
The Problem with Labor and the Promise of Leisure

A censorious review of Melville's *Mardi* appeared in the April 1849 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*: there is "an effort constantly at fine writing, [and] a sacrifice of natural ease to artificial witticism."¹ Melville, according to dissatisfied critics, seemed to be continuing the assault against the gentlemanly figure of the (h)auteur that Poe had launched in "The Man That Was Used Up" by foregrounding the effort that went into the act of writing. Melville's talent is here assessed according to an aesthetic that uses the discourse of work, promoting those texts which display "natural ease" while dismissing others for their constant "effort." Thus it was not unusual to see the following kind of praise in literary reviews: "Mr. Bryant's style in these letters is an admirable model of descriptive prose. Without any appearance of labor, it is finished with an exquisite grace."² Writing was supposed to appear effortless, natural, and easy. Bryant's did and Melville's did not. Simply put, writing was not supposed to look like work, especially of the unnatural and artificial variety.³ We can easily understand the many critics who pronounced *Mardi* a colossal failure because of its lack of organization or its disconnected flights into philosophical speculation, but to frame the attack against *Mardi* in the language of work seems especially problematic and interesting, given the fact that one of the dominant discourses of antebellum America, namely the work ethic, championed precisely the degree of effort evidenced throughout Melville's text. It is this compelling and, to my mind, most fruitful paradox that this chapter will explore. What might it mean for a culture to castigate literature for displaying characteristics which that very culture elsewhere valorizes? What might we say about a work ethic that increasingly called for an ideal of invisible labor?

I shall suggest that new techniques in the workplace and a developing market economy problematized the value of labor to such an extent that virtually any manifestation of labor seemed to resonate with the ambiguous status of industrial labor. Of particular interest is the relation between

reconfigurations of work and the work ethic and representations of labor in literary texts. It was not simply the case that nineteenth-century literary sensibilities prohibited literature from representing work (one need only think of the popularity of Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* or Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*, both of which go to great lengths to represent work). At stake in the relation between literature and the work ethic was not work as the subject matter of a narrative per se but rather how fictional texts erased or called attention to the literary labors that went into them, the visible signs of a fiction being made, and how the cost of being a laboring being, specifically a laboring being in an industrialized market economy, was foregrounded (or not) through fictional characters.⁴ Literature registered the work ethic as both damaged and repaired; that is, literature had the impossible task of functioning as a haven from the damaged ideals of the work ethic while becoming the site where those ideals could be (and should be) repaired and disseminated.

This chapter thus begins with an analysis of the work ethic and the strains put upon it by new forms of production. Factory work, in particular, destabilized the work ethic to such an extent that work was no longer adequate to the task of upholding such basic principles of the work ethic as moral uplift, economic reward, and the spiritual development that should come from hard work. As a consequence of the breakdown of the work ethic, one's leisure time took on increased significance, because leisure was now required to fulfill those ideological duties that could no longer be effectively administered by work. Mount Auburn Cemetery ideally exemplifies the complex function of leisure in antebellum America, because this leisure space was constructed as both a world outside work and a world that promoted the ideals of the work ethic. A close reading of Mount Auburn illustrates how any manifestation of labor inevitably intersected with anxieties about a developing and industrializing market economy. Such intersections produced an aesthetic that called for the erasure of labor. This aesthetic of erasure is then read in the context of discussions of literature which called for a similar ideal of invisible labor on the part of literary laborers. The final section of the chapter offers a reading of the discourse of allegory in antebellum America and suggests that allegory can be read as a discursive site in which the fragility of the work ethic was most fully exemplified. The debate between symbol and allegory thus takes on new meaning when read as an attempt to stabilize the ideological inconsistencies of the work ethic as it applied to literature. If allegorical characters brought these discursive contradictions to the surface and demonstrated their insolubility, the symbol erased both the signs of work and the problems attendant upon an unstable work ethic. As new forms of work destabilized the work ethic,

they also generated the two narratives which make up this chapter: the allegory of labor and the labor of allegory.

