the information that they witnessed Alice's cousin Belle committing the "theft" of her own jewelry. Belle's motive is intense jealousy of her cousin by marriage, abetted by drug use.



Denison describes the Catholic culture of the servants (making the sign of the cross, speaking worshipfully of the Pope) in stereotypical fashion, yet succeeds in giving a human dimension to their struggle to do the right thing. Belle's dressing maid, Lorine, has noticed that Belle "grows strange," and held a vial of opium to her lips. When confronted with the prospect of swearing on the Bible before testifying in court, Belle is overwhelmed by "the burning anguish of a guilty conscience" and suffers a fit (252-260). At Alice's trial, Lorine tells "a plain, unvarnished, unexaggerated story" about Belle's bad behavior. Alice is found not guilty and reunites with her father and fiancée.

Recovering the agency of Denison as an editor and writer is critical to considering Fanny Fern in context. I have noted similarities between the literary careers of the two women in the 1850s: Both gained experience under the editor of the *Olive Branch*; both published two collections of columns and stories; both wrote about sentimental and moral subjects (though Fern moved away from writing about these subjects exclusively); and both framed their newspaper stories with a similar device (i. e. as the response to an epigram) and wrote in similar style. How is it that one became a celebrity and the other has remained largely unknown? I suggest one reason is that Fern soon moved beyond the realm of religious newspapers to popular newspapers. Though crossing paths in the 1850s, Fern and Denison were in quite different circumstances. Fern was divorced and needed to support herself. Denison was married to a minister and quite likely needed to write and edit to supplement her family's income, yet had a different view of marriage than Fern, who by this time had been married twice, with the first marriage ending in the death of her husband, and the second in a humiliating divorce. Whether Fern "outgrew" religious newspapers, as N. P. Willis advised his sister that she would not be able to do, is a separate consideration. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to make the case that Denison and Fern may have influenced each other during the first half of the 1850s.



A second reason for Denison's lack of critical attention is the perception that she was primarily the "author of pulp fiction and dime novels" (Hoeveler 490). The scholarship almost ignores her career in journalism. Though *Women Writers in the United States* includes a brief biography of Denison, the four-volume reference work summarizes her journalistic career in two short sentences: "D.'s first publications were short sketches in printed in the *Boston Olive Branch*. . . . D. was also a continual contributor to a number of periodicals, chiefly *Frank Leslie's Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, the *People's Home Journal*, and *Youth's Companion*" (490-491). The last publication mentioned is evidence of a connection between Denison and Nathaniel Willis, Jr., founder and publisher of *Youth's Companion*, who was Sara's father. The chronology suggests that the connection between Mary Andrews Denison and the *Youth's Companion* came after the two women met while working for the *Olive Branch*. The connection increases the probability that the women were acquainted with each other and may have discussed the challenges of a woman making a career in writing. Perhaps Sara Willis suggested *Youth's Companion* as a market for Denison's writing. Diane Long Hoeveler's biographical entry on Denison in *American Women Writers* (1: 400-01) misses this connection, writing that Denison's husband, a Baptist minister, was assistant editor of the *Olive Branch*, rather than Mary Denison herself. This is an error. Rev. Charles Wheeler Denison, edited the *American Lady's Wreath & Literary Gatherer*, published in Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1844 to 1846 (American Antiquarian Society catalogue).

*Women Writers in the United States: A Timeline of Literal, Cultural, and Social History* has six timeline entries on Mary Andrews Denison (68, 89, 90, 91, 94, and 100). The book's format divides information into two columns: texts and contexts. All of her entries are texts. The first entry (1847) documents the publication of Denison's popular novel *Edna Etheril, a Boston Seamstress* and



describes the writer as a “prolific author of short stories, sketches, nonfiction, and novels, including many dime novels. . . .” (68). In her biography of Fern, Warren uses information from *Edna Etheril* to estimate Sara Willis’s pay at six cents an hour when she worked as a Boston seamstress in her initial effort to make money after her divorce from Farrington. (325n11).

Denison’s signed contributions to the *Olive Branch*, at the time Sara Willis Farrington’s first work was published, appeared above her initials M. A. D. Her articles were substantial—1,200-1,400 words long—and written on not only domestic but cultural subjects. An article on a domestic topic appears in the *Olive Branch* of June 28, 1851, the same edition in which Willis’s first article appeared, Denison’s contribution was a feature story on the social ritual of “Tea Time”:

“Come and take tea with us,” is the form in which invitations are generally given by New England people. . . . In some old families it is made quite a time of ceremony. On no account must the hour be later than that which preceding generations have fixed. As soon as the huge body of antiquity in the corner, the old family clock strikes five, or six, whichever it may be, on goes the kettle, and the black oak table with its six legs, marches to the middle of the room, and reluctantly hides its polished face under a cloth of snowy whiteness ; one after another the different members of the family enter, punctual to the moment, and it would be a rare thing, out of date in memory, if some bolder spirit than the rest should presume to keep the others waiting by his tardiness.

(2)

Her contribution to the edition of July 19, when Willis’s second article appeared in the *Olive Branch*, was on a cultural topic, “Pictures versus Society,” which argues for good taste and restraint in pictures displayed in the gallery windows of artists and daguerreotypists:



We commence our editorial upon this subject, with the sincere conviction that no virtuous man or woman will impute to us any but honorable motives, in attempting to lay before the people our views upon the publicity, given to what we call indelicate engravings and paintings exposed in shop windows, and in the cases of some daguerrian artists in this city. As a woman we feel and write upon the subject, and we believe we shall have at least the sympathy of our own sex, who are, or ought to be, most concerned about the matter, as rarely any other than a female figure is exposed to the rude gaze of the rabble in this ridiculous manner. (2)

Warren mentions Denison in her biography of Fern only as a writer—author of the novel *Edna Etheril, the Boston Seamstress* (325n11)—who “also wrote for the *Olive Branch*” and who some at first suspected might be the writer using the pseudonym “Fanny Fern” (102). The suspicion is further evidence that Denison’s and Fern’s writing was similar at this point in Fern’s career. Warren does not mention that Denison was assistant editor of the *Olive Branch*, or that Denison held her editorial position at the *Olive Branch* during the time of Sara Willis Farrington began to write for the newspaper and commence her career as Fanny Fern. Similar to the lack of identification of Gideon Welles in the biography, this omission is an example of a tendency of critics and literary historians to ignore the role of editors in the literary marketplace.

To what extent did Reverend Norris and Mrs. Denison (as her marital status appears on the masthead) affect the writings of Sara Willis when she began her professional career as a writer for newspapers? Warren argues that Norris had little, if any, influence on Willis’s early writings for the *Olive Branch* because she wrote the articles before she encountered Reverend Norris’s article “Writing for a Newspaper.” However, Warren also mentions that Willis wrote drafts of her first



articles in the spring of 1851 in the attic room of the Cambridge boarding house (Warren 90). The timing leaves open the possibility that Willis wrote or revised the articles after reading Norris's instructions to newspaper writers.

Close readings of her first articles in the *Olive Branch* may establish if editorial influence is evident. The first of the articles to be published in the *Olive Branch* is "The Model Husband." This article may have had the germ of its idea in one of the brief articles I believe can be attributed to Willis in the *Hartford Times* of December 30, 1830, when she was a student at the Hartford Female Seminary. That article states:

The main and principal thing which constitutes a good man is a sincere aim and intention to do right. Nothing can supply the place of this, and with it a man has all the ingredients of virtue and righteousness. It is the pivot upon which every thing turns, and a man is valuable and worthy of confidence and esteem, just in proportion as he is governed by a sincere desire to do right.

As with "The Model Husband," the article enumerates qualities that are necessary to a man's "virtue and righteousness"; they are sincerity and the intention to do the right thing. A principal difference is that the *Times* article is serious, and "The Model Husband" is humorous and satirical. However, both articles are written from the point of view of women evaluating men. Though considerably longer, "The Model Husband" is similar in that it enumerates (and illustrates) the qualities and behaviors of a good husband. As Norris writes in his introduction to the article, "As the following account of a 'Model Husband,' is from a lady in good position in society, we can but suppose her model husband is the true style of a husband, and what all good married men should be." The first half of the article reads:



His pocket-book is never empty when his wife calls for money. He sits up in bed, at night, feeding Thomas Jefferson Smith with a pap spoon while his wife takes a comfortable nap and dreams of the new shawl she means to buy at Warren's the next day. As "one good turn deserves another," he is allowed to hold Tommy *again* before breakfast, while Mrs. Smith curls her hair. He never makes any complaints about the soft molasses gingerbread that is rubbed into his hair, coat, and vest, during these happy, conjugal seasons. He always laces on his wife's boots, lest the exertion should make her too red in the face before going out to promenade Washington street. He never calls any woman "*pretty*," before Mrs. Smith. He never makes absurd objections to her receiving bouquets, or the last novel, from Captain this, or Lieutenant that. He don't set his teeth and stride down to the store like a victim, every time his wife presents him with another little Smith. He gives the *female* Smiths French gaiter-boots, parasols, and silk dresses without stint, and the boys, new jackets, pop guns, velocipedes and crackers, without any questions asked. He never breaks the seal of any of his wife's billet doux, or peeps over her shoulder while she is answering the same. He never holds the drippings of the umbrella over her new bonnet while his last new hat is innocent of a rain-drop. He never complains when he is late home to dinner, though the little Smiths have left him nothing but bones and crusts. . . .

The article was signed "Clara." Clearly the 1830 and 1851 articles have significant differences. The first may be the thoughts of a schoolgirl (or schoolgirls in conversation) trying to understand what makes a good man, and by extension a good husband. The second is a series of domestic scenes, without a conventional narrative, written by a woman who had been married twice and was a mother.



Reading the 1851 article with Norris's instructions on writing for a newspaper in mind, one sees that Willis's writing conforms to these instructions. Her rhetorical purpose—satirizing men in general and husbands in general – is maintained throughout the article. She writes in common speech, using familiar words and a common sayings, “one good turn deserves another”; yet her vocabulary is that of an educated woman who might use the French phrase “billet doux” for effect. She begins to make her point in the first two sentences and stays on point until the end of the article—a characteristic of her writing style that is discussed below by a close reader: her husband. She avoids circumlocution and verbosity, progressing rapidly from image to domestic image. The language of the images is vivid – a hat “innocent of a rain-drop,” a meal consisting of “nothing but bones and crusts—creating a vivid image for the reader. This element of style perfectly matches Norris's advice to “Daguerreotype your subject; and leave your reader to study the picture.” A possible explanation for the more developed writing style in the second article is Reverend Norris's editorial influence on the writer.

Willis's third husband, James Parton, provides insight (though he confuses which of her articles was published first) into the enumeration of qualities that became a characteristic of her writing style. In *Fanny Fern, a Memorial Volume* (1873), Parton describes the emergence of the characteristic style as a sudden event that followed a period of introspection:

Gradually . . . the resolve formed itself in her mind to step beyond the confines of her family of editors, and throw herself upon the great world of journalism. *She struck out, also, a new kind of composition—short, pointed paragraphs, without beginning and without end—one clear, ringing note, and then silence.* (51, emphasis mine)



Parton recalls that the financially desperate Willis “dashed upon paper, in ten minutes” the first of her articles in the form he describes, calling it “The Model Minister.” The style is recursive: for the entire twenty-one lines of the article, Willis circles back to the same sentence by her use of semi-colons and dashes, giving the article a single focus – in keeping with Norris’s advice to know what you want to say and get to the point:

He never exchanges—is not particular whether he occupies a four-story house or a ten-footer for a parsonage—considers “donation parties” an invention of the adversary—preaches round and round the commandments in such a circular way as to not hit the peculiarities of any of his parishioners—selects the hymn to suit the singing of the choir instead of himself—never forgets, when excited in debate, that pulpit cushions are expensive articles—visits all his people once a month, and receives their visits whenever they choose to inflict them—brings forth things “new and old” every Sunday, more particularly new—knows by intuition, at a funeral, the state of mind of every distant relative of the deceased, and always hits the right nail on the head in his prayers—when he baptizes a girl baby, never afflicts the anxious mother by pronouncing Luisa, Luizy—frowns upon all attempts to get him a new cloak. . . (qtd. in James Parton 51-52).

According to Parton, “The Model Minister” was the first article that Willis sold to an editor (in Parton’s recollection, the editor of a family publication named *The Mother’s Assistant*). In a footnote to her biography of Fern, Warren questions Parton’s information, pointing out that “The Model Minister” appeared in the *Olive Branch* on April 24, 1852, seven months after Sara Willis began using her pseudonym (328n3). Indeed, when Parton reproduces the text of “The Model Minister” in the



*Memorial Volume*, he includes the signature line “Fanny Fern.” Supporting Parton’s account of the first publication is a letter from Fern to Horace Greeley in which she writes that her first article appeared in “a one-horse religious magazine in Boston, called *The Mother’s Assistant* or some such name” (qtd. in Warren 328n3). However, I tend to agree with Warren’s explanation that Parton confused “The Model Minister” with “The Model Husband,” which was Willis’s first publication in the *Olive Branch* in June 1851. Definitive identification of the first article is not available (Warren 328-329n3-4). I agree with Warren’s evidence that “The Model Minister” was Willis’s first published article in 1851.

Though Willis was seven weeks away from adopting the pseudonym Fanny Fern, her second article in the *Olive Branch*, “Thoughts on Dress,” is an example of the style of writing Warren had in mind when she cited a primary reason for Fern’s rapid rise to celebrity:

Although Fern’s articles in the *Olive Branch* and *True Flag* were sometimes tender and/or somber (and there were more of these early in her career, reflecting her life at the time), for the most part her articles were witty and sometimes outrageous. Reading through the periodicals of the time, it is easy to see why Fanny Fern quickly became so famous. Her articles stand out; they sparkle among the dust of convention and artificiality. Her brusque tone and candid air give the impression that she is saying exactly what she thinks—regardless. (99)

In “Thoughts on Dress,” which appeared in the July 19 edition, Willis’s authorial voice sounds more assured, and her satire of men is more pointed than the gentle prodding of “The Model Husband.” The time between the two publications was three weeks—more than enough time for Willis to have written the second article especially for the *Olive Branch*. It is worth keeping in mind that Willis’s



first article was reprinted the day after its appearance by “a prominent Boston paper” (Warren 92)—another boost to the author’s confidence. By framing “Thoughts on Dress” as “thoughts [that] suggested themselves to me, in Church last Sunday,” Willis gives the article a sense of her eagerness to make fun of men’s fashion in response to their stir about women’s dress. Employing a device that establishes the article’s directness in speaking truth to a man in power, she addresses the article to the editor:

*Mr. Editor,* While the gentlemen are making such a parade and fuss about ladies' dress, Bloomerism, and the like, I who, for one, still reside in petticoats, beg leave to enquire, if a cravat or handkerchief, doubled and twisted round a gentleman's neck, this hot weather, tight enough too (ye railers at corsets) to stop the circulation, is a whit more reasonable than dresses lined with whalebone at the waist? I would also humbly submit to their consideration, whether a dickey, starched stiff enough to cut the flesh under the ears, is *altogether* comfortable?

These thoughts suggested themselves to me, in Church last Sunday, as such thoughts sometimes will, spite of pulpit, parson or preaching, and without previous preparation, as I witnessed the vain attempts of a young man in the pew before me, to get his head in a comfortable position to look over the top of his dickey and see the singers, without cutting his ears off! . . .

Then I read the following paragraph in one of the newspapers the other day: "A gentleman informs us that out of one hundred young ladies he met in the street to-day, ninety-nine were sucking the handles of their parasols." Crusty old Benedict! Did you ever see a man that could live a minute (except he was in bed) without a cane? And did



you ever see one, unless his head was white with age and he needed it for its legitimate use, that wasn't whipping his boots with it, or rubbing it against his lips? Take the mote out of you own eye, brother Benedict, before you meddle with the sisters. . . .

The article was signed “Tabitha,” as were three more of Willis’s articles before she settled on the pseudonym Fanny Fern.

From my reading of Reverend Norris’s advice to contributors and Sara Willis’s early columns, I argue that the editor’s guidelines for newspaper writing had a demonstrable effect on Willis as a writer. Her writing outgrew the “pathetic” quality that her brother N. P. Willis described in his letter, and made increasing use of Sara Willis’s gifts for humor and satire. As in her “Thoughts on Dress,” Willis described the male characters that she lampooned in greater detail, following Norris’s succinct instruction to “Daguerreotype your subject; and leave your reader to study the picture.”

### **Robert Bonner**

Fanny Fern’s most enduring and successful professional relationship by far was with Robert Bonner, editor of the New York *Ledger*. According to Warren’s article “Uncommon Discourse: Fanny Fern and the New York *Ledger*,” Bonner and Fern enjoyed an ideal editor-writer relationship. Warren writes, “Throughout her sixteen year career with the *Ledger*, the relationship . . . was one of mutual respect and admiration. Both privately and publicly Fern made it clear that she thought highly of Bonner and his paper” (56). When Bonner bought the *Ledger* in 1851, it was, as the name suggests, a business paper—a weekly with a small circulation. As owner and publisher, Bonner lowered its price to three cents, dispensed with all advertising, and sought writing that would be suitable for families (57-58). Warren writes:



[He] resisted the blandness imposed on other papers by conventional piety, while refusing to pander to the public's taste in prurient violence and pornography. The key was variety: the *Ledger* would have something for everyone – poetry, politics, social commentary, sensational novels, literature, [and] commerce. . . . . Finally, the most important feature of the *Ledger* was that it printed only signed, original material . . .

(58)

Bonner believed that the last practice—uncommon in an age of reprinting—would attract readers in a newspaper business that published anonymous reviews and, before international copyright law, borrowed material freely from English newspapers. He also was convinced that well-known authors would draw readers. When negotiating a contract with Fern in early 1855 (the year *Ruth Hall* was published), he was willing to raise his offer from twenty-five dollars a column to one hundred dollars a column—an unprecedented amount (55).

Warren speculates that, “Impressed by his pluck and determination, Fern accepted the offer and agreed to write a serialized story” (145). The story, “Fanny Ford,” ran for several weeks beginning June 9, 1855 and made Fern “the mostly highly paid newspaper writer of her time” (146). Warren describes Bonner’s hyperbolic promotion of Fern and her “spirited, lively, dashing, unrivalled sketches” that began to run in the *Ledger* on January 5, 1856. Encouraged by the success of the “Fanny Ford” serialization, Bonner negotiated exclusive contracts with two of the most popular adventure novelists of the day, E. D. E. N. Southworth and Sylvanus Cobb, Jr. Southworth’s work appeared in newspapers and story journals from 1846; her best known work, *The Hidden Hand, or Capitola the Madcap*, appeared as a serial in the *Ledger* in 1859 (Dotson xi-xii). Because of Bonner’s



high rates of compensation and respectful relationships with his writers, Fern and the others “staunchly refused to be lured away by higher pay” (Warren 148).

Beyond Warren’s claim that Bonner’s “pluck and determination” impressed Fern, the questions arises whether Bonner’s financial power in relation to Fern might have influenced her choice of subjects, and how she treated certain subjects. In arguing that it did not, Warren writes “Bonner’s principal credo . . . was to leave his writers alone” (*Periodical Literature* 60). However, a letter from Bonner to Fern dated January 10, 1868 links her choice of subjects to payments. Bonner wrote the letter on the anniversary of Fern’s having written for the *Ledger* for fourteen years, enclosing a check. Quoted by Fern’s third husband, James Parton, in *Fanny Fern, a Memorial Volume*, Bonner’s letter encouraged Fern to write short items, perhaps two or three sentences in length:

. . . I enclose a check as a present to you to remind you of the event; no, not exactly as a present . . . but as compensation for some anonymous paragraphs which I want you to write for the *Ledger* whenever you may feel like it. You must frequently see a paragraph or a sentence in the papers on which you would like to make a few lines of comment anonymously—particularly if the subject happens to be about husbands, wives, mothers, girls, or babies. (qtd. in Parton 65-66)

Referring to Fern’s earlier, similar contributions, Bonner writes that “sometimes they were exceedingly bright and happy,” perhaps suggesting that future such items should be happy as well. Continuing to express his appreciation, and perhaps to reinforce the nature of Fern’s contributions, Bonner sent Fern a check every January from 1868 forward. Bonner’s use of the word “bright” in his



letter to describe the items is interesting; in late twentieth-century newsrooms, such upbeat, stand-alone items were called “brights” and used to lighten up the matter-of-fact tone of most front pages.

The January 1868 letter also demonstrates Bonner’s ability to influence on the subject matter of Fern’s writings. In the letter, he suggests that Fern will want to comment on news items “particularly if the subject happens to be about husbands, wives, mothers, girls, or babies”—all domestic topics. In her biography, Warren writes that Fern was free to write about any subject she chose, yet with an implied restraint because “Fern was also aware that Bonner expected her to remain within certain unspoken boundaries, which she herself knew it would not be politic to overstep” (65). There is an obvious contradiction between “free to write about any subject” and “certain unspoken boundaries” that is worth considering from an ideological perspective.

The presence of “certain unspoken boundaries” calls to mind Foucault’s description of the regulating function of discourse:

In a society such as our own we all know the rules of exclusion. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. (215).

Such prohibitions would be applicable to a popular columnist such as Fanny Fern, who wrote primarily on domestic subjects. In fact, Warren describes Bonner as “very moralistic,” placing unspoken boundaries around moral issues. For example, while permitting Fern to write in a sympathetic way about prostitutes because it reflected her sympathy for other women, he would not have tolerated her advocating sexual freedom. Warren writes, “If Fern had advocated for free love or adultery, he undoubtedly would not have renewed her contract” (66). The subject matter that a



“moral” editor such as Bonner saw as his responsibility to keep out of the newspaper—thus regulating discourse—matches subject areas that Foucault specifies as rejected by a “complex web” of prohibitions. Foucault writes that “the areas where this web is most tightly woven today, where the danger spots are most numerous, are those dealing with politics and sexuality” (216).

Bonner’s primary agency in relation to Fern was as her editorial gatekeeper. He recruited her to his newspaper and helped to make her a journalistic star. In the competition for literary celebrity, Fern may have entered the starting gate writing for the *Olive Branch* and *True Flag*, but it was Bonner who opened the gate by signing her to a contract and letting her run. The equine metaphor is Fern’s. In 1868, Fern dedicated *Folly as It Flies: Hit At* this way:

To My Friend Robert Bonner, Editor of the New York Ledger.

For fourteen years, the team of Bonner and Fern, has trotted over the road at a 2.40 pace, without a snap of the harness, or a hitch of the wheels.—

Plenty of oats, and a skillful rein, the secret.

In her dedication, Fern makes explicit that she and Bonner functioned as a team, with the editor applying “a skillful rein” to his prized columnist. In the discourse of today, the “skillful rein” could be interpreted to represent ideological taboos and other restraints.

### **Fanny Fern’s Books**

Close reading of columns, articles, and stories collected in Fanny Fern’s books shows her increasing comfort with the media of newspapers and books, and the ongoing use of comments on news items as a means of writing some of her articles. Over the years, she became immersed in the media as a personality as well as a prolific contributor to newspapers and frequent author of books.



However, in the preface to *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, published in 1853, she represents herself an accidental author:

I never had the slightest intention of writing a book. Had such a thought entered my mind, I should not long have entertained it. It would have seemed presumptuous.

What! I, *Fanny Fern*, write a book? I never could have believed it possible.

How, then, came the book to be written? some one may ask. Well, that's just what puzzles *me*. I can only answer in the dialect of the immortal "Topsy," "I 'spect it growed!" And, such as it is, it must go forth; for "what is written is written," and—stereotyped.

Whether her self-representation is accurate or ingenuous is a matter of interpretation. As with many other authors, she appears to have served a literary apprenticeship, beginning with her editorial work for her father's publications. Perhaps the culture she came to adulthood in did not permit her to express the ambition that she would later express in one of her columns: to become an editor. What is clear from her collected columns is that she continued to develop as a writer.

The story "Cecile Gray" (69) is the first example in the anthology of what would become a recurring device in Fern's journalistic pieces. To set the tone for the tragic event that follows, Fern precedes the story with two lines of sentimental poetry: "Alas, for Love! If this be all, / And naught beyond; o earth!" The narrative begins with the birth of a baby girl to a family whose previous children are boys:

"'T is a girl, sir; my lady has a daughter."

"Heaven be praised!" said the discontented father of six unruly boys. "Now I shall have something gentle to love. . . ."



[On her eighteenth birthday, looking “beautiful as a dream” to her idolizing father, Cecile faints at her party and dies the next day.]

In that still gray dawn, at sultry noon, in the hushed and starry night, long after that bright young head was covered with the violets, rang that plaintive, reproachful voice in the parental ear, “You never taught me how to die.”

In the volume’s next story, “Childhood’s Trust,” Fern begins:

“‘I asked God to take care of Johnny, and then I went to sleep,’ said a little boy, giving an account of his wandering in the wood.”

How sublime! how touching! Holy childhood! Let me sit at thy feet and learn of thee. How dost thou rebuke me, with thy simple fate and earnest love! (74)

The sentiment present in these stories suggest that N. P. Willis’s critical appraisal of his sister’s writing samples as sentimental and “pathetic” were not as misplaced as Warren suggests.

Beginning with the column “The Wail of a Broken Heart,” Fern employs a device that is to become one of the characteristic techniques of her journalistic writing: she establishes the theme of the column, article, or story with an introductory quotation above the article’s first paragraph. In the article itself, she responds to the quotations. For example, preceding the body copy of “The Wail of Broken Heart” is the familiar quotation “‘T is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all” (81). The author’s copy begins with a heartfelt rebuttal of the quotation: “O, No; no!—else you have never passed from the shield of a broad, true breast, where for long years you had been lovingly folded, to a widow’s weeds, and the rude jostling and curious gaze, of the heartless crowd!” In a similar manner she precedes the column “A Talk about Babies” with the unattributed quotation: “Baby carts on narrow sidewalks are awful bores, especially to a harried business man” (89). Once



again her column begins with a challenge to the quotation's validity: "Are they? Suppose you, and a certain pair of blue eyes, that you would give half your patrimony to win, were joint proprietors of that baby? I shouldn't dare to stand very near to you, and call it a 'nuisance.'" This stylistic device is a small but important step in Fern's development as a newspaper columnist. It is the recurrence of this device—and an encouragement to use it more often, even in brief items—to which Bonner refers in his letter of January 10, 1868:

You must frequently see a paragraph or a sentence in the papers on which you would like to make a few lines of comment anonymously—particularly if the subject happens to be about husbands, wives, mothers, girls, or babies. (qtd. in Parton 65-66)

Quotations that were, or appeared to be, taken from the news gave her columns a sense of currency. The quotes also served as prompts to which she could respond. Walker notes, "Fanny Fern's columns are frequently responses to contemporary news items, and prefigure a similar technique used . . . in the early twentieth century. . . . In more than one of these columns, Fanny Fern extends the dialogic nature of the informal newspaper piece by responding to an item in which she herself has been quoted" (36). However, Walker fails to note that Bonner may have had a hand in Fern's habitual use of this technique.

In the first two collections of her journalistic writings in book form—*Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio* and *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio, Second Series*—one can see Fern grow as a writer using techniques such as the introductory quotation. Biographer Nancy Walker discusses this progress in terms looking toward the development of newspaper and magazine columns:



Several techniques and approaches that appear in the first volume of *Fern Leaves* are used more frequently in *Fern Leaves*, Second Series. These became established trademarks of the “Fern Leaves” columns—of Fanny Fern’s distinctive style—and some of them prefigure the characteristics of twentieth-century newspaper and magazine columnists. One of these devices is the column as a response to a statement made by another writer—frequently an anonymous statement. The quoted statement, set as an epigraph, serves as a springboard for Fanny Fern’s views on the same subject, *enabling her to enter into a kind of public debate on matters of manners or morality.*

(35, emphasis mine)

The handsome matching books (the first with a blue cover, the second with a red cover, both with gold gilt, and both 400 pages long) appeared only six months apart. In that brief time, Sara Willis had internalized the persona of Fanny Fern, often referring to herself in the third person as a celebrity might. She had become, in fact, a celebrity.

In the second volume, Fern more often used the device of beginning her columns with a quote and responding to it; and she expanded the range of the quotes. An example of Fern responding to a news item can be found in the column “Curious Things” (48), which begins with this item:

“CURIOUS: The exaggerated anxiety of wives to see the women who were formerly loved by their husbands. – *Exchange*.” In the column itself, Fern satirizes the anxiety of husbands about men whom their wives formerly loved. An example of responding to an unattributed quotation is “The Other Sex,” which plays off the quote “Let cynics prattle as they may, our existence here, without the presence of the other sex, would only be a dark and cheerless void.” In her column, Fern asks:



Which other sex? Don't be so obscure. . . . If you allude to the female sex, I don't subscribe to it.

[Ferns gives examples of female friendship]

Oh, there never should be but one woman alive at a time. Then the fighting would be all where it belonged – in the masculine camp. (61)

Continuing her discussion of the “battle of the sexes, Fern begins “Who Would Be the Last Man?” with a quotation from a writer who responded to “The Other Sex”: “Fanny Fern says, ‘If there were but one woman in the world, the men would have a terrible time. Fanny is right; but we would ask her what kind of a time the *women* would have if there were but *one man* in existence?’” Fern responds in the body of her column, “Oh, there never should be but one woman alive at a time. Then the fighting would be all where it belonged—in the masculine camp” (95). Preceding the column “A Model Husband” [a different column from “*The Model Husband*’] is an unattributed news item: “Mrs. Perry, a young Bloomer, has eloped from Monson, Massachusetts, with Levins Clough. When her husband found she was determined to go, he gave her one hundred dollars to start with” (116). Fern uses the vernacular to begin “How Is It?” with this bit of dialogue: “Well, Susan, what do you think of married ladies being happy?” “Why I think there are more AIN’T than IS, than IS that AIN’T” (118). I note that the dialogue resembles one of the brief items I identified above as a possible Sara Willis contribution to the *Hartford Times*: “Why are the females of the present day, like the lily in the Scriptures? ‘Because they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all glory, was not arrayed like one of these.’” Even though traces of her early style might still appear, one can see in these writings Fern’s progress from a writer of bathetic stories to her more assertive, satiric voice as a columnist. Some of this impression may be a product of the sequencing of the stories and columns in the



collections, yet one can see in the early writings why her brother N. P. Willis might have thought his sister Sara's early work to have limited possibilities in the New York City market: "Your writings show talent, but they are in a style that would only do in Boston" (qtd. in Warren 93). Consequently one might speculate that Sara Willis's writing turned away from the bathetic after the critical letter from her brother, and that she reinvented her writer self in the persona of Fanny Fern.

Her writing style continues to evolve after the first two volumes of *Fern Leaves*. In the smaller (both in format dimensions and page length) *Fresh Leaves*, published in 1857 in a plain blue cover, Fern moves away from the device of using sayings and quotations to begin her columns. By the publication of *Folly as It Flies; Hit At* (1868) and *Ginger Snaps* (1870), she has found a direct, confident voice. One manifestation of this confident voice is her incorporating the writings of others into the texts of her own work, rather than using these bits of writing from outside sources as prompts. An example of this is the opening of "Discourse upon Husbands," which appears in *Folly as It Flies*:

I wish every husband would copy into his memorandum book this sentence, from a recently published work: "*Women must be constituted very differently from men. A word said, a line written, and we are happy; omitted, our hearts ache as if for a great misfortune. Men cannot feel it, or guess at it; if they did, the most careless of them would be slow to wound us so.*"

The grave hides many a heart which has been stung to death . . . [because a man] was deaf, dumb, and blind to truth in the sentence we have just quoted . . . (11)

The flow between her writing and the included quotation is more seamless than in previous writings.

In "The Working Girls of New York," also in *Folly as It Flies*, there is evidence that Fern's social satire is in the process of turning toward social criticism. (219)



Nowhere but in New York does the contest between squalor and splendor so sharply present itself. . . . Particularly is this noticeable with regard to its women. Jostling the same pavement with the dainty fashionist is the care-worn working-girl. Looking at both these women, the questions arises, which leads the more miserable life . . . (219)

This element of social criticism extends, in “Children Have Their Rights,” to a defense of the rights of the young:

There is not a day in my life at which I am not vexed at the injustice done to children. . . . The other day I was sitting in a car, and a nice, well-behaved boy of ten years took his seat and paid his fare. Directly after, in came the conductor, and without a word of comment coolly took him by the shoulder and placed him on his feet, and then motioned a lady to his vacant seat. Why not *ask* the child, at least? (232-233)

Published in *Ginger Snaps* in 1870, “A Bid for an Editorship” is a combination of social satire and making the case for gender equality in the male-dominated newspaper business:

I think I should like to be an editor, if somebody would do all the disagreeable, hard word for me, and leave me only the fancy touches. I don’t know how profound my political articles would be, but they would be *mine*. I think my book reviews would be pleasant reading, at least to everybody but some of the authors. I should have a high railing around my editorial desk, and “through the lattice” microscopically and leisurely regard the row of expectant men outside waiting for a hearing. I should not need a spittoon in my office. . . .

If anybody sued me for libel, I’d—I’d whine out, “Ain’t you ashamed to annoy a female? Why don’t you strike one of your own size?” I should insist on being treated



with the deference due to a woman, though in all respects I should demand the untrammelled-seven-league-boots-freedom of a man. (60)

Fern might have been expressing a gendered limitation to her own career: that if she were a man, she would have been able to become an editor like her mentor, Robert Bonner.

Fern received editorial advice on her writing from her childhood well into her maturity. Such advice, whether from her father or Gideon Welles, would demonstrate the agency of the editors and possible traces of influence on the author. Benefiting from the editorial advice of Reverend Norris, Fern began to develop a recognizable literary style, as evidenced by the response to her early columns in the *Olive Branch* and *True Flag*. Achieving financial security through the agency of Robert Bonner in the form of a lucrative contract, she enjoyed the luxury of being able to continue to develop her style over time and cautiously expand the range of topics she wrote about, as I demonstrate in these selections from her books of columns. At the same time, Bonner's gatekeeper and ideological roles placed boundaries around her choice of subjects that were only partially overcome because of changes in society during her career.

In her biography *Fanny Fern*, Nancy Walker observes:

As immigration and industrialization began to create distinct urban centers in the Northeast, there was much to remark in the contrast between rich and poor, the simple and the pretentious, the transient life of hotels and boardinghouses and the permanence of great houses. The society that Fanny describes in these essays is one still in transition from frontier to settled metropolis; ladies' skirts get muddy in unpaved streets, and there are no social services to see to the needs of homeless children, but the



“cult of gentility” affects the buying habits of a growing middle class that years to be fashionable. (37)

Coincident with Fern’s career as a columnist, these powerful demographic trends explain why the writer began to devote columns to divisions and class distinctions in addition to her customary focus on women and men, wives and husbands, and women, and babies.

### **Journalistic Influences on *Ruth Hall***

Fanny Fern’s early and later experience in the newspaper business influenced the writing style of her canonical novel. According to Warren in the introduction to *Ruth Hall*, “an important aspect of Fanny Fern’s style is its terseness. The novel is written in a brisk, off-hand style, which includes the vernacular when necessary, and except in the early sections, seldom reaches for effect” (xxix). Warren expresses reservations about Fern’s style, acknowledging that it has its origin in her journalism. “At times . . . the novel, with its short chapters and lack of transition between them, seems to carry terseness too far. Fern won fame for her short newspaper sketches, and at first glance the novel seems to be simply a succession of independent sketches” (xxix). Yet Warren believes that the style has narrative utility: “Once one understands Fern’s method, however, one can see that the short chapters and lack of transition clearly contribute to the effectiveness of the novel” (xxix). Warren argues that Fern’s abrupt chapter breaks make possible “the constant shifts in tone which are so important in the first part of the book . . .” She concludes that the device of writing “several seemingly unrelated chapters presented in rapid succession” enables the author to “provide different aspects of the same point”—such as how chapters 35 to 51 provide several different glimpses of the ways in which Ruth is treated when she becomes a widow (xxix). I agree with Warren that narrative sketches similar to newspaper columns are useful, yet suggest that their utility has more to do with accessibility of the



novel than a deliberate strategy of presenting different aspects of the same point. From her newspaper writing, Fern had become accustomed to focusing exclusively on one point in each column—thus the short chapters and lack of transitions.