I. THE ALLEGORY OF LABOR: VERSIONS OF THE WORK ETHIC

Because the ideology of the work ethic structured any number of cultural activities, whether one's goal were religious salvation, economic improvement, or moral rectitude, versions of the work ethic can be found in a variety of sources from the antebellum period – from sermons to public lectures to newspaper editorials. These versions of the work ethic usually combined a belief in hard work with the promise of reward, sometimes economic, sometimes moral, and sometimes both. Although the inherent value of work almost always functioned as the rhetorical point of departure, the work ethic was not a monolithic discourse. It was being constructed and debated in a variety of different contexts for a variety of different audiences.

As a powerful and organizing discourse in nineteenth-century American culture, the work ethic cannot be overestimated. The ideal of self-sufficiency through meaningful work is dramatically articulated in the following passage from Emerson's "Self-Reliance": "There is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works . . . a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things."⁵ When he proclaims, "Do your work and you shall reinforce yourself" (34), the power of work not only to produce objects but to construct selves is made manifest. To focus on the individual as "the centre of things" is to suggest that the work ethic properly understood exists outside the realm of competition, of exchange, of the market. But in order to be at "the centre," there must be a context, and, as we shall see, the context in which the individual works and reinforces himself is the market. The market is, in other words, the invisible hand guiding the work ethic. The discourse of the work ethic, as Emerson's passage suggests, kept the instability of the market safely at a distance and focused attention on the uplifting principle that work was a means to economic and moral superiority. It trained young men to fear idleness and embrace industry, it educated young women in the science of domestic economy, and it held out the possibility of prosperity for all. The mythological premise of the work ethic was that America was a classless, endlessly mobile society. The work ethic, moreover, promulgated the notion that the perpetual motion of a classless society was far less threatening than the instabilities generated by a society in which citizens identified themselves according to class. To acknowledge the presence of class in Amer-

ica would imply that manifest destiny was visible in the dreaded factories of industrial England and that the “virgin land” of the West could no longer absorb the labor supply. Class, according to the ideology of the work ethic, could only be a part of American identity as an absence, because the existence of class presupposed a need to focus on work *as* work rather than on work *as a sign* of one’s economic or spiritual success. The work ethic, in other words, gave work both an ontological and an epistemological status. People were the work they did. To know their work was to know them. If identity and work existed in a transparent relation to one another, class threatened to undermine this hermeneutic structure by suggesting that, far from being a sign of one’s character, work only indicated work.

A complete adherence to the virtues of work is not uncommon in the writings of antebellum Americans, whether in the religious, moral, or economic domain. Let us briefly return to Channing’s 1839 address, because it offers one of the most concise articulations of the work ethic: “I have great faith in hard work. The material world does much for the mind by its beauty and order; but it does more for our minds by the pains it inflicts; by its obstinate resistance, which nothing but patient toil can overcome; by its vast forces, which nothing but unremitting skill and effort can turn to our use.”⁶ Channing bases his utopian vision of American society on a correct understanding of work because, he claims, only through work can one become “one of God’s nobility, no matter what place he holds in the social scale” (42). In a series of lectures delivered to members of the Westminster Church of Providence, Rhode Island, Augustus Woodbury had similar words of praise for the virtues of work: “[The house carpenter] would find that he was doing something more than driving nails, and hewing timbers, and wearily shoving the plane; that he was giving form to ideas; that he was growing into a love of the beautiful and true, and that every day’s labor was aiding in the noiseless but certain work of building up the structure of a manly and noble character.”⁷ Only “by means of labor,” writes Woodbury, do we “arrive at the development of our various faculties” (80). Labor, in other words, has the enormous responsibility of building and developing a person’s character.

Horace Greeley, the popular reformer and editor of the *New York Tribune*, advocates a similar faith in the values of work, only this time the work ethic appears in the context of a discussion of immorality. In *Hints Toward Reform*, Greeley reminds his readers of the necessity for continual vigilance when entering upon adult life, a time when one is sure to encounter what he calls “the soft breezes of Temptation.” “Truth and Goodness,” he warns, find their staunchest opponent in “every hour of non-resistance [that] relaxes [one’s] energies while it increases the power

of the adversary.”⁸ Offering the rather standard fare, he prescribes hard work if one wishes to maintain the high moral ground. In Channing and Woodbury, the resistance of the material world fosters a sense of endless pursuit and heightened expectations; for Greeley, these expectations are thwarted by one’s own nonresistance to temptation and, presumably, heightened by one’s resistance. Although they proffer the work ethic as the solution to slightly different dilemmas, Channing, Woodbury, and Greeley similarly conclude that work is the defining and self-defining activity of American life.