Chapters 56 through 62 in *Ruth Hall* are not only the turning point of the plot, but also revealing in regard to Fern's early impressions of editors. In Chapter 56, Ruth receives her brother Hyacinth Ellet's reply to her request for his opinion of her writing and possible help in making a start as a professional writer. In the novel, the letter is shorter and more negative in tone than its real-life counterpart:

I have looked over the papers you sent me, Ruth. It is very evident that writing can never be *your* forte; you have no talent that way. You may possibly be employed by some inferior newspapers, but be assured your articles never will be heard of out of your own little provincial city. For myself, I have plenty of contributors, nor do I know of any of my literary acquaintances who would employ you. I would advise you, therefore, to seek some *unobtrusive* employment. (116)

Though upset by Hyacinth's insensitive response, Ruth becomes more determined to carry out her plan to write for newspapers. She vows that "Hyacinth shall yet be proud to claim *his sister*." Further motivated by her mother-in-law's plot to take custody of her daughter Katy, and her father's apparent complicity, Fern's fictional counterpart knocks on the doors of three editors without success. The second editor wears "a white neck-cloth and green spectacles"—the professional garb of an editor—while the third is another "white neck-clothed gentleman" whose manner resembles that of a minister. He turns away Ruth because she is not of the same religious denomination (121).



The subtext of these encounters positions Ruth in opposition to an all-male world of editors, starting with her brother. One can speculate that the most religious of the editors is based on the Norris. Warren's account of Ruth's first interactions with editors suggests similarities: "She was subjected to an inquisition of personal questions under which she writhed painfully . . ." (Warren 92). The religious editor in the novel, who stutters, asks Ruth if she is a religious woman. When she responds "I endeavor to become so," he demands to know "what sect?"—personal questions indeed. In what I think is overstatement, Warren chooses words, such as "inquisition" and "writhing painfully," that recall discourse about the Inquisition conducted by Catholic priests in Spain. There is a considerable difference between discomfort felt during an employment interview and "writhing painfully" under torture. In this regard, the connotations of Warren's word choices exceed those of the language used in the novel—a point to which I will return in reference to Warren's biography.

Reverend Norris bought Fern's article "Model Husband" for fifty cents, and published six additional articles. Warren reports that "He said she would be paid after the article appeared in print" (92). Payment of freelance writers upon publication is a common practice among editors of newspapers and magazines, yet is portrayed in *Ruth Hall* as withholding needed cash from the writer:

The remuneration was not what Ruth had hoped, but it was at least a *beginning*, a stepping-stone. What a pity that Mr. Lescom's (the editor's) rule was, not to pay a contributor, even after a piece was accepted, until it was printed—and Ruth so short of funds. Could she hold out to work so hard, and fare so rigidly? for often there was only a crust left at night; but, God be thanked, she should now *earn* that crust! (125)

In Chapter 64, Fern portrays Lescom more humanely as he tells Ruth that her article has been reprinted in another paper—a sure sign of success. Fern writes of his good humor, "mischievous



smile,” “mirthful mood,” and “beaming smiles” (110). Ruth is resistant to his show of good nature, wondering “whether *she* ought not to profit by it as well as himself, and whether she should not ask him to increase her pay” (131). I have great respect for Warren’s definitive recovery of Fanny Fern as a canonical author, yet in my study, wish to add perspectives that a primarily feminist reading of Fern may leave out: in particular, the contributions to the success of Fern’s career that male editors made in their roles as gatekeepers and editorial advisers.

Fern wrote the novel in the manner that she had learned how to write as a newspaper columnist—what Warren calls in her introduction to *Ruth Hall* “a succession of independent sketches” (xxix). One explanation for the more rapid progress of the second part of the book may be that Fern signed a contract to deliver a 400-page novel to her publishers when she was used to writing columns measured in the hundreds of words. She may have dealt with the additional length by writing much of the novel in the form of a series of columns—some longer, some shorter—as the individual scenes and other elements of the narrative came to her mind.

Some of the material in the last third of the novel appears to be padding, such as the letters that Fern includes in several chapters. The fact that a number of readers write to “Floy”—Ruth Hall’s pseudonym—does little to advance the narrative. Though autobiographically accurate, epistolary evidence that Floy has a wide following audience does little in the novel other than give Ruth opportunities to talk about her work. For example, in Chapter 82, the sympathetic editor Mr. Walter accompanies Ruth and her daughter Nettie to dinner at a fine hotel. In the middle of their banter, Walter realizes that he is carrying letters to Floy in his pocket. “Ruth broke the seal on one, saying ‘You’ll excuse me for a few moments,’ and read” (187). The novel’s next two pages consist almost entirely of three somewhat humorous letters to Floy: one from the secretary of an infant school, the



second from an academy student who wants Floy to write his compositions for him, and the third from a little girl whose mother has told her to write to Floy about the new baby (188-190). Perhaps their purpose is to establish the diverse composition of Floy's readership; but the sequence of letters in different voices slows down the reader.

In her preface, Fern characterizes *Ruth Hall* as something other than a novel, calling it a "continuous story" instead.

I present you with my first continuous story. I do not dignify it by the name of "A novel." I am aware that it is entirely at variance with all set rules for novel-writing. There is no intricate plot; there are no startling developments, no hair-breadth escapes. . . . I have avoided long introductions and descriptions, and have entered unceremoniously and unannounced, into people's houses, without stopping to ring the bell. (3)

This may be an appeal to reader to overlook *Ruth Hall*'s sudden transitions and occasional lack of continuity in book form. The same episodic quality appears to be a byproduct of writing for serial publication in a newspaper, and perhaps worked better in the original medium. However, the novel has a basic, yet effective plot in the form of Ruth's economic and domestic declines into poverty and misery, and rapid rise through a writing career into prosperity. The death of daughter Daisy in the ineffectual presence of two doctors, and the discovery that Mrs. Leon's corpse lies in the lunatic asylum, are startling developments. Ruth and her daughters make a "hair-breadth" escape from a burning hotel. Thus Fern's appeal serves as the conventional apology from the author, with a suggestion of insecurity about whether her first novel is a literary success.



In the early chapters, Fern does write long descriptions, such as this sentence describing Ruth and Harry's first house:

The approach to it was through a lovely winding lane, a little of the main road, skirted on either side by a thick grove of lindens and elms, where the wild grapevine leaped, clinging from branch to branch, festooning its ample clusters in prodigal profusion of fruitage, and forming a dense shade, impervious to the most garish noon-day heat . . .  
(28)

It is interesting to compare such "flowery" descriptive writing in the first part of the book with the more abrupt sentences of the second part:

Ruth had found employment. Ruth's MSS. had been accepted at the office of "The Standard." Yes, an article of hers was to be published in the very next issue. The remuneration was not what Ruth had hoped, but it was at least a *beginning*, a stepping stone. (125)

Fern appears to modify her writing style in parallel with the pace of the narrative—from fulsome descriptive writing to short, spare sentences. In the preface, she acknowledges that she deliberately limited her development of some of the material: "I have compressed into one volume what I might have expanded into two or three" (3). After the middle section of the novel slows down the novel with the inclusion of many letters from Floy's readers, Fern's writing makes a transition toward a more journalistic rhythm at the beginning and end of Chapter 76, the phrenological examination. The relative brevity continues in Chapter 77, which begins with the sentence "And now our heroine had become a regular businesswoman" – certainly a brisk statement in keeping with the accelerating pace—and continues through the conclusion of the novel.



The characteristic elements of Fern's style—short sentences, quick transitions, sarcastic observations, and matter-of-fact statements—are apparent throughout the novel, though they appear among descriptive passages, occasional lengthy dialogue, and epistolary chapters. The elements originated in the four years writing newspaper columns before Fern embarked on *Ruth Hall*. The characteristic elements in turn may have been reinforced by the publication of her early witticisms and possible compositions in the *Hartford Times*. It is reasonable to conclude that Fern's ability to write and publish her first professional newspaper column on the eve of her fortieth birthday was based on confidence gained from experience in the newspaper business acquired as a girl and young woman. The requirements of writing for newspapers contributed toward her developing a literary style in *Ruth Hall* that owes as much to the influence of her newspaper editors as it does to literary influences.

In reviewing the writing career of Fanny Fern, I seek to demonstrate the extent to which Fern, like many authors of her time, benefited from professional interactions with editors. Until this study, the circumstances of the early editorial intervention of Gideon Welles on behalf of Sara Willis have been mentioned in two of the three biographies of Fern, but the identity of Welles and Willis's editorial products that he published in the *Times* have not been explored. Similarly, Fern's biographers have mentioned her first professional employment as a freelance contributor to *Olive Branch*, yet have pushed aside the possible editorial influence of the paper's editor, Reverend Thomas F. Norris, in order to construct a narrative organized around Fern's innate talent and persistence in the face of adversity. In my section on Norris and his assistant editor, the writer Mary A. Denison, I show that Norris was in a position to influence Fern because he had formulated a set principles to guide the writing of newspaper contributors. The fact that Fern sought Norris out soon after he published "Writing for Newspapers" may be coincidental, but the fact itself and Norris's journalistic guidelines



are worth noting for their possible effects on Fern's career. Fern's biographers acknowledged the positive effect on Fern's career of a third editor, Robert Bonner, but largely in terms of financial and personal support. In this study, I explore Bonner's gatekeeper role in Fern's career, as well as the possibility that his ideological influence on Fern may have limited her choice of subjects to write about in her columns. In no way does my study intend to diminish Fern's remarkable talents and accomplishments as a writer. On the contrary, I hope that my consideration of the agency of the three editors (and a possible fourth in the person of Mary Andrews Denison) will help to clarify the engagement with the marketplace that Fern was required to make in order to negotiate a remarkably successful career in a male-dominated profession.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WHITMAN AND PENNY PRESS EDITORS

Walt Whitman's attendance at Emerson's lecture on poetry in New York City on Saturday, March 5, 1842, offers a glimpse into his thinking at a critical moment in his career. A veteran newspaperman at age twenty-two, Whitman went to the Society Library to cover the lecture for the New York *Aurora*. He was in his first weeks as editors of the paper, which was one of the relatively new "penny press" newspapers that began in 1833 with the publication of Benjamin Day's New York *Sun*. In *God in the Street*, Bergmann writes, "The *Sun*'s most important innovation was its coverage of everyday New York. Its news was the news of New York, with comparatively few commercial or political items" (21). In a period of rapid development, newspaper publishers took advantage of improvements in technology and new distribution methods to reduce the price of a newspaper from six cents to a much more affordable one or two cents. These visionary editors saw an untapped market of readers eager for news that concerned them, including the newly literate among New York City's growing immigrant population. In addition to lowering the price, editors such as Day, James Gordon Bennett, and Horace Greeley introduced a new set of news values for the writing that appeared in their newspapers. Instead of formally written accounts of politics and commerce, these editors began to cover the police court and roam the city looking for stories that concerned the common person. This was the birth of the human interest story: reports of unusual cases and eccentric behaviors in court (21-22), coverage of dramatic events such as murders, fires, and accidents (23), and accounts of activities that caught the attention of editors and reporters as they made their urban rounds. "It is specifically a walking *visit*—a middle-class field trip—to the new city created by the middle-class market society," Bergmann writes (53). "The implicit problem that starts the narrative into being is the



same one that occasioned the panoramic illustration: how can the new city be accounted for, justified, interpreted?" Though Bergmann refers here to guidebooks and panoramic illustrations of the city, his notion of *interpreting* the city is precisely the role played by newspaper editors and reporters. They interpreted the city for their readers. On the surface, that was the role that Whitman played as he wrote about Emerson's audience and lecture. Beneath the surface, his decision to attend the lecture was an external manifestation of the internal evolution that was taking place in his attitude toward his writing. While embracing the populist discourse of the penny press, Whitman wanted to listen to Emerson in order to feel connected to lecture to a discourse of American intellectual life, poetry in particular, to which he increasingly was drawn.

While critics and literary historians have analyzed Emerson's influence on Whitman, the influence of the democratic, sensationalistic news values of the penny press on his work has received less attention. Beginning March 3, 1842, Emerson delivered six lectures at the Society Library on "The Times" (*Early Lectures IIII* 347); the lecture on poetry was the second of these. Thus Whitman did not attend the opening lecture, which would be more conventionally newsworthy, or subsequent lectures in the series. He specifically chose to attend the lecture on the subject in which he was most interested. On March 7, 1842 the *Aurora* published his two-paragraph article on the event under the headline "Mr. Emerson's Lecture." The article demonstrated Whitman's editorial sense of what his readers would be interested in, rather than his personal sensibilities as a poet, reporting on the composition of the audience, caricaturing the enthusiasm of Horace Greeley, and only secondarily mentioning the lecture's subject:

The transcendentalist had a very full house on Saturday evening. There were a few beautiful maids—but more ugly women, mostly blue stockings; several interesting



young men with Byron collars; lawyers, doctors, and parsons; Grahamites and abolitionists; sage editors, a few of whom were taking notes; and all the other species of literati. Greeley was in ecstasies whenever anything particularly good was said, which seemed to be once in about five minutes—he would flounce about like a fish out of water, or like a tickled girl—look round, to see those behind him and at his side; all of which plainly told to those, both far and near, that he knew a thing or two more about these matters than other men.

This lecture was on the “Poetry of the Times.” He said that the first man who called another an ass was a poet. Because the business of the poet is expression—the giving utterance to the emotions and sentiments of the soul; and this expression or utterance is best effected by similes and metaphors. But it would do the lecturer a great injustice to attempt anything like a sketch of his ideas. Suffice it to say, the lecture was one of the richest and most beautiful compositions, both for its matter and style, we have ever heard anywhere, at any time. (44)

Considered as an anecdote, the article reveals much about the way in which Whitman saw himself, his role, and his readers on this night. Of the two-hundred-twenty-four words in his article, he devoted fifty-three to describing the audience, seventy to Horace Greeley’s reactions to Emerson’s material, and one-hundred-one to the lecture itself; thus journalistic attention to the audience in general, and Greeley in particular, occupied more than half of the article on “Mr. Emerson’s Lecture.” It is possible that Whitman lampooned of the high-culture audience to appeal to the readers; the same populist principle might apply to coverage of the lecture itself. Whitman writes that “it would do the lecturer great injustice to attempt anything like a sketch of his ideas.”



As perhaps the newest editor in New York City's intensely competitive newspaper market, Whitman perceived Greeley as representing the competition among penny press papers. At the time of the lecture, the *Aurora*'s circulation was about half the circulation of the *Tribune*, yet Reynolds writes that "[a]lthough the *Aurora*'s circulation did not vie with that of the largest penny papers, it more than held its own, achieving a sizable readership" (*Walt Whitman's America* 98). In hindsight, it is apparent that Whitman took away much more from Emerson's lecture than his article reported. First of all, he made the decision to attend the Saturday night event—not an ordinary work night—having become somewhat familiar with Emerson's ideas after reading his writings (Trowbridge, *Whitman in His Own Time* 172-174). Whitman was not disappointed by what he heard, thus concluding his *Aurora* article by writing that "the lecture was one of the richest and most beautiful compositions, both for its matter and style, we have ever heard anywhere, at any time."

### **Whitman's Universality**

A passage delivered later in Emerson's lecture introduces the subject of the poet's need to be "universal"—a quality that is characteristic of Whitman as poet *and* the news values of the penny press. Emerson said:

The universal knower and singer, he must have an universal experience. Nothing exists unrelated to him: he is covetous of sweet and bitter things, of simple and of artificial experiences. He cannot spare any grief or pain or terror: he wants every rude stroke that has been dealt on his irritable texture: he hangs out his life like an Aeolian harp in a tree, where every wind . . . may play on it. He needs his fear and his superstition as much as his purity and courage, as notes for the anthem which he is to compose. (357)



Emerson's phrase "Nothing exists unrelated to him" is analogous to Whitman's claim in the opening lines of *Leaves of Grass*: "I Celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (662). The "universality" of the penny press was a dramatic expansion of the definition of news to include police court news, human interest stories, sketches of urban life, and commonplace human behavior as well as unusual behavior. News was almost anything that penny press editors and writers thought would be interesting to their readers. I suggest that Whitman's "universality"—his sense that he is not only is self-sufficient as an individual, but representative of all men and women of his country and familiar and comfortable with all forms of human experience—includes elements of both Emerson's philosophy and the penny press's news values. In his lecture, Emerson assures his audience that a poet who can satisfy the imperative of universality will come: "The Poet shall yet arrive—the fortunate, the adapted, the timely man, whose heart domesticated in ideas sees them proclaimed in the face of the world of this Hour, in the men and women of today, and their institutions and covenants, their houses and shops . . ." (363). Critics often have noted that Whitman's 1855 book—in both its preface and the poetry—appears to be a response to Emerson's call for a distinctively American poet. In *The Solitary Singer*, Allen writes, "Many of the basic doctrines of this preface could have come straight out of Emerson's own essay 'The Poet,' and possibly they did" (155). We know for certain, however, that Whitman heard Emerson's description of the "universal" poet at the New York City lecture

One might wonder how a Harvard-educated minister came to exert an influence on a New York newspaper editor with little education. The connection between the two may have come about *because* of their differences in education and social class, as well as their similarities as visionary



writers and nonconformists. In *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed*, Joel Porte ruminates on this “opposites attract” explanation from the point of view of Emerson:

Perhaps it was the weight of an increasingly deadly and deadening classical curriculum that forced the national muse to seek non-academic lovers. It is a matter of curious interest that many of the great names in the nineteenth-century American literary record have either scanty or no formal collegiate education—Whitman, finally, standing for the egregious extreme of autodidacticism. (82)

Porte’s observation that Whitman’s habit of learning was autodidactic is crucial to understanding Whitman’s receptiveness to influence that I will return to in the conclusion of this chapter. In 1842, Whitman’s attendance at Emerson’s lecture constituted an important piece of his higher education; over time, he would incorporate several key messages in Emerson’s talk into his own philosophy and poetry. This absorption and consolidation of ideas was characteristic of Whitman. Allen notes in *The Solitary Singer*, “it is interesting to observe, as always with Whitman, the merging of his own self-consciousness, his literary ambitions, and his philosophical abstractions” (155). In return, Whitman’s emulation of Emerson, demonstrated in the preface to *Leaves of Grass* as well as its poetry, would be flattering to the “national muse.”

During the 1830s and 1840s, Whitman was in the process of making a transition from an information-based writer to an imaginative writer, blurring boundaries in both directions. His reworking of information first written about in his newspaper articles became an important element of his poetry. Building on Fishkin’s identification of continuities between Whitman’s journalism and his poetry, I propose that Whitman’s pronounced sense of personal universality probably derived from the influence of both the penny press and Emerson. The idea of the universal value of human experience



was advanced in news reporting by the penny press (1833), soon after was called for as a requirement for a national poet by Emerson (1842), and put into practice by Whitman in 1855 with the publication of *Leaves of Grass*. Both the penny press and Emerson exerted this ideological influence on Whitman. The emergence of a sense of personal universality coincided with the United States' growing self-awareness as a democratic country—an historical development leading to the election in 1832 of an ideologically democratic president, Andrew Jackson. Building on the work of Reynolds in *Walt Whitman's America* and *Beneath the American Renaissance*, I argue that newsgathering practices and news values, which changed considerably from 1833 onward (for example, shifting from political reports and notices to articles on personal, unusual, and sensational occurrences), had a profound effect on Whitman's sense of what was suitable subject matter for poetry. In addition, Whitman's posture when he became a poet—that of a loafer or rough—was the result of various styles of self-representation he was exposed to, and experimented with, while working in New York City as a newspaper editor among other editors, and as a bohemian personality spending his free time with more casual men and women and other bohemians.

Herbert Bergman, editor of *Walt Whitman, the Journalism*, suggests wider implications of the correspondences between Whitman's journalism and poetry. He writes,

Whitman's extensive journalistic experience helped make him the poet of *Leaves of Grass*: it helped give him a distinctively American perspective, a humanitarian view, an acute social sense, a concern for the individual and his or her rights, and a representative, all-embracing, cosmic outlook. Whitman's journalistic years helped to make him the "I" of *Leaves of Grass*, helped make him a poetic teacher-reformer,



helped make him the poet-prophet of Democracy. If it had not been for his journalistic years, Whitman would not have become *the* Whitman of *Leaves of Grass*. (lxx)

I add to Bergman's observation that innovations in news values by the penny press, shifting focus from political and commercial information valued by the elite to democratic forms of content that emphasized the personal (Dominick 83), contributed to Whitman's perception that, as one individual, he could experience all life in the United States and bear witness to the country's history. Contributing to Whitman's perception were his proximity to historical personages and events as a boy, his deep sense of occupying a central place in the worlds he knew (whether Brooklyn, Long Island, or Manhattan), his intense feeling of connection to his fellow residents of the New York City and the United States, and the historical period in which grew up, filled with the manifestations of democracy: a growing, diverse population, increasing literacy, and the 1832 election of Andrew Jackson. Seeing Jackson during his post-election tour of the northeast was one of Whitman's abiding memories. He may not have thought it unusual to see the President of the United States in person. Whitman projected his sense of personal universality onto his poetry: in the preface to the 1855 edition, he describes himself as "commensurate with a people" (618) and "a seer" (621); in the poem that came to be titled "Song of Myself" (1881), he refers to himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (680).

The passage of time and successive editions of *Leaves of Grass*—along with increasing public awareness of Whitman as a singularly American poet—appear to have had the effect of validating Whitman's view of himself as a representative person. In his introduction to *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, Michael Moon writes that the strength of Whitman's identification with the people of the United States was the core of his creative energy for decades: "He had to wait upon the event, and



in this case, the event was the whole life of the nation. So Whitman was surely justified in insisting upon identifying the growth of his *Leaves* with the growth of his country” (Moon xxvii). The redefinition of news from political events and debates to the lives and experiences of the individual helped Whitman to form this bond with the people. The democratization of news prompted Whitman to feel—first as a reporter, then as an editor—that his profession gave him permission to attend public and private events, walk along streets and through neighborhoods, observe his fellow citizens at work and play, and document whatever came to his attention as worthy of publication. In twentieth-century journalism, this perceived license to step over social boundaries would become linked to the self-definition of a journalist as the agent of “the public’s right to know.”

### **Whitman at the Center**

Whitman’s proximity to historical figures and events nurtured his sense that he was a witness to history, able to observe people and events at important times in the life of a young nation. His boyhood cultivated a sense of history through elements of the personal, unusual, and sometimes sensational—all good fits with criteria valued by the penny press of his young manhood. Biographer Gay Wilson Allen writes, “Wherever there was a crowd and excitement young Walt was likely to be found.” There were many such occasions, both celebratory and sad. Several times as a boy, he was in close proximity to historical personages, meeting the Marquis de Lafayette and Aaron Burr, and seeing John Jacob Astor and President Andrew Jackson (Allen 9, 17, 21, 23). Jackson made a lasting impression. According to Reynolds,

When Andrew Jackson made a presidential visit to Brooklyn in the summer of 1833, the fourteen-year-old Whitman saw a sight that would always be engraved in his memory. There was the wiry Old Hickory, his white hair brushed stiffly back from his



weather-beaten face, waving his white beaver hat to the applauding crowds as he was drawn through Brooklyn in his open barouche. (49)

Biographer Justin Kaplan reflects, “This time of Whitman’s growing up was a long farewell salute to the receding world of the founders, a series of noteworthy deaths, days of national mourning, acts of patriotic commemoration” (66). The famous people living and dying, memorable tragic and patriotic events, and the energy present in a growing metropolis near where Whitman spent his youth contributed to his sense that he was at the center of human activity. Whitman’s father, Walter Whitman Sr., knew Thomas Paine, pamphleteer of the American Revolution. Though Paine “was a dying man, a pariah, and, some said, a drunkard” at the time (Kaplan 57), he was a hero to the senior Whitman and his son, who believed that his granduncle died in the Battle of Long Island (Kaplan 55).

At age ten, Whitman was so close to an historic event that he could feel it: the explosion of the steam-frigate *Fulton* at anchor near the Brooklyn Navy Yard in June 1829. A sailor had ignited the powder magazine. While in school, Whitman felt the “dull shock . . . something like an earthquake” that killed forty-three people (Allen 11). Their funeral brought Whitman to tears.

It was a full military and naval funeral—the sailors marching two by two, hand in hand, banners tied up and bound in black crepe, the muffled drums beating, the bugles wailing for the mournful peals of a dead march. We remember it all—remember following the procession, boylike, from beginning to end. We remember the soldiers firing the salute over the grave. And then how everything changed with the dashing and merry jig played by the same bugles and drums, as they made their exit from the graveyard . . . (*Uncollected* 2: 265-266.).



Kaplan suggests that details from this scene echo in lines of the first poem in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, though he quotes a later edition. These are the lines as they appear in the first edition:

This is the trill of a thousand clear cornets and scream of the octave flute  
and strike of triangles.

I play not a march for victors only . . . . I play great marches for conquered  
and slain persons.

. . . . .

I sound triumphal for the dead . . . . I fling through my embouchures the  
loudest and gayest music to them . . . (675)

The notion that he lived in the center of things became part of his sense of himself and his surroundings. As late as March 18, 1842, Whitman wrote in the *Aurora*:

Whoever does not know that ‘our city’ is the great place of the western continent, the heart, the brain, the focus, the main string, the pinnacle, the extremity, the no more beyond, of the New World—whoever does not know this, we say, must have been brought up in a place where they “didn’t take the papers,” and where the *Aurora*, in particular, had never scattered its effulgent light. (53)

Building on Kaplan, I suggest that Whitman’s curiosity about life at the center found expression in his work as a newspaper reporter more than a decade before it was expressed in *Leaves of Grass*.

In *The Solitary Singer*, Gay Wilson Allen describes Whitman’s newspaper work as a continuation of his education: “Leaving school did not mean the end of Walt’s education; that, in fact, had scarcely begun, and would continue more rapidly in office, print shop, newspaper office, and



before many years in his own schoolroom” (17). Of these settings, the newspaper office would be the most helpful to developing writing and editing skills. In the beginning, the newspaper office would attract him to a career: it was during Whitman’s work as office boy for the editor of the Long Island *Patriot* in summer 1831 that he “became interested in journalism, which in turn aroused literary ambitions” (Allen 17).

The circumstances of Whitman’s boyhood and his first forays into journalism support my argument that penny press editors exerted an influence on his journalism and later poetry. In a biography published on The Walt Whitman Archive, Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price write:

These early years on his own in Brooklyn and New York remained a formative influence on his writing, for it was during this time that he developed the habit of close observation of the ever-shifting panorama of the city, and a great deal of his journalism, poetry, and prose came to focus on catalogs of urban life and the history of New York City, Brooklyn, and Long Island.

Whitman formed his habits of close observation earlier in life from his own curiosity and the requirements of journalism, rather than later in his life from espousing Emerson’s concept of the “outward eye,” which is Bergmann’s claim (81). The continuity between the events and persons of Whitman’s boyhood and his subsequent newspaper work demonstrates that the democratic and sensationalistic view of news that penny press editors brought to their profession was at least as influential on Whitman’s later poetry as the philosophy and beliefs about poetry of Emerson. Still, Emerson’s philosophy and beliefs had a significant influence on Whitman’s poetry, as I discuss below.



## Poetic Events

Though distinctions among the practices and practitioners of genres were less established in Whitman's time than they are today, those between journalism and poetry were fundamental prior to Whitman. The practice of journalism was perceived as antithetical to the process of writing poetry. To paraphrase the distinction made by Canada, journalism is considered to be based on fact rather than imagination. Journalism is perceived as temporal and transitory, while poetry—even “occasional” poetry—is presumed to be written not only for the moment, but with future readers in mind. Another difference between journalism and poetry is that journalism includes two distinct steps: information gathering and organizing information through the act of writing. In the mid-nineteenth century, the language of penny press journalism moved closer to the vernacular while the language of poetry was elevated until Whitman's arrival as a poet in 1855. Though one cannot have a wholly accurate understanding of what took place in Whitman's mind, it is evident that his 1842 encounter with his contemporary who most represented the philosophical perspective on poetry, Emerson, had a powerful influence on Whitman's perception of the importance of poetry.

Emerson stirred the *Aurora*'s editor to a flurry of writings on poetry and poets that began with the article “Mr. Emerson's Lecture.” Days after attending Emerson's lecture, a second event appears to have had a powerful effect on Whitman growing sense of himself as a poet. He responded to the death of eccentric New York City poet McDonald Clarke by writing two long articles, a poetic “parody,” and revising one of his own poems, all of which he published in the *Aurora*. Whitman's articles on Clarke were not the result of any personal connection between the two men. In his first article, Whitman admitted he never had met “the Poor Poet, the eccentric and unfortunate McDonald Clarke,” but observed that Clarke's death in early March 1842 “is the subject of considerable



comment in our city press” (46). Published on March 8, the article begins with a quotation from Marlowe and is a tribute rather than an obituary. Whitman encourages readers to contribute to a monument to “the hapless poet” and includes in its entirety a Clarke poem titled “The Dead Poet.” In concluding his article, Whitman acknowledges that he has “strung out” the piece well beyond the simple notice of Clarke’s death that he intended. His second article on Clarke, published on March 12, includes two stanzas of a poem of Clarke’s that appears to have been recovered from the poet’s papers and given to Whitman; he reports that it bears the notation “For the Aurora” in the margin. As with Emerson’s lecture, the event resonated with both Whitman the emerging poet and Whitman the newspaper editor. Loving observes, “Human interest stories [such as Clarke’s] were more in line of Whitman’s literary and journalistic talent” than “political harangues” (68). The death held a fascination for Whitman, whose early poetry and fiction often concerned the subject of death. Whitman’s *Aurora* articles not only give editorial attention to Clarke’s life and death, but also quote from his poetry. With these two articles coming so soon after Emerson’s New York City lecture on poetry (in fact, Clarke died the day of the lecture [Brasher 25n1]), Whitman seems to have conflated the lecture on poetry with the death of a poet to produce a flurry of writing about poets and poetry—subjects related to the brewing direction of his life. On March 18, 1842, Whitman published his own “The Death and Burial of McDonald Clarke” in the *Aurora*, a “parody” written in imitation of the popular “The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna” by Charles Wolfe (Brasher 25n1). Rounding out this flurry, Whitman published a revised version of one of his early poems three weeks later, on April 9, 1842. In subject matter and tone, the poem “Time to Come” is appropriate to the passing of a poet. In it, death brings an end to “swelling hope and gloomy fear” and “unrequited cravings”—evoking the unrequited love of McDonald Clarke for his actress wife.



Such a burst of published writings related to poetry raises the question: What did Whitman hear Emerson say about poetry that night? One might look for an answer in Emerson's essay "The Poet," included in *Essays, Second Series*, which was published in 1844. However, the speech and essay are quite different, with only "a few insignificant passages" from the speech used in the essay (Spiller and Williams 347). Emerson uses another few sentences from the speech in his essay "Poetry and Imagination," and includes a long passage from the speech in the essay "Eloquence." The latter two essays did not appear in print until the 1875 publication of Emerson's *Letters and Social Aims*. Fortunately, Emerson's hand-written text of his speech survives. It was published for the first time in 1972 "as a significant statement quite different from the famous essay with the same title" (347).

Several passages in the lecture, delivered in close succession, resonate with aspects of Whitman's 1855 poetic persona: first, that the poet's every thought must be voiced; second, that the poet's world view ("his science and his perception of things") is important to self-expression; third, that small details are as important to poetry as grand symbols; and fourth, that "mere lists of words" will excite the poetic imagination.

First, "Poetry finds its origin in that *need of expression* which is a primary impulse of nature. Every thought of man requires to be uttered, and his whole life is an endeavor to embody in facts the states of his mind. . . . (348-349). That every thought must be uttered and a poet should devote his life to embodying his states of mind is consistent with the life and work of Whitman. By the end of his life, his output of poetry and prose was prodigious.

Second:

This need of expression is thus the cause of our action and of the love of spectacles or witnessing what is extraordinary in the action of others. But besides the need which



every man has of doing something, and making his mark somewhere . . . it needs that not only his will, or the practical application of his faculties should have this justice done to it, but that his science or his perception of things in the intellect, should have an expression also. (351-352)

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's perception of life in the United States is panoramic in scope and scientific in its detail, including some of Whitman's own scientific interests, such as the theory of atoms. Passages in *Leaves of Grass* often speak of "what is extraordinary in the actions of others." For example, Whitman paints a detailed portrait of "The negro [who] holds firmly the reins of his four horses," concluding "I behold the picturesque giant and love him . . ." (670).

Third:

Small and mean things serve just as well as great symbols. The meaner the type by which a spiritual law is expressed, the more pungent it is, and the more lasting in the memories of men, just as we value most the smallest box or case in which any needful utensil can be carried. (353)

Whitman's vivid, explicit language, often in regard to the human body, finds meaning and often spirituality in "small and mean things" of life. He notices rather than philosophizes. His images are concrete rather than abstract. He is the poet of the very day rather than the big idea. No person or thing is too mean or trivial to escape his notice. He, more than Emerson, is the all-seeing eye.

Fourth: "A man must not, to be sure, go seeking for trivial or fantastic tropes, but every one is legitimate which occurs to any mind without effort or study. . . . I think we more easily see how mere lists of words should be suggestive to a highly imaginative and excited mind (353)." In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman catalogs the people, places, and history of the United States, making images of



individual entries with the use of a telling detail. For example, while unfurling a list of more than seventy-five types of people in his country, he writes “On the piazza walk five friendly matrons with twined arms . . .” (673), which leaves the reader with a clear picture of the five women.

Building on these four excerpts from the speech, one can construct a persona quite close to the poet that Whitman would become. For example, Emerson said in his lecture that “Every thought of man requires to be uttered, and his whole life is an endeavor to embody in facts the states of his mind. . . .” Contemporary acquaintances describe Whitman as a sometimes incessant conversationalist. William Roscoe Thayer, who was skeptical of the poet, recalls that “we rambled for hours among many fields of literature, he leading, I following in that unpremeditated way, which is one of the conditions of a delightful conversation” (*Whitman in His Own Time* 286). Thayer adds:

One could not talk to him for five minutes without being struck by two qualities— his rare gift of discerning natural objects, and the ease with which he seemed to improvise opinions on intellectual matters. Except for a few fundamental ideas . . . he was not an orderly thinker at all. . . . He was unconcerned to hunt for an opinion; if one did not come readily to his mind, and he announced frankly his lack of knowledge or interest and changed the subject. (291-92)

Edward Carpenter, an Englishman who corresponded with Whitman before visiting him in 1877, recalls, “Often as not he would have his listener by the hand; and his words too had an attractive force, from their very simplicity and purity from affectation or display” (136). These first-hand recollections from visitors support the connection between Emerson’s description of an expressive poet and Whitman’s enactment of free and open expression in his life as well as his poetry. Many critics have noted this influence, but not that it was intertwined with the influence on Whitman of the penny press.