The perilous temptations at which Greeley only hints are fully developed in Henry Ward Beecher’s *Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects*, a popular tract that never tires of singing the praises of hard labor, or what Beecher calls “industry,” whether one is working at a job or doing battle with the assaulting passions of youth. In *Lectures*, Beecher reminds his audience that “in the ordinary business of life, Industry can do anything which Genius can do; and very many things which it cannot.”⁹ Industry prevails over genius in Beecher’s formulation because the former entails a commitment to work, which develops individual character and promotes ethical behavior, whereas the latter is defined by virtue of its absence from labor. Industry not only functions to bring about pecuniary rewards but more importantly serves to stabilize and regulate the sexual impulses of young men. It acts as a moral fortress prohibiting the entry of idlers, gamblers, and prostitutes. The relation between labor and virtue (as well as idleness and depravity) determines one’s success or failure in all cultural activities, whether business, politics, or aesthetics.

Lest we mistakenly think that the work ethic only came from the economic top down, we need only look at the *Voice of Industry*, one of the more radical newspapers published in Lowell, Massachusetts, during the antebellum years. The relation between labor and character formation is the subject of “Morale of Labor,” a column that appeared in 1845: “We have before spoken of the *formation of a good character and of the necessity of energy* as all-important to the young man in laying the foundation of success in life. We need not say that, in addition to the adoption of good principles and the requisite resolution and perseverance to carry them out, it is equally important that industry should be constantly and cheerfully applied, if a young man would secure success.”¹⁰ In “A Call to the Members of the Legislature and the Mechanics and the Laborers of this Commonwealth,” columnist Samuel Whitney denounced an economic state in which “the monopolising money-power is confined with all its profits to the comparatively *idle few*” such that “all the sources of wealth, all the instrumentality of life, and even the right and privilege of industry are taken away from the *people*.”¹¹ Far from being an ideological critique

of the work ethic, Whitney's address situates labor as the savior of a work ethic that has been grossly perverted. Indeed, "the privilege of industry" is precisely the founding principle of the work ethic. Such complaints about work would seem to have less to do with the work ethic itself or even with the conditions of work than with workers' not receiving the benefits of their labor. The fact that some of the same rhetorical formations appear in the *Voice of Industry* as in the texts of Woodbury, Greeley, and Beecher indicates the cultural commitment to the work ethic and its effectiveness in bringing together, at least on the level of discourse, members from different classes. For example, just as one must work against the power of the adversary in Greeley, labor must fight against "the monopolising money-power," and just as one must valorize Beecher's ideal of industry over genius, because genius excludes the constitutive category of value, that is labor, workers must fight against the *idle few*, those geniuses who have successfully taken away the rights and privileges of industrious laborers. And the inextricable relation between labor and character development appears in all of these texts. Thus the *Voice of Industry*, in its commitment to the work ethic rightly understood, voices many of the same positions promulgated in mainstream, middle-class texts.

These examples of the work ethic make clear that its power as a unifying discourse stemmed, in part, from its ability to reroute class anxieties about the work ethic, especially those directed toward the working class, into attacks against idleness. Although idleness cut across all classes (one could be a working-class, middle-class, or upper-class idler), it is clear that idleness was seen to be a particularly upper-class phenomenon. Thus we find Channing criticizing "the upper ranks of society" (40), for whom "fashion is a poor vocation . . . idleness is a privilege, and work a disgrace" (40). Similarly, Woodbury thinks more highly of the man whose "hands may be hard with toil" and whose "frame sturdy through his honest industry" (103) than the man who possesses "all the comforts of wealth, and the pomps of power, and the delicacies of fashion" (104). As one might expect, almost any page of the *Voice of Industry* includes an admonition against idleness: "How many there are . . . who are living in affluence and luxury without adding one farthing to [society's] wealth, and who are greedy to devour and monopolize the treasure of honest industry."¹² The invidious evil of idleness was strategically meant to disseminate the ideology of the work ethic across all of the classes. If the work ethic could restage potential class conflict as individual conflict, the problems described in the *Voice of Industry*, according to the logic of the work ethic, were not systemic but rather the result of individual lapses into idleness.