## The Penny Press

In order to understand the agency of editors in the literary career of Whitman, one needs to understand the fundamental changes that took place in American journalism with the arrival of a number of one- and two-cent newspapers in New York City that came to be called the penny press. The rise of the penny press was concurrent with the most active decades of Whitman's journalistic career, which began just two years before printer Benjamin Day launched his pioneering one-cent newspaper, the *New York Sun*, on September 3, 1833. This event began a decade from 1833 to 1843 that was one of the most innovative periods in American journalism, especially in New York City. Day and his fellow penny press editors permanently changed the content of the news and the business of selling newspapers. Technology and technique converged to allow newspapers to be printed more cheaply and read by a much wider public than ever before. Also converging in the city were three printers-turned-editors who were pivotal in the transition of newspapers written for elites to papers written for the growing literate population: Day, James Gordon Bennett, and Horace Greeley. The three innovators emerged from a population of former typesetters, printers, and small businessmen who became editors and publishers.

An obvious innovation of the penny press was a reduction in the cost of newspaper so that a growing audience of literate readers could afford to buy a daily newspaper for one cent or subscribe for one year for three dollars, "half the price of his cheapest competitor" (Huntzicker 2). New York's mercantile press looked down on the penny papers because it did not consider them to be rivals for the politically oriented mercantile audience (Crouthamel 21). In the mid-1830s, six mercantile papers competed for morning circulation and four appeared each evening. Average circulation of the six-cent papers was 1,700. The *Courier and Enquirer* had the largest daily circulation at four thousand. New



York's population in 1835 was more than a quarter of a million, but total daily newspaper circulation was about forty-five thousand (21). It is not surprising that entrepreneurs such as Day and Bennett saw an opportunity to find readers. Prior to the launching of the *Sun*, the cost of a daily newspaper in New York City was six cents. Having learned the compositor's craft in Springfield, Massachusetts, on the *Republican*, Day realized that he could lower the cost of printing a newspaper because of technological advances in the printing press (Tebbel 107, 167). He shifted much of the financial responsibility from the printer onto newsboys, who could buy a hundred copies of the paper for sixty-seven cents and make a 50 percent profit (Crouthamel 20).

Along with making the newspaper more affordable, Day made its content more interesting to potential readers who were outside the well-to-do audience of the six-cent newspapers. These more expensive newspapers concentrated their coverage on politics from a particular party's point of view, and financial news that was of interest to the mercantile class. In contrast to the mercantile papers, the *Sun* published "little in the way of useful information for the elites. Instead, it told stories of ordinary people confronting life in the big city" (Huntzicker 1)—a major change in the definition of news. Huntzicker's claim of the significance to the penny press of "ordinary people confronting life in the big city" parallels Bergmann's argument for the significance of writers' encounters with New York City to the narratives of antebellum New York texts (10-11). According to Frank Luther Mott's *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960*, "The *Sun* had an abundance of short, breezy items, with some theatrical notices, paragraphs about monstrosities and prodigies, with an emphasis on crime news" (Mott 224). Huntzicker describes the paper's earliest front pages:

The [*Sun's*] front page carried advertising, poetry, fiction, and anecdotes. Not all items were short, but longer items were seldom profound. Some contained little morality



tales. . . . Simple narratives and conversations . . . found such a receptive audience that the *Sun* increased its emphasis on storytelling and police dockets. (3)

As a matter of journalistic practice, Day's determination to cover the police court as a source of newspaper articles was his principal innovation. The *Sun*'s success enabled him to hire printer George Wisner, who not only helped him set type but also cover the police and court. Wisner's job was "to get up early each morning, visit the court house, scan the police docket for interesting news, and write an entertaining daily columns of short items from the docket"—and then turn his hand to typesetting (Huntzicker 3).

The success of the *Sun* drew imitators. Most failed, but the *Daily Transcript* gained a foothold in the newspaper market almost equal to the *Sun*. The *Transcript* concentrated on local news and gossip, particularly crime stories, "carrying the *Sun*'s innovative police court reports a step further" (Crouthamel 21). Paying careful attention to the daily circulation figures of the *Sun* and *Transcript* was a Scots immigrant, James Gordon Bennett, who re-established the *New York Herald* on May 6, 1835. Though later given to hyperbolic pronouncements on the importance of the press, Bennett's statement of purpose in the *Herald*'s debut issue was to the point about his plans:

If the *Herald* wants the mere expansion which many journals possess, we shall try to make it up in industry, good taste, brevity, variety, point, piquancy, and cheapness. It is especially intended for the great masses of the community—the merchant, mechanic, working people—the private family as well as the public hotel—the journeyman and his employer, the clerk and his principal. (qtd. in Crouthamel 22)

The new *Herald* was priced at a penny per issue or three dollars a year. Bennett aimed his one-cent newspaper toward the potential readership of literate New Yorkers who enjoyed the spice of the penny



papers but also wanted news and information. He believed that literate New Yorkers would buy a cheaper newspaper that combined the sensationalism and local orientation of the *Sun* with the useful news articles in the six-cent papers (Crouthamel 18-21). This readership lacked formal schooling, but was willing to spend a penny a day to get the news and educate their households, much as a mid-twentieth century household would have subscribed to a weekly news magazine.

On January 1, 1833, Horace Greeley, the young printer from rural New Hampshire, had launched a two-penny newspaper, the *Morning Post*, perhaps to find similar middle ground between the *Sun* and the six-cent newspapers. On the day the *New-York Tribune* was to hit the streets, a blizzard paralyzed the city. Newsboys were unable to purchase their papers, let alone distribute them. The snow and freezing cold continued for a week. In an effort to bring his new newspaper to the public, after two weeks Greeley reduced its price to one cent. The paper soon failed (Crouthamel 19). In April 1841, Greeley founded the *New-York Tribune* from his own savings of a few thousand dollars. His timing could not have been better this time. The *Tribune*'s founding came in the middle of a communications revolution that—along with the coming of age of transportation and market networks—transformed the country, facilitating “the flow of commodities, people, and ideas” (Tuchinsky 6-7). The production of newspapers had begun to mechanize in the 1830s, reducing costs; mechanical reproduction made a number of print media formats—journals and magazines, moralistic novels such as Whitman's *Franklin Evans*, religious tracts, as well as newspapers—available to ordinary readers for the first time. The invention of the telegraph (1844), improvements to the steam engine, and expansion of the railroads made the delivery of news and information almost instantaneous, and revived a national conversation about politics and culture (7).



Lacking formal education, Greeley the printer was able to become Greeley the writer, journalist, and editor because the distinction between artisan and professional was not yet established in the economic and social settings of the 1830s. Like other penny papers (though not the *Sun*, which was smaller), Greeley's *Tribune* was four pages long, with pages about the size of a small blanket (thus giving rise to the nickname "blankets"), and printed in a barely readable size of type. The *Tribune*'s contents were similar to other penny press papers, but with an important difference.

Tuchinsky writes:

Though not as sensational as the *Herald* or the *Sun*, the *Tribune* featured elements with which penny press readers would be familiar: articles on seductions, suicides, crime, and advertisements for quack medicines and dubious business schemes. What separated the *Tribune* from its penny counterparts was the extent to which it aspired to cultural influence and was willing to trespass the generic and class boundaries that defined traditional print culture. *The Tribune*, a penny paper targeted to a diverse readership, embraced the democratization of the culture. (9)

Within a year, the *Tribune*'s daily circulation was close to ten thousand. Tuchinsky attributes this remarkable growth to the *Tribune*'s being a one-cent newspaper targeted to a diverse readership, thereby contributing to "the democratization of culture." From an industrial perspective of a newspaper competing within a universe of newspapers, Greeley and his staff created a more saleable product than the competition. The marketplace of literate readers—both existing and untapped—responded to the formula that the paper's managers put together on a daily basis.

Though their effect on Whitman was less direct than if Whitman had worked for them on their newspapers, the influence of penny press editors Bennett, Greeley, and Day on Whitman is



nevertheless evident in both his writing and his personal style. The incessant, shameless self-promotion espoused by Bennett and Greeley on behalf of their newspapers was a lesson taught to Whitman for the time when he had a product of his own creation to promote. The role of a penny press editor was to be at the center of things—the better to report to the readership the news and information of the day. More political and partisan editors saw their role as one of persuasion; it was their job to convince their readers of the rightness of a particular party or cause. Though the word does not appear in the newspaper business discourse of this generation of editors, as expressed in their statements of the guiding principles of their respective papers, “credibility” had begun to become a news value. News and information that focused on everyday people, police courts, and local events could be verified or dismissed as false by an informed reader. If there was reported to have been a fire in a neighborhood of New York City, the smoke would have been visible to many. If there were a murder on a particular street, passers-by would have noticed the presence of police and perhaps even the body of the victim. Credibility and being at the center of things were linked: a reporter or editor had to be present at a particular scene, such as the building fire or the police court, or at least talk to those who had been there in order to convey credible news and information to readers. This was the beginning of the practice of attribution.

Whitman entered into this dynamic mix of innovative discourse and practice when he was hired as editor of the *Aurora* in March 1842 by publishers Anson Herrick and John F. Ropes, who founded the paper in November 1841 as a two-cent daily. Herrick and Ropes were experienced newspapermen; they had published a successful Sunday paper, the *Atlas*, since 1833. They announced in the first issue of the *Aurora* that the paper was a nativist response to what they viewed as foreign control of the majority of New York City newspapers:



Nearly every paper in New York is wholly or in part, controlled by foreigners. Some of them are as good republicans as live – but many of them are as foreign in feeling as in birth, and most are lamentably ignorant of our country, our institutions, and our people. Some of them hate, and would do anything in their power to injure the land that gives them shelter and subsistence. (qtd. in Rubin and Brown 1)

The paper's first editor, Thomas Low Nichols, was a Yankee from New Hampshire who had worked for Bennett's *Herald*. Under Nichols, the *Aurora* focused on New York City events such as the social season, forms of entertainment from prize-fighting to classical dance, and "the more sensational scandals like the trial of John Colt for murder" (Rubin and Brown 2). In three months, the *Aurora*'s circulation grew to five thousand, smaller than that of the *Sun*, *Herald*, and *Tribune* and two or three of the six-penny Wall Street papers (2). Yet Nichols was fired when he went beyond the tolerance of his publishers, printing potentially libelous charges of graft in a city pipe-laying project. During the same period, however, the paper's frequent editorial targets were Scotland native Bennett and *New World* editor Park Benjamin, born in British Guiana (1)—so the publishers appear to have allowed the publication of potentially libelous nativist sentiments. Nichols left the paper on February 22, 1842. Perhaps proceeding cautiously after firing a successful editor, Herrick and Ropes waited until March 28 before announcing the hiring of Whitman. They boasted that their new editor was "a bold, energetic and original writer," adding that Whitman would enable the publishers "to carry out their original design of establishing a sound, fearless, and independent daily newspaper, which shall at all times and on all occasions advocate and sustain the dignity and interests of our country" (qtd. in Rubin and Brown 2). The nature of Whitman's political views—or his willingness to share his publishers' views—no doubt were a major consideration in the hiring process, because after Whitman



succeeded Nichols at the end of March, he immediately expressed strong nativist sentiments in his editorials—an example of an editor’s need to represent the ideology of publishers. Whitman also represented and perhaps shared the publishers’ anti-Catholic sentiments. Under Whitman, when Roman Catholic Bishop John Hughes politicked Democratic members of the New York Senate to give parochial schools a share of public education funds, the *Aurora* published a succession of ten editorials on the “school issue.” The views expressed in the editorials were anti-Irish and anti-Catholic. For example, on March 21, 1842, Whitman wrote,

Every man who knows what are public schools are, and who possesses any remnant of common sense, cannot but be pleased [that Hughes’s proposal might not pass]. . . It is a very false impression, that which the public laboring under, as to the Catholics not sending to these schools. All the vigilance and cunning of that reverend knave Hughes, and his subordinates, cannot keep the children of their flock away. . . . The plain truth is, that the villainous priests stir up the lower Irish to take the course they do.

(*Journalism* 1: 62)

When the Hughes proposal passed 13 to 12 three days before the municipal election, Whitman urged readers not to vote. On the day of the election, riots broke out between the Irish and nativists (Rubin and Brown 7). Though Whitman declined invitations to join the Native American movement, he supported it. Historians Joseph J. Rubin and Charles H. Brown write, “The resistance offered by the *Aurora* to the entrance of the Roman Catholic Church into secular education and party politics parallels the action of the anti-Catholic group known as the Native Americans” (7). Whether Whitman held nativist beliefs, was drawn to the ideology of his publishers, or simply being expedient is uncertain. Upon receiving a compliment from the *Mercury* that his newspaper “has been roaring very



loudly and ably, though somewhat savagely, on behalf of the Native Americans. . .” (qtd. in *Journalism* 1: 124), Whitman wrote that “we repudiate such doctrines as have characterized the ‘Native American’ party. . . . Let us receive these foreigners to our shores, and to our good offices. While it is unbecoming for us to fawn upon them and flatter their whims, it is equally unnecessary that we should draw the line of exclusiveness . . .” (124). Despite Whitman’s public repudiation of nativism. Rubin and Brown write, “He may have found it politically wise and financially profitable to join a party which had been growing in numbers and importance since 1834. By 1844, the Nativists would have enough strength to elect as mayor of New York the publisher whom Whitman admired, James Harper” (7-8). It is possible that Whitman may have dissembled in ideological and other matters. One acquaintance who knew the poet well said that he was playing a part, calling him “a poseur of truly colossal proportions, one to whom playing a part had long before become so habitual that he ceased to be conscious he was doing it” (Thayer, *Whitman in His Own Time* 303).

On the surface, the changes that Whitman underwent often were evident in his choice of clothes. Upon becoming an editor, he dressed nattily in the style of other New York City editors (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman in America* 143). In his transition from journalism to poetry, his appearance changed from change that of the professional man to the casual, open-shirted “loafer” who appears in the frontispiece of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. According to Reynolds, the change was already in progress in 1842, when Whitman may have been influenced in personal style and manner of dress by McDonald Clarke (89). Other sources of influence in matters of style were the nativist editor-politician Mike Clarke and “the b’hoys of the Bowery” who were drawn to him (103), and a class of men called roughs, rowdies, or loafers who roamed poorer parts of Manhattan and caused trouble (88-90, 107). Whitman identified with these bohemian elements, calling himself a loafer and a rough, yet



also was a former schoolteacher and entrepreneurial businessman who established his own newspaper before he was 20 and before he came to the editorship of the *Aurora* in 1842. With well-known and public contemporaries such as Bennett and Greeley (Day by this time had sold the *Sun*), Whitman needed to look the part of an editor. It was not until the 1850s—a decade of flamboyant fashion—that he grew a beard and dressed casually.

Whitman had some familiarity with an office environment because he had taught school, owned a paper, and gained business experience before modeling himself after a loafer or rough; yet he also needed to get away from that that environment. While editor of the *Aurora*, he was known for taking long walks that often resulted in articles for the newspaper. In their introduction to *Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora*, Joseph Jay Rubin and Charles H. Brown write:

The city, “a mighty work in itself,” absorbed the young editor. He seemed willing to walk the streets at all hours in search of different experiences. He would start from the Aurora office, only four doors from City Hall. . . . Then, pass Tammany Hall on his way to . . . Broadway. He could view . . . the Park theater; St. Paul’s . . . ; the windows of Colman’s book store; Trinity Church; the Astor House. He then would join the glittering promenade of fashion people all heading for the Battery . . . (8-9)

The named locations, along with others within walking distance, became the background for—and sometimes subjects of—many of Whitman’s *Aurora* articles. In “Our City,” published on March 8, 1842, he writes:

New York is a great place—a mighty world in itself. Strangers who come here for the first time in their lives, spend week after week, and yet find that there are still hundreds of wonders and surprises and (to them) oddities, which they have not had a chance of



examining. Here are people of all classes and stages of rank—from all countries on the globe—engaged in all the varieties of avocations—of every grade, every hue of ignorance and learning, morality and vice, wealth and want, fashion and coarseness, breeding and brutality and degradation, impudence and modesty. (*Journalism* 1: 44)

The emphasis of the penny press on personal observation and human interest stories gave him a reason not only to roam the poorer parts of the city as a loafer might, but also to explore the financial and mercantile districts and attend the opera as a professional man might.

The fluid structure of his *Aurora* work days allowed him the freedom to observe the lives of his fellow New Yorkers at close range. His growing catalog of observations of the habits, quirks, sorrows, and passions of the people of New York City became a fertile garden of story possibilities through which his imagination could roam at his leisure, or at his desk. Transformed to greater and lesser degrees by his creative gifts, scenes and vignettes from the catalog later reappeared in the content of his poetry. For a time, the relationship between a fact-based profession and imaginative aspiration was symbiotic.

In *God in the Street: New York Writing from the Penny Press to Melville*, Hans Bergmann writes condescendingly that, “Like all penny press editors and writers, Whitman could also be very high minded about the purposes of the penny newspaper. The key myth of the newspaper was that it was the medium of American democracy” (72-73). I disagree with Bergmann’s characterization of the mission of the penny press as a “myth”; his opinion is an example of critics and literary historians privileging the imaginative writer at the expense of the fact-based writer and editor. From their commitment to their respective newspapers, the first generation of penny press editors certainly acted as if they believed in the importance of their mission at the commercial, cultural, and ideological



levels. In regard to my study of Whitman—a penny press editor and aspiring poet—the question is where he stood at the intersection between journalism and imaginative writing. In my view, his feet were firmly in the world of penny press journalism—editorship of the *Aurora* being a plum position for a young man with journalistic ambitions. For someone not yet twenty-three years old, Whitman was committed to the mission of his work. Reynolds writes,

Whitman saw the penny press as a democratizing influence that brought knowledge to the masses. “Among newspapers,” he wrote, “the penny press is the same as common schools among seminaries of education.” This positive attitude to [sic] the penny press was reflected in “A Song for Occupations,” where he mentions among things to be sung, “The column of wants in the one-cent paper” and “Cheap literature, maps, charts, lithographs, daily and weekly newspapers.” (98)

Whitman’s statement echoes James Gordon Bennett’s view of the penny press as a democratizing educational influence in society. At the same time, I agree with Reynolds’s view that Whitman had “leaped gleefully into the cutthroat world of popular journalism” (100)—a competitive world in which *Herald* editor Bennett often ridiculed *Tribune* founder Horace Greeley’s roots in rural New Hampshire “to show how far from a metropolitan editor” Greeley was (Bergmann 32). In the midst of these rivalries, Whitman nurtured within himself the realization that he was someone other than a journalist: a maturing writer who aspired to bring his ideas to the attention of a different, more literate audience than the readers of a newspaper. The more imaginative side of Whitman would continue to develop throughout the 1840s and achieve significant self-expression with the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. Yet Whitman’s intent to become a poet was present in 1842, to the extent that it brought him to Emerson’s lecture not only to cover the event for his newspaper, but also to hear



thoughts on poetry from an acknowledged American philosopher. Reynolds identifies another effect on Whitman: his immersion in the culture of promotion that became commonplace in New York City by the 1850s. The effect of penny press promotional techniques on Whitman came about through Whitman's learning, as an apprentice editor in the New York City penny press marketplace, the correlation of sensational material and hyperbolic promotion to boosting readership and circulation (344). In a related recollection in *Whitman in His Own Time*, William Roscoe Thayer writes, "We must remember that he was contemporary of P. T. Barnum and agreed with that master-showman's views of publicity; so he chose a style both in prose and verse which at once arrested attention; he did not blush to write for the newspapers puffs of himself and his works; he craved notoriety, even of the flimsiest sort" (304). Perhaps the most extreme example of Whitman's craving notoriety was his unauthorized use of a personal letter to him from Emerson, praising the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, as a public endorsement from Emerson on the cover of the second edition.

### **Penny Press Lessons**

Whitman learned important lessons from the penny press. For example, he became a skilled and sometimes unscrupulous self-promoter, and his promotion of *Leaves of Grass* resembles the boastful puffery of the penny press. When it came to self-promotion, the penny press was hyperbolic and shameless. James Gordon Bennett wrote in the *Herald* of August 19, 1836, that newspapers were replacing churches as a source of moral instruction (Bergmann 24-25). Increasing numbers of people were becoming literate and eager to consume the contents of daily newspapers that contained sensationalized human-interest accounts rendered in a simple, colloquial style.

Sensationalized human interest and a colloquial style are consistent with Whitman's personality and influenced his poetry. Representing himself as a loafer, he was in fact ambitious, a



student of human nature as well as social behavior, and unconventional. He could write about almost anything, and would adapt his style to suit the publication. During 1842 and 1843, after his time at the *Aurora*, he contributed fourteen freelance articles to the original penny press newspaper, the *Sun* (*Journalism* 1: 159-173). He wrote about “schools and education, capital punishment, corporal punishment, moral education, the evils of gambling, the dangers to country youths in the city, a currency forger, the working people’s intelligence, cleanliness, inexpensive public baths, and patriotism” (Bergman lvii). Innocuous as this list sounds, Whitman’s freelance article of November 24, 1842, under the headline “The Moral of a Recent Tragedy,” began with the sentence: “The horrid murder of Adams—the obduracy and unbridled passions of Colt—his desperate and persevering efforts to escape the penalty of his crimes—and the awful circumstances attending his exit from the world, have been sufficiently enlarged upon by the press” (*Journalism* 1: 162). The “sufficient” press coverage did not prevent Whitman from devoting a large amount of column inches to finding “a great moral lesson especially for the young” in the crime (1: 162-163). As was his account of the murder, Whitman’s last identified contribution to the *Sun* was hyperbolic. In “Saunders, the Boy Forger,” he describes the “small, delicate complexioned fellow” as “a smooth spoken, oily tongued boy” whose “eyes were very fine, neither black nor gray—but those liquid changeable things that are so seldom met with, but which are very peculiar and beautiful, reflecting a different hue with every different impulse of passion” (1: 173). It is interesting to note the difference in Whitman’s style when writing frequent articles as editor of the *Aurora* and contributing freelance articles to the *Sun*. The use of language in the former is tame relative to the language in the latter; yet the later articles demonstrate that Whitman was perfectly capable of writing at the level of a shout, as later generations of New York *Post* writers were instructed to do (Smith).



Whitman's views on issues that he wrote about in the columns of newspapers needed to correspond with the ideology of the people who employed him. Thus editors and publishers (often the same person) exerted an influence on Whitman's expression of an ideology. An example of ideological correspondence was the publication on November 23, 1842, of Whitman's novel *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate* as a stand-alone "extra" edition of the *New World* newspaper. Sensational as the novel is, chronicling the degenerative condition to which drinking brought the protagonist and other men and women, the ideology of *Franklin Evans* is temperance. For example, in Chapter XII, which opens with two lines from a temperance song ("What brings vice and guilt below? / Strong drink brings!"), Whitman writes:

Months swept onward in their silent course. I know not how I lived. . . . Sometimes finding a chance shelter in a half-finished building left open by the work men – sometimes sleeping in the purlieus of the markets, or on the docks—sometimes, for two days with hardly a morsel of food, for I was a drunkard still. . . (63)

A second example of ideological influence is the absence of any portrayal of prostitution in New York "although Whitman was well aware of its pervasive presence . . ." (xxii). In their introduction, editors Castiglia and Hendler attribute the invisibility of prostitution to Whitman's setting the novel "in an almost exclusively masculine world, reflecting the intense male camaraderie and competition that characterized urban working-class culture in the 1840s" (xxiii). However, Foucault's identification of the "danger spots" of discourse also explains the lack of attention in *Franklin Evans* to prostitutes. Foucault writes that "the areas where this web [of prohibitions in discourse] is most tightly woven today . . . are those dealing with politics and sexuality" (216). Similar limitations on the discourse of Whitman's day discouraged the author from writing about prostitution openly as he was able to write



about excessive drinking because he understood that publishers of a family-oriented newspaper such as the *New World* would not print such material. Limitations on certain discourse, such as the “danger spot” of sex, protected the controlling ideology and increasing power of penny press newspapers and their owners.

As a journalist and single man who frequented the boarding houses, bars, and theaters that he wrote about, drinking moderately as he did so, Whitman was familiar with both the arguments for temperance and the culture of the drinker. The impetus for Whitman’s choice of subject is not clear, but it is likely that the publishers of the *New World* commissioned the novel to advance an ideological agenda consistent with their family newspaper, yet sensational enough to sell perhaps twenty thousand copies of the stand-alone edition (xiii); or less likely, author may have seen an opportunity in the marketplace to freelance such a book. Either way, Whitman wrote a novel that was consistent with the *New World*’s family-oriented ideology. This would be consistent with his public persona because in his editorials for the *Aurora* in the spring before the fall 1842 publication of *Franklin Evans*, Whitman espoused temperance as his public position on the drinking issue. Biographer Jerome Loving writes, “*Franklin Evans*, of course, is clear evidence that Whitman thought at the time that ‘the demon rum’ would be the ruination of young America. Reporting on a temperance parade for the *Aurora* in March, he admired the young firemen (‘fine, stalwart, handsome young men’) who participated” (73). Of course, there may have been a sexual element to Whitman’s admiration of handsome young firemen.

My point is that for marketplaces reasons, the *Aurora*’s publishers and its editor/writer needed to represent the same ideology as the newspaper’s audience. Not even Thoreau was exempt from this, as James Russell Lowell’s deletion of Thoreau’s pantheistic image of an immortal pine tree illustrates. When Whitman’s editorials on the free soil issue did not agree with publisher Nelson Herrick’s



position, Herrick edited the editorial matter and fired the editor. In print, the publishers attributed the firing to Whitman's laziness, yet the amount of his writing during his time as editor supports a conclusion that he was productive. Thus a conflict over ideology is the more likely reason. The differences were not over the requirements of penny press journalism. In the issue of the *Aurora* published on March 26, 1842, Whitman emphatically declares his allegiance to penny press standards. Under the headline "The Penny Press," he echoes earlier statements on the subject by *Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett. Whitman writes,

Among newspapers, the penny press is the same as common schools among seminaries of education. They carry light and knowledge in among those who most need it. They disperse the clouds of ignorance; and make the great body of the people intelligent, capable, and worthy of performing the duties of republican freemen. . . . (74)

The high-minded tone of Whitman's editorial is similar to that of Bennett's hyperbolic (and rhetorical) question, "What is to prevent a daily newspaper from being the greatest organ of social life?" Bennett writes,

Books have had their day—the theatres have had their day—the temple of religion has had its day. A newspaper can be made to take the lead of all these great movements of human thought and human civilization. A newspaper can send more souls to heaven, and save more from hell, than all of the churches or chapels in New York—besides making money at the same time. Let it be tried. (qtd. in Bergmann 24-25)

Bennett's practical prospectus printed in May 1835 on page two of the inaugural issue of the *Herald* set the tone for Whitman's editorial posture in the *Aurora*: "Our only guide shall be good sound practical common sense, applicable to the business and bosoms of men engaged in everyday life" (qtd.



in Tebbel 167). Where Bennett refers to “men engaged in everyday life,” Whitman similarly describes the *Aurora*’s readership as “people intelligent, capable, and worth of performing the duties of republican freemen” (74)

Day’s *Sun*, too, had claimed that “the penny press, by diffusing useful knowledge among the operative classes of society, is effecting the march of independence to a greater degree than any other mode of instruction” (Mott 303). This claim is similar to Whitman’s editorial in regard to the educational benefits of the penny press, and in stating that the penny press is read by different classes of society. As Whitman continues in “The Penny Press” editorial, “Nor is it only the lower and middling classes who take the cheap papers. They are found in the houses of the rich. They lie upon magnificent centre table, and are met with in the parlors of the wealthy and proud. Everywhere is their influence felt. No man can measure it, for it is immeasurable” (74). The voice in the last sentence is similar to that of Whitman’s later poetry.

For all the similar sentiments New York City editors might have had about the mission of their newspapers, penny press editors of the time seemed to thrive on interpersonal feuds. Whether Bennett saw himself in competition with Whitman or not, Whitman characterized himself in the *Aurora* as David in the shadow of Bennett’s Goliath:

The senseless prattle that those having mighty ideas of their own importance, now and then indulge in towards these mighty engines of truth, is as disgraceful as the utterers themselves, as it is false in principle. The large papers feel that we are supplanting them. They know that the time must soon arrive, when they will have to hang their harp upon the willows, and lay themselves down and die quietly, and be laid in their graves. No exertion of theirs can postpone this doom. It must come. (*Journalism* 1: 74)



Reynolds and Canada both quote an editorial insulting Bennett that Whitman later wrote in the *Aurora* as evidence of their mutual animosity, yet they do not use more than a sentence from the “Penny Press” editorial or identify the subject as the penny press. In doing this they miss the point of this important piece that shows Whitman was a proponent of the penny press as well as a critic of Bennett—the latter editorial stance voicing the attitude of Whitman’s publishers toward Bennett. Their animosity may have been genuine, but on Bennett’s side, the feud was at least partly for show. As both publisher and editor of the *Herald*, Bennett thought it was good business to be in the limelight and create controversy, and Whitman may have attacked Bennett for the same reason: to increase his own stature and that of his newspaper by taking on Goliath.

Measuring himself against his fellow editors understandably preoccupied Whitman during March 1842—his first month as editor. His second editorial on the subject of the press appeared in the *Aurora* on March 19, three days after the penny press editorial. In the editorial headlined “The New York Press,” Whitman announces his editorial philosophy and offers opinions of other New York City newspapers—a subjective view from a perhaps insecure new editor. Whitman begins with a boastful assessment of the *Aurora*’s standing among New York City newspapers:

Without vanity, we can say that the *Aurora* is by far the best newspaper in the town. It is bound to no party, but fearless, open, and frank in its tone – brilliant and sound, pointed without laboring after effect, ardent without fanaticism, humorous without coarseness, intellectual without affectation – and altogether presents the most entertaining mélange of latest news, miscellaneous literature, fashionable intelligence, hits at the times, pictures of life as it is, and every thing else that can please and instruct—far beyond any publication in the United States. Its chief editor, and his



coadjutors, are among the ablest in America, and each one “knows his part, and does it well.” (81)

Whitman comments on eleven other newspapers: the “next best” *Evening Post*; the “candid” *Commercial Advertiser*; the similar but inferior *American*; the expensive (six cents) but current *Journal of Commerce*; the “stupid” *Express*; the “violent and vindictive” *Courier and Enquirer*; the “tolerable” *Tribune*; the spiritless *Sun*; the “rickety” *Standard*; scandalous *Herald*; and “dying” *New Era*, with a circulation of 800 to 1,000. The last shows Whitman’s awareness of circulation numbers—the measure of a newspaper’s readership and perceived influence; yet his list lumps together papers of diverse sizes, among which the *Aurora* is on the small end.

Whitman concludes his evaluation of the competition with a paragraph that combines his public contempt for his rivals with an assertion of nativist ideology:

Very few really good papers are published in New York. Most of them are bound up in partisanship, or prejudice, and are incapable of taking enlarged and comprehensive views of matters and things. Five sixths of them are directly or indirectly under the control of foreigners; they therefore, though possessing some marks of ability, are not imbued with any wholesome American spirit. They cannot and do not come out with that fiery enthusiasm in the cause of truth and liberty—the vigor of advocacy—that energy and boldness and frankness which will ever mark the apostle of the new system—the system which teaches far different doctrine from the rusty, cankered, time-honored, anti-democratic philosophy that looms up in Europe, and is planting its poisonous seeds too widely among us. (82)



The quote is ideological. Whitman builds on the nativist statement that the *Aurora*'s publishers printed in the first edition—"Nearly every paper in New York is wholly or in part, controlled by foreigners"—to develop an argument that the *Aurora* is not only distinct from the majority of New York newspapers, but is better.

To summarize the influence of the penny press on Whitman, I argue that similarities between penny press journalism and his later poetry are apparent in three ways. First, the penny press and Whitman's poetry share elements of a conversational writing style with which Whitman became familiar when he contributed to the *Aurora* and became its editor. Guiding the writing style of the penny press was the requirement that reporters write, and editors edit, at the reading level of a newly literate audience, many of whom were immigrants. Day, Bennett, and other owner-editors demanded this type of writing. Thus writers and editors had a powerful business reason to use clear and common language, simple grammatical structure, and familiar words. For example, Whitman writes in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* that "I think I could turn and live a while with the animals . . . / they are so placid and self-contained, / I stand and look at them half the day long" (686). These lines sound like one man ruminating to another as they lean together on the pasture fence.

The requirements of writing for the penny press were quite different from those of mid-nineteenth century poetry prior to Whitman. In "The Poetic Principle" (1850), Poe writes that he would "define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*" (*Essays and Reviews* 78). Yet even as he defined the art of poetry, Poe supported himself by working for newspapers and magazines (Miller 147). Moving to New York City in 1844, Poe brought with him the ambition to found and edit a high quality magazine, for which he thought he could obtain financial backing in an urban center (149). He worked first for the New York *Mirror*, and in 1845 became



editor of the *Broadway Journal*, where he “warmed to the trade somewhat. . .” (149). Miller writes in her article “Poe on the Beat: ‘Doings of Gotham’ as Urban, Penny Press Journalism”:

Inasmuch as Poe engaged in a looser and lighter style of writing, one in keeping with the newspaper writing of the day, he gave to these articles a droll wit and charm. . . . Overall, Poe’s articles are in keeping with the human interest emphasis which many scholars say characterized the penny newspaper” (152).

Poe may have been as elitist as Whitman was populist, yet he also felt the influence of the first generation of penny press editors in his newspaper writing.

Second, Whitman’s poetry shares the element of sensationalism with newspapers published by the founding generation of penny press editors. Both Day’s *Sun* and Bennett’s *Herald* introduced content into newspapers that focused on titillating aspects of personal and domestic life.

Communication scholar Joseph R. Dominick writes that “the *Sun* contained local news, particularly those items that featured sex, violence, and human-interest stories.” (82). For example, in regard to the brutality of war, Whitman writes as if he were a newsboy hawking a special edition of the newspaper, “Hear of the murder in cold blood of four hundred and twelve young men . . . / The second Sunday morning they were brought out in squads and massacred. . . / Some half-killed attempted to crawl away. / These were dispatched with bayonets or battered with the blunts of muskets” (693). In regard to the marriage bed, he writes graphically:

His own parents . . . he that propelled the fatherstuff at  
night, and fathered him . . . and she that conceived him in  
her womb, and birthed him . . . they gave this child more  
of themselves than that,



They gave him afterward every day . . . they and of them  
became part of him. (746)

Describing the penny press's dramatic expansion of news coverage away from "stodgy political debates" toward material from everyday life (82), Dominick writes,

The penny press . . . redefined the concept of news. The penny press hired people to go out and look for news. Reporters were assigned to special beats: police, financial, sports, and religion . . . Foreign correspondents were popular. Newspapers changed their emphasis from the affairs of the commercial elite to the social life of the rising middle class. (83)

Politics, which had been the hallmark of the party-affiliated newspapers, were de-emphasized, and human behaviors that had gone unreported, such as police court proceedings and petty crime, were elevated to newsworthy status.

Third, Whitman's promotion of his poetry as a literary product is analogous to the boastful self-promotion of editors of the penny press newspapers. Just as penny press editors were prone to exaggerate their newspapers' circulation figures (sometimes using the device of multiplying daily circulation by an arbitrary number of assumed readers, such as three or four readers per newspaper), Whitman inflated the popularity of his poetry in the preface to the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. He writes ostensibly to Emerson, "The way is clear to me. A few years, and the average annual call for my Poems is ten or twenty thousand copies—more, quite likely. . . . In poems or in speeches I say the word or two that has got to be said. . . and remind every man and woman of something" (638). At the time Whitman wrote this, only Longfellow came close to these sales figures (638n5).



Because the promotional function became part of the informational function of the penny press, media historians such as Donald K. Brazeal consider the *Sun* to be the first mass medium, using marketing to reach a wider audience than previous newspapers. In “Precursor to Modern Media Hype: The 1830s Penny Press,” Brazeal writes:

While the changes produced by the penny press have been analyzed from a journalistic standpoint (objectivity, definition of news, and so on) and sometimes measured by traditional newspaper business models (sources of revenue and modes of circulation), Benjamin Day’s real breakthrough may have been in marketing and product development. He conceived of a way to get people who rarely read newspapers—and, perhaps, never bought them directly—to want to buy them and buy them daily. (407)

Day’s fellow first-generation editors, Bennett and Greeley, expanded on Day’s “breakthrough” by relentlessly promoting their newspaper products, as Whitman constantly promoted his editorial product, *Leaves of Grass*, through new and expanded editions from 1855 until 1892.

### **Equal Influences**

My claim that the penny press had an influence on Whitman equal to Emerson’s influence relates directly to my central argument that critics and literary historians have privileged imaginative writers over editor. By continuing to assume that Emerson, in connection to some extent with the transcendental movement, was the greater influence, critics largely ignore contemporary recollections of Whitman and penny press influences cited above, which demonstrate that Whitman’s years as a penny press journalist shaped his later poetry. Here is one first-hand recollection.

In 1860, Whitman’s friend and fellow journalist John Townsend Trowbridge met Whitman in Boston and “was extremely interested to know how far the influence of our greatest writer [Emerson]



had been felt in the making of the book which, without being at all imitative, was pitched in the very highest key of self-reliance” (172). After conversing at length with Whitman during that first meeting, and continuing the friendship for many years, Trowbridge came to believe that Emerson’s influence “is often clearly traceable in Whitman’s early poems; seldom the later” (174). By “early” he meant the 1855 and 1856 *Leaves of Grass*.

With this first-hand account in mind, Porte’s observation that Whitman was an autodidactic learner should be revisited. I suggest that, because he was an autodidact, Whitman’s capacity for self-teaching was based on his life experiences and to some extent on his reading. Whitman experienced Emerson’s direct influence at the 1842 lecture. Trowbridge recalls that Whitman did not read Emerson until twelve years later, when he carried a book of Emerson’s writings with him to read at lunch while he built houses in Brooklyn. Trowbridge writes: “It was that summer of 1854, while he was still at work upon his houses, that he began the *Leaves of Grass*, which he wrote, re-wrote, and re-wrote (to quote again his own words), and afterward set in type with his own hand” (173-174). I did not find evidence that Whitman spent time reading Emerson or the writings of other transcendentalists except during this brief period of time. Until the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman’s style of autodidactic learning led him to imitate those whom he admired or aspired to be like, such as New York City newspaper editors and editor-politician Mike Clarke’s loafers and roughs, rather than devote time to reading.

The preface and poetry of *Leaves of Grass* include testimony to Whitman’s imitation of Emerson. Hearing Emerson in person at Society Hall, Whitman have indirectly felt the influence on Emerson of transcendentalism’s philosophical and religious beliefs: that subjective consciousness and the conscious subject are central to understanding the world; that religious spirit is an intrinsic aspect



of human nature rather than residing in the words and ceremonies of organized religion. On the night of the lecture, Whitman heard in person Emerson's statement of transcendentalism's literary philosophy that "it is a built-in necessity of human nature to express itself, that self-expression, like self-development, is one of the purposes of life itself" (Richardson 250). However, in *The Solitary Singer* Allen refers to the philosophy of Whitman in *Leaves of Grass* as a sort of "metaphysical equalitarianism" (155), as expressed in the line "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (680). Unpacking Whitman's line, Allen writes:

The primary stress, however, is on the kosmos . . . the oneness of time, nature, and of soul and body. The poet himself shall be the kosmos, symbolically harmonizing the diversity of forms and experiences, exemplifying by his very word and act the vital laws underlying and enclosing all existence. (155)

In his memoir, Trowbridge recalls Whitman telling him about "the diversity of forms and experiences" he encountered, "editing newspapers and making political speeches . . . leading an impulsive, irregular sort of life, and absorbing, as probably no other man ever did, the common aspect of the cities he was so proud of, Brooklyn and New York" (172). Allen's quotation and Trowbridge's recollection both describe a man who sought to unify his experiences. Because of his autodidactic learning style, Whitman came to understand his environment and the people in it by direct experience rather than the indirect experience of others, which might otherwise have influenced him. For twenty years, he gathered information about the world through journalism—an occupation to which he was well suited.



In “Song of Myself,” Whitman discourages speculation about influences. Early in the poem, he catalogs a number of perceptions that people might have of him – and thus assumptions of influences on him – in order to negate them.

Trippers and askers surround me,  
People I meet . . . . the effect upon me of my early life . . . . of the ward and city I  
live in . . . . of the nation,  
The latest news . . . . discoveries, inventions, societies . . . authors old and new,  
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, business, compliments, dues,  
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,  
The sickness of one of my folks – or of myself . . . or ill-doing . . . or loss or lack  
of money . . . or depressions or exaltations,  
They come to me days and nights and go from me again,  
But they are not the Me myself. (664)

After warning readers not to jump to conclusions, including “the effect upon me of my early life,” he announces his independent and ambivalent posture toward the world:

Apart from pulling and hauling stand what I am,  
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,  
Looks down, is erect, bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,  
Looks with its sidecurved head, curious what will come next,  
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it. (664)

In these excerpts, Whitman advises readers to put aside prior notions of who he might be and accept him on his own terms. He defines himself as common person, yet a poet and visionary: “Do I



contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / I am large, I contain multitudes” (709). He wants to put aside his biographical and cultural identity (teacher, news writer, editor of newspapers) for the bohemian identity of the poet, which emerges as closer to his true self. Yet traces of Whitman’s biographical and cultural origins are evident in his poetry because he has remained rooted in his customary place in America:

This is the city . . . . and I am one of the citizens;

Whatever interests the rest interests me . . . . politics, churches, newspapers,  
schools,

Benevolent societies, improvements, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, and  
markets,

Stocks and stores and real estate and personal estate. (700)

Much as Whitman might imagine “the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far-west” to a “red girl” bride (668) and the “maimed and mangled dug in the dirt” at the scene of a massacre (693), his poetry is more powerful when recounting an “old fashioned frigate-fight” (694) whose details came down to him through family oral history. He devotes sixty-five lines to the sea battle in contrast to twelve to the trapper and thirty-eight to the “rangers” who died in the massacre.

In the stanza after the frigate fight, Whitman recalls “the Brooklyn boy as he looks down the shores of the Wallabout and remembers the prison ships” (695)—a reference to the place where British prison ships anchored to warehouse American prisoners in wretched conditions during the Revolutionary War. After the war, the Wallabout would become the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In this and other references, Whitman’s early life is very much present in his later poetry. His recollections are



journalistic in the sense that if he were active in journalism at this time, rather than devoting his literary energies to poetry, he might have written articles about the stuff of his poems.

Nevertheless, the traces of the influence of penny press journalism continued to be felt in his poetry. A habit of mind that resulted from the new journalistic environment was the conditioning of a writer or editor to think of treat equally almost all daily occurrences, from humorous to tragic, as possible news items that could be reported in the newspaper; each was entitled to its space on the page. Paid a penny a line, freelance contributors always were on the lookout for more stories and more lines. The same was true of editors and regular contributors with space to fill such as Whitman, who appears to have acquired this egalitarian habit of mind, which continued to manifest itself in the many stories, sketches, and vignettes that are found in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. By its inclusion of suggestive, picturesque, and dramatic sketches in addition to frequent affirmations of the commonplace and the poet's representative status, the poem that became "Song of Myself" reflects penny press news values: "local news, particularly those items that featured sex, violence, and human-interest stories" (Dominick 82). The poet's expressions of universality are frequent: "In all people I see myself, none more and not one barleycorn less, / And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them." (677) Or, "Agonies are one of my change of garments; / I do not ask the wounded person how he feels . . . . I myself become the wounded person" (692).

Whitman wrote journalistic prose for so long and so expressively that he developed patterns of expression that he was unwilling or unable to abandon when writing the new long-lined poetry that became *Leaves of Grass*. In the "Collect" of *Prose Works 1892, Volume II*, under the entry "Notes Left Over" and the portion "Ventures, on an Old Theme," Whitman writes about "New Poetry." He



seems to say that conventional poetry is no longer a viable form of expression, and that prose should be elevated to the level of the free and unencumbered poetry. He writes:

In my opinion the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry. I say the latter is henceforth to win and maintain its character regardless of rhyme, and the measurement-rules of iambic, spondee, dactyl etc., and that even if rhyme and those measurements continue to furnish the medium for inferior writing and themes . . . the truest and greatest *Poetry*, (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough,) can never again, in the English language, be expressed in arbitrary and rhyming metre, any more than the greatest eloquence, or the truest power and passion. . . . [I]t is . . . certain to me, that the day of such conventional rhyme is ended. In America, at any rate, and as a medium of highest aesthetic practical or spiritual expression, present or future, it palpably fails, and must fail to serve. . . . [and] resumes that other medium of expression, more flexible, more eligible – soars to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose. (519-520)

If poetry and prose become so similar, what will be the purpose of poetry? Whitman's answer is grandiose: poetry will be necessary to defend and preserve the Union:

In these States, beyond all precedent, poetry will have to do with actual facts, with the concrete States, and—for we have not much more than begun—with the definitive shape of the Union. Indeed, I sometimes think *it* alone is to define the Union (namely, to give it artistic character, spirituality, dignity). What American humanity is most in danger of is an overwhelming prosperity, “business,” worldliness, materialism: what is most lacking, east, west, north, south, is a fervid and glowing Nationality and



patriotism, cohering all the parts into one. Who may fend that danger, and fill that lack in the future, but a class of loftiest poets? (520-521)

Five key points emerge from the essay. First, conventional poetry is obsolete. Second, the new poetry will enjoy a freedom of expression that has been reserved for prose. Third, the principal subjects of the new poetry will be “actual facts” (suggestive of journalism). Fourth, poetry will define the United States in aesthetic and spiritual terms in the face of worldliness and materialism. Fifth, by inspiring patriotism, poetry will unify and protect the United States.

Expression and inspiration traditionally have been the province of poetry; attention to “actual facts” has not. In Whitman’s synthesis, a function previously carried out by prose writing has entered the realm of poetry. In American literature, the prototypical demonstration of the synthesis is the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*—the radical literary product of a former penny press journalist who became an influential poet. In the arc of his career, Whitman’s writing was affected not only by a famous poet such as Emerson, but also by an obscure poet, McDonald Clarke, and was affected on a daily basis for many years by the innovative editorial practices of the first generation of penny press writers and editors: Day, Bennett, and Greeley. Whitman’s inclusion of “actual facts” in his synthesis is evidence of the influence on his writing of these fact-based writers and editors.

Whitman’s sense of the blurred lines between poetry and prose is analogous to my claim that blurred lines exist between the work of imaginative writers and the agency of their editors. In the introduction to this study, I suggested that, while Mark Canada’s distinction between imaginative writing and fact-based writing is useful, the distinction is not as clear as he implies. The works of the three authors in this study demonstrate that imaginative writers often wrote fact-based works, and some works that incorporated elements of both. For an example of the last, one can contrast two of



Whitman's articles that appeared in the *Aurora* on March 28 and 29, 1842, both about his visit to the Crosby Street temple. In the first, "A Peep at the Israelites." he begins with the straightforward statement, "For the first time in our life, we went, on Saturday morning last, to spend an hour in a Jewish synagogue" (*Journalism* 1: 76). He writes an eight-paragraph account that is fact based even as he recounts the history of "a remnant of the mighty nation, who routed the warlike dwellers in Canaan, and who received the Law from the great I Am upon the mountain of clouds. . . ." (1: 77). In the second article, Whitman returns to the fact-based account of his visit for eight paragraphs, then gives "fancy . . . its unchecked flow" (1: 83):

We were in the holy city. The palaces of the haughty nobles—the magnificent temple that the Jews loved as the apple of their eye—the streets and the houses, and the public places—all, all, were there. And along the public thoroughfare came trailing a solemn group. In the centre was a pale being with a crown of thorns bound round his forehead, and blood trickling down his brow. It was the Holy Savior of Man, bearing the cross upon his shoulder. And as he passed, the mob scouted and reviled him—his very friends thought it scorn to recognise him; all but *one*, a woman, who followed him even to the place of his crucifixion" (83-84)

In these consecutive articles, Whitman's writing encompasses factual reporting, Biblical history, and an imaginary sketch of Jesus on his way to crucifixion. Whitman deliberately blurs genre lines, perhaps to make the writing more vivid to the reader, or perhaps to lengthen the article to fill a column in the newspaper. I suggest that similar examples of blurred boundaries can be found in the sketches in Fanny Fern's newspaper columns cited above, and the language and content of Thoreau's *Walden*: for example, "Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed



into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and inevitable wretchedness” (91). Thoreau’s account of Alex Therien becomes more a fable of the natural man than the profile of a Canadian woodchopper. Were it not for reasons of marketing and promotion, the literary marketplace of the mid-nineteenth century might not have needed to make the critical distinctions between information-based and imaginative writing that are common to the discourse of our discipline.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The goal of this study has been to take a step toward recovering the agency of mid-nineteenth-century editors in relation to the careers of three canonical authors. I look at the effects of the editors' agency as the inevitable result of authors entering the literary marketplace. I am fortunate that the three authors I began to study in 2006-2007 represent three different postures toward the marketplace. Henry Thoreau was ambivalent toward it and had difficulty working with editors. Were it not for the support of Horace Greeley, acting as Thoreau's advisor and agent, Thoreau would have experienced even more difficulty negotiating with editors. As a woman in a male-dominated profession, Fanny Fern had misgivings about entering the marketplace in her mature years, yet achieved great success by collaborating with one editor in particular, Robert Bonner. In this study, I try to recover Fern's introduction to the marketplace in her youth through the editorial intervention of Gideon Welles, and her successful re-entry into the marketplace as a divorced woman with children through her timely encounter with a receptive editor, Thomas F. Norris.

My hypothesis at the beginning of this study was that, from the perspective of a number of critics and literary historians, editors are somewhat shadowy figures whose function is uncertain. Thus neither Gideon Welles nor his newspaper were identified in the scholarship, even though he had, in effect, discovered the young Fanny Fern (Sara Payson Willis) as a writer when she was a student at the Hartford Female Seminary in her late teens. Hearing of her talent as a writer, he sought her out so that he could publish pieces of her work in Connecticut's leading newspaper. Another example is William Stevens Robinson. Though a grammar school classmate of Thoreau's and one of New England's most active newspaper editors in the mid-nineteenth century, Robinson received little or no



attention from Thoreau scholars. The biographical facts suggest that he deserves more: in grammar school, he had the same teachers as Thoreau; he learned from one of these about the issue of race; was employed by the Concord *Yeoman's Gazette* when the newspaper published Thoreau's first article in 1837; and returned to Concord with his wife to rent a house from the Thoreau family. These facts suggest considerable interaction between Robinson and Thoreau throughout much of Thoreau's life. Since Robinson was several years ahead of Thoreau in going public with an antislavery position—an ideological position for which Thoreau is well known—one wonders how Robinson escaped notice in studies of Thoreau.

I suggest that, for the most part, critics have made a similar oversight in regard to the agency of editors in relation to the career of Walt Whitman. From my experience as an instructor in communications, I understood that Whitman became a newspaper contributor and editor in one of the most significant eras in American journalism: the rise of the New York City penny press from 1833 through the 1840s and 1850s. In *God in the Street*, Bergmann argues that “The period begins when a ‘new,’ dramatically changing New York starts to be widely identified as an extraordinary subject and ends when the city has become firmly established as that subject” (1). The penny press was an important agent in this discourse. Communications scholars such as Dominick and Brazeal agree that during this period, penny press editors revolutionized the newspaper business in New York City by introducing much broader definitions of what constituted news. For example, when Benjamin Day founded the New York *Sun* in 1833, he began to cover the New York City police court to gather “human interest” stories that focused on the lives of ordinary people. Bergmann makes the interesting point that “ [Police court] narratives and the *Sun's* other anecdotes were rudimentary literary forms struggling toward a descriptive realism that could present the city's new effects in an entertaining way



to the paper's readers" (21). Whitman's long walks as editor of the *Aurora* anticipated the daily news-gathering rounds made by reporters who covered specific news "beats," such as City Hall, the schools, and court. Writing for the *Aurora*, Whitman described places visited and events attended: the public markets (*Journalism* 1: 55, 86), life in a New York City boarding house (1: 60), worship in a Jewish temple (1: 76), the theater (1: 65), Tammany Hall (1: 101), and rival editor Park Benjamin (1: 68, 77); and Whitman sometimes wrote about imagined images or "dreams," as he did at the conclusion of his article "Doings at the Synagogue" (1: 83).

Critics have paid considerable attention to Whitman's journalism and, to some extent, the penny press newspapers of New York City for which he worked for half his newspaper career. Yet little attention has been paid to the probability that specific innovations in news values exerted an influence on Whitman's later poetry. As I specify in this study, among these values are writing with common words in clear, direct sentences; reporting the news of the city as a representative man who is at the center of things; and expanding the range of subjects covered to include happenings that are at times graphic, lurid, and sensational. Two lines from *Leaves of Grass* that speak to the influence of the penny press value of sensationalism "The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom. / It is so . . . . I witnessed the corpse . . . . there the pistol had fallen" (667).

All told, I have given examples of ten newspaper editors and one book editor whose work affected the early and canonical works of Thoreau, Fern, and Whitman in three distinct ways. First, the editors acted as gatekeepers who decided which writer—and which of their works—would go into print. Second, the editors had an effect on the ideology of the writers through several kinds of discourse, including literary discourse, ideological discourse, and personal discourse. Third, the editors had an effect on the literary style of writers by requiring that their writing be accessible to



ordinary readers and the many newly literate readers in the mid-nineteenth century. This study owes an enormous debt to the work of the many critics and literary historians who are cited in the text and included in the bibliography. In particular, I built on the work of Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Stephen Fink, Mark Canada, David S. Reynolds, Walter Harding, Joyce W. Warren, and Hans Bergmann. In my chapter on Thoreau, the work of Sandra Harbert Petrulionis was an invaluable resource. Supported by work of these scholars, I have argued that recovery of the agency of editors in relation to Thoreau, Fern, and Whitman contributes to an important line of scholarly inquiry into the lives and works of a number of mid-nineteenth century American authors.

My approach was to look for indications in existing scholarship that an editor or editors worked with a canonical author. Several times I found that there was incomplete or no information about the editors in the scholarship around the author. I also found that sufficient information existed to recover the agency of the editors. Examples of editors recovered in this study are book publisher and editor James T. Fields, who was in a position to have expressed opinions on the majority of Thoreau's drafts of *Walden* between 1849 and 1854, and the Reverend Thomas F. Norris, who published guidelines for writers for a newspaper, the Boston *Olive Branch*, that may have had an influence on the early newspaper writing of Fanny Fern.

My hope is that this approach will be useful to others who might want to recover the influence of editors. As this study begins to reveal, the life and literary career of Mary Andrews Denison are deserving of serious scholarly attention. In Chapter Three, I demonstrate that an accurate understanding of the context in which Fanny Fern rose to prominence is impossible without a similar understanding of the parallel career of Mrs. Denison. Diane Long Hoeveler's entry on Denison in *American Women Writers* (490-91) estimates that Denison published more than eighty novels in her



lifetime, yet Hoeveler dismisses Denison's first novel, *Edna Etheril, the Boston Seamstress* (1847) as "a potboiler" (490) and comments that "[m]any of them do not deserve close scrutiny" (490).

Hoeveler divides the novels groupings: those exploiting the spotless heroine and domestic ideal; others crusading against alcohol; and another group using stereotypical situations and stock formulas, such as *Chip, the Cave Child* (ca. 1860), about a white boy held captive by Indians. Later she wrote novels that "reinforced religious conservatism and piety, such as *Victor Norman, Rector* (1873).

Hoeveler concludes that "The majority of D.'s readers probably read these works, not for their high-minded preachings but for their thrilling and graphic depictions of evil" (490).

My close reading in Chapter Three of Denison's novel *Opposite the Jail* is an effort to build on the serious consideration of Denison by Amanda Konkle. In her 2015 article "Conjuring Abolition in *Old Hepsy*," Konkle recovers the agency of the novel's central character:

The novel's titular figure, Hepsy, a respected conjure woman, persistently voices her outrage against the institution of slavery in the form of curses and conjure operations, thereby actively invoking misfortune on the slaveholders who have cursed her. Hepsy's curses provide an antidote to slavery's corruption of both the law and Christianity, and attest to Denison's vision of the means of resistance available to even the most disempowered members of society: the aggressive words of a curse. (298)

Konkle argues that Denison not only was able to satisfy the literary tastes of her readers in the 1850s, but also to embody in Hepsy a woman whose influence could take more aggressive forms than "the tender and intimate persuasions advocated by antebellum domestic ideology" (300).

Konkle suggests that Denison's novel has been overlooked in literary representations of conjure because she is a woman, the author of "sensational, popular texts," and white (303). She notes that



*Old Hepsy* preceded Charles Chestnutt's novel *The Conjure Woman*, published in 1899, which is considered "the first work by an African American to value conjure as a cultural practice." In her article and annotated end notes, Konkle makes a case for further study of the novels of Denison. From my brief review of her feature articles in *The Olive Branch*, I argue that her journalism, including her role as assistant editor of the *Olive Branch* also deserves serious attention.

Another editor whose life and relationship with a canonical mid-century author deserve more study is Caleb Foote, editor of the *Salem Gazette* and friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne. My preliminary research found Foote's obituary in the *New York Times* (18 June, 1894) bearing the headline "A Veteran Editor's Death" (18 June, 1894). In the obituary, there is no mention that as editor of the *Gazette*, Foote published stories by Hawthorne that enabled the author to develop his craft, or that Foote was a personal friend of Hawthorne's. In *Hawthorne: A Life*, Brenda Wineapple writes that Foote wrote a positive review of *Twice-told Tales* in the *Gazette* (93); Wineapple also identifies Foote as Hawthorne's friend in each of her four references to him (93, 101, 205, 405n). These references could provide starting points for a study similar to mine.

My approach also can be the basis of further consideration of editorial agency in relation to the authors I have write about in this study. Harvard's Houghton Library holds cartons of unsorted material from the files of Ticknor and Company and its successors that may contain additional materials regarding Fields, Hawthorne, and Thoreau. Unfortunately Fields did not include his recollections of Thoreau in *Yesterdays with Authors*. In regard to Whitman, further research into possible correspondences between his years as editor of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* and his poetry could to be productive. Biographer Gay Wilson Allen writes that "Many of the authors whose direct influence can be traced in his later poetry Whitman reviewed in the *Eagle*" (81) Allen argues that



some of these authors “were subtly emancipating him from the puritanism and asceticism he had been taught in public school and Sunday school . . .” Based on reading Whitman’s articles in the *Aurora*, I am confident there is more to be learned about continuities between Whitman’s *Daily Eagle* editorship and his later poetry.

In an approximate parallel to Whitman’s call, in “Notes Left Over,” for removing the barriers between poetry and prose, I have argued that critics and literary historians make too rigid a distinction between fact-based writing and imaginative writing; in doing so, they privilege imaginative writing and writers over fact-based writing and writers. I include newspaper and book editors in the latter group of literary practitioners, believing they should be identified as a step toward the recovery of their agency in relation to canonical writers. Adapting Whitman’s position in “Notes Left Over,” I suggest that removing an arbitrary separation between writers and editors working on the same works in the same literary marketplace will result in more complete consideration of authors and provide additional context for canonical works.



## Works Cited

- Allen, Gay Wilson. *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman*. New York: Macmillan, 1955. Print.
- . *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, Vols. 1 and 3. Ed. Lina Maniero. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979 and 1981. Print.
- Asselineau, Roger. *The Evolution of Walt Whitman: The Creation of a Personality*. Cambridge: Belknap (Harvard UP), 1960. Print.
- Austin, James C. *Fields of The Atlantic Monthly: Letters to an Editor 1861-1870*. San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1953. Print.
- Bachelor, John. *The Art of Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995. Print.
- Bergmann, Hans. *God in the Street: New York Writing from the Penny Press to Melville*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011. Print.
- . *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.
- Borst, Raymond R. *Henry David Thoreau: A Bibliography*. Pittsburgh Series in Bibliography. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1982. Print.
- Brasher, Thomas L., ed. *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: The Early Poems and the Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1963. Print.
- Brazeal, Donald K. "Precursor to Modern Media Hype: The 1830s Penny Press." *The Journal of American Culture* 28 (2005): 405-414. Print.



- Canada, Mark. *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America: Thoreau, Stowe, and Their Contemporaries Respond to the Rise of the Commercial Press*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- Castiglia, Christopher, and Glenn Hendler. Introduction. *Franklin Evans*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. ix-lvii. Print.
- The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*. Eds. Walter Harding and Carl Bode. New York: New York UP, 1958. Print.
- Crouthamel, James L. *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1989. Print.
- Davis, Cynthia J., and Kathryn West. *Women Writers in the United States: A Timeline of Literary, Social, and Cultural History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Dean, Bradley P., and Ronald Wesley Hoag. "Thoreau's Lectures before *Walden*: An Annotated Calendar." *Studies in the American Renaissance: 1995*. Ed. Joel Myerson. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995. 127-228. Print.
- . "Thoreau's Lectures after *Walden*: An Annotated Calendar." *Studies in the American Renaissance: 1996*. Ed. Joel Myerson. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996. 241-362. Print.
- The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion, Volume IV*. April 1844. Print.
- Dominick, Joseph R. *The Dynamics of Mass Communications*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume II, Essays: First Series*. Ed. Joseph Slater. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979. Print.



- . *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume III, 1838-1842*. Eds. Robert B. Spiller and Wallace E. Williams. Cambridge: Harvard UP/Belknap, 1972. Print.
- . *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volumes II (1836-1841) and III (1842-1847)*. Ed. Ralph Rusk. New York: Columbia UP, 1939. Print.
- . *The Portable Emerson*. New ed. Ed. Carl Bode. New York: Penguin, 1981
- Fern, Fanny. *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*. Auburn: Derby and Miller. Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, Cincinnati: Henry W. Derby, 1853. Print.
- . *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio. Second Series*. Auburn and Buffalo: Miller, Orton & Mulligan. London: Sampson Low, Son & Co. 1854. Print.
- . *Fresh Leaves*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1857. Print.
- . *Folly as It Flies; Hit At*. New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868. Print.
- . *Ginger-Snaps*. New York: G. W. Carleton, 1870. Print.
- . *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1855. Print.
- . *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. Ed. Joyce W. Warren. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2007. Print.
- Fields, Annie Adams. *James T. Fields, Biographical Notes and Personal Sketches*. 1881. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971. Print.
- Fields, James T. "Our Poet-Naturalist," *Baldwin's Monthly*, April 1877. *Thoreau in His Own Time*. Ed. Sandra Harbert Petrulionis. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 2012. Print.
- Fink, Steven. *Prophet in the Marketplace: Thoreau's Development as a Professional Writer*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. Print.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985. Print.



Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Trans. A. M.

Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972. Print.

---. "What Is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*. 101-120. Print.

Fulsom, Ed; Kenneth M. Price, eds. The Walt Whitman Archive, <http://www.whitman.org>. Accessed Sept. 19, 2015. Web.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. Print.

---. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*: 3-30. Print.

Gilmore, Michael T. *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. U of Chicago P, 1985. Print.

Glick, Wendell. "Thoreau and the 'Herald of Freedom.'" *New England Quarterly*. 22: 2. June 1949. 193-204. Print.

---, ed. *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: The Reform Papers*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973. Print.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

---. *Will in the World*. New York: Norton, 2004. Print.

Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau, a Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1965. Print.

---. *Thoreau's Library*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1957. Print.

*Hartford Times*. Ed. Gideon Welles. Hartford: available issues, 1828-1831. Print.

*Hartford Times*. Ed. Gideon Welles. Hartford: 6 Feb., 1832.

<http://www.readex.com/content/americas-historical-newspapers> Accessed Sept. 19, 2015.

Web



- Hartford, William F. *Money, Morals, and Politics: Massachusetts in the Age of the Boston Associates*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2001. Print.
- Hoeveler, Diane Long. "Mary Andrews Denison." *American Women Writers*, 1: 490-91. Print.
- Hoffman, Frederick J., Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, ed. *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1946. Print.
- Huntzicker, William E. *The Popular Press, 1833-1865*. The History of American Journalism, Number 3. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999. Print.
- Johnson, Linck C. *Thoreau's Complex Weave: The Writing of A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1986. Print.
- Kaplan, Justin. *Walt Whitman: A Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.
- Konkle, Amanda. "Conjuring Abolition in *Old Hepsy*." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 61.2 (2015): 298-329. Print.
- Kunitz, Stanley. *American Authors 1600-1900*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1938. Print.
- Levin, Jonathan. Introduction. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003: xiii-xxxiv. Print.
- Loving, Jerome. *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.
- Maniero, Lina, ed. *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, Vols. 1 and 3. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979 and 1981. Print.
- Marshall, Megan. *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. Print.
- McGill, Meredith. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. U. of Pennsylvania P, 2003. Print.



- Miller, Linda Patterson. "Poe on the Beat: 'Doings of Gotham' as Urban, Penny Press Journalism." *Journal of the Early Republic* 7.2 (1987). 147-165. Print.
- Mott, Frank Luther. *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960*. New York: Macmillan, 1962. Print.
- Myerson, Joel, ed. *Studies in the American Renaissance*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995 and 1996. Print.
- . *Whitman in His Own Time*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2000. Print.
- Newhall, James R. "From the Legacy of an Octogenarian." Myerson. *Whitman in His Own Time* 125-129.
- Niven, John. *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.
- Norris, Thomas F. "Writing for a Newspaper." Boston *Olive Branch*, 3 May, 1851. Print.
- Olive Branch*. Ed. Thomas F. Norris. Boston: May 3, 1851; 28 June, 1851. Print.
- Parton, James. *Fanny Fern, a Memorial Volume: Containing Her Select Writings and a Memoir by James Parton*. New York: G. W. Carleton & Co. 1873. Print.
- Parton, Ethel. "Fanny Fern: An Informal Biography." Unpublished. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College. Print.
- Peters, Catherine. "Secondary Lives: Biography in Context." *The Art of Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.
- Pettit, Philip. *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
- Petrulionis, Sandra Harbert, "Re: Thoreau Query." E-mail to the author. 20 Aug. 2015.
- , ed. *Thoreau in His Own Time*. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 2012. Print.



- . *To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord*. Ithaca. Cornell UP, 2006. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. *Essays and Reviews*. New York: Library of America, 1984. Print.
- . "The Poetic Principle." *Essays and Reviews*. New York: Library of America, 1984: 71-94. Print.
- Porte, Joel. *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004. Print.
- Price, Kenneth M., and Susan Belasco Smith, eds. *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1995. Print.
- Prospectus of the Hartford Female Seminary, *Connecticut Mirror*, Hartford, 5 March, 1827; *Connecticut Courant*, Hartford, March 5, 1827. Print.
- Rabinow, Paul, *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Vintage, 2010. Print.
- Redpath, James, ed. *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*. Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860. Print.
- Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance*. New York: Knopf, 1988. Print.
- . *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1995. Print.
- Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995. Print.
- . *Henry David Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986. Print.
- Robinson, Harriet. "Warrington" *Pen-Portraits: A Collection of Personal and Political Reminiscences from 1848 to 1876*. Boston: Published by Mrs. W. S. Robinson, 1877. Print.
- Rogers, Nathaniel P. *Collection from the Newspaper Writings of Nathaniel Peabody Rogers*. Concord, N.H.: John R. French, 1847. Print.
- Rubin, Joseph J., and Charles H. Brown. Introduction. *Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora: Editor at Twenty-Two*. 1950. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1972. Print.



Sanborn, F. B. *Henry D. Thoreau*. American Men of Letters. Ed. Charles Dudley Warren.

Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883. Print.

Sattlemeyer, Robert. "Historical Introduction." *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau, Journal*,

*Volume 1: 1837-1844*. Eds. Elizabeth Hall Witherell, William W. Howarth, Robert

Sattlemeyer, Thomas Blanding. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.

Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. David

Bevington. New York: Pearson, 2009.

Shanley, James Lyndon. *The Making of Walden*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957.

Smith, L. Randall. "Re: hi david." E-mail to the author. 11 May, 2015. Personal communication.

Tebbel, John. *The Media in America*. New York: Crowell, 1974.

Thayer, Roscoe William. "Personal Recollections of Walt Whitman." Myerson. *Whitman in His Own*

*Time* 283-308. Print.

Thoreau, Henry D. "A Plea for Captain John Brown." *Reform Papers*: 111-138. Print.

---. "Herald of Freedom." *Reform Papers*: 49-57. Print.

---. *Walden: 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

---. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003. Print.

---. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. 1980. Ed. Carl F. Hovde et al. Princeton, N.J.:

Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

---. *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. Vols. 9-15 and 20. Ed. Bradford Torrey. Boston:

Houghton Mifflin, 1906. Print.

---. *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, Journal, Vol. 1: 1837-1844*, Eds. Elizabeth Hall

Witherell et al. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1981. Print.



- . *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Reform Papers*. Ed. Wendell Glick. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1973. Print.
- Trowbridge, John Townsend. "Reminiscences of Walt Whitman." Myerson. *Whitman in His Own Time*. 169-191. Print.
- Tryon, W. S. *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Fields*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963. Print.
- Tuchinsky, Adam. *Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. Print.
- Updike, John. Introduction. *Walden*. 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.
- "Valuable Historical Summary of the Press Is Now Owned by the State," *Hartford Times*, 23 Oct., 1915. Connecticut State Library, <http://www.ctstatelibrary.org>. Accessed Sept. 19, 2015. Web.
- Walker, Nancy A. *Fanny Fern*. New York: Twayne, 1993. Print.
- Warren, Joyce W. *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1992. Print.
- . Introduction. *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. By Fanny Fern. Ed. Joyce W. Warren. New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers UP, 2007: ix-xxxix. Print.
- . "Uncommon Discourse: Fanny Fern and the *New York Ledger*." *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. Price and Belasco Smith 51-68. Print.
- Welles, Gideon. Letter from Gideon Welles. 18 Dec., 1829. Connecticut Historical Society. Print.
- . Letter from Gideon Welles, 6 June, 1829. Connecticut Historical Society. Print.
- Whicher, Stephen E. *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1953. Print.
- Whitman, Walt. *Collected Poetry and Prose*. New York: Library of America, 1982. Print.



- . *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate: A Tale of the Times*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2007. Print.
- . *The Journalism*. 2 vols. Ed. Herbert Bergman. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. Print.
- . *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Ed. Michal Moon. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.
- . "No. 10. . . The Burial Ground in Fulton Ave. . . ." *The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*. 2 vols. Ed. Emory Holloway. New York: Peter Smith, 1932. Print.
- . *Prose Works 1892, Volume II: Collect and Other Prose*. Ed. Floyd Stovall. New York: New York UP, 1964. Print.
- Whipple, Edwin P. "Recollections of James T. Fields." *Atlantic Monthly*. August 1881. Vol. 58. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1881. Print.
- Williams, Robert C. *Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom*. New York: New York UP, 2006. Print.
- Willis, Sara Payson (Fanny Fern). Autograph book. Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. Print.
- Wineapple, Brenda. *Hawthorne: A Life*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Print.
- Women Writers in the United States: A Timeline of Literary, Cultural, and Social History*. Ed. Cynthia J. Davis and Kathryn West. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Yeoman's Gazette*. Concord, Ma. Ed. Herman Atwill, George F. Bemis, William S. Robinson. Available issues, 1833-1839. Print.