But the rhetoric of individualism, which interpreted idleness as an indi-

vidual problem that compromised one's ability to pursue those economic and spiritual benefits guaranteed by an adherence to the work ethic, did not necessarily contain the element of class dissatisfaction, as is evident in the passages from the *Voice of Industry*. In contrast to Woodbury, Greeley, and Beecher and their emphasis on the individual, columnists for the *Voice of Industry* usually read idleness as a systemic problem to be cured by systemic solutions. One columnist, for example, complained about "the slavish 'twelve to fifteen hour' system which is making such inroads upon the health and happiness of our 'free, well paid' operatives" and justified his complaint by saying, "We do not bring this before the public, as a crude, and undigested scheme – a partial fragmentary measure, based merely upon selfishness, the result of which shall be to personally aggrandize one class of our people at the expense of another; but one fully attested and theoretically acknowledged by all classes of society."¹³ Another columnist for the *Voice of Industry* notes the "hords of unproducing exchangers, speculators, and idlers" who "are living upon the producing classes and oppressing the real workingmen of the country."¹⁴ Some, in other words, saw the perversion of the work ethic as one more element in a larger system which was generating a class structure in which some people worked and other people remained idle. Thomas Skidmore's *The Rights of Man to Property*, written in 1829, launches a critique similar to the Lowell piece, though from a slightly more radical perspective: "Most of the indolence, now existing among mankind" stems from the "ease and indulgence [that] spring[s] from enormous fortunes, acquired without labor, and possessed without right. . . . By the introduction of a system of equal property, indolence itself would be banished also."¹⁵ It was becoming painfully clear to certain segments of the American population that living and laboring according to the principles of the work ethic did not necessarily guarantee upward mobility and economic reward; in fact, William Heighton in his 1827 *Address to the Members of Trade Societies and the Working Classes* suggests that hard work and economic reward were often mutually exclusive. "Money is always most abundant in the hands of the rich, who never labour nor produce any thing."¹⁶ Idleness and indolence, according to Heighton's and Skidmore's working-class perspective, were not only the results of wealth but, paradoxically, seemed to be the precondition for it.

As early as the 1820s, then, the gap between what the work ethic promised and what it delivered was apparent to many. What made this gap even more obvious, especially by the 1840s, were the visible changes in modes of production. It is important to keep in mind that although changing conditions in the workplace galvanized critiques of the work ethic and made the problems with the work ethic more obvious, critiques of the work ethic, at least in the early stages of industrialization, did not exclusively depend upon technological transformations in the workplace.

In fact, Heighton sang the praises of new machinery: “With the aid of it, the labour of a *single individual* will create as much wealth as the unassisted labour of *eighty* can without it. . . . Amazing power! happy nation, how superabounding in wealth must she be” (20). What destroys the promise of machinery is “*competition* which renders the invention of machinery a curse instead of a blessing to mankind” (21). Skidmore echoes these sentiments and urges workers not to waste their energies blaming machinery for their difficulties, but rather to go to the root of the problem – the unfair distribution of property. He issues the following call to arms: “LET THEM APPROPRIATE . . . THE COTTON FACTORIES, THE WOOLEN FACTORIES, THE IRON FOUNDERIES, THE ROLLING MILLS . . . AS IS THEIR RIGHT; and they will never have occasion any more to consider that as an evil which never deserved that character” (384).

II. FACTORING IN THE FACTORY: THE DESTABILIZATION OF THE WORK ETHIC

Although early critiques of the work ethic often had as much to do with the unfair distribution of property rights as with anxieties about new conditions of labor, these new conditions, particularly the introduction of labor-saving machinery and the division of labor, came to assume center stage and thus repositioned the terms of the debate.¹⁷ The language of ownership and property remained, but it was more explicitly directed at industrialization and, in particular, the relation between machinery and the bodies of laborers, as new forms of labor appeared to be undermining the worker’s proprietary relation to her own body. In his compelling discussion of the incipient dissolution of the work ethic in antebellum America, labor historian Daniel Rodgers notes that changes in production “create[d] not only new work relations but a new kind of work: specialized, repetitious, machine-paced, and, often, deadeningly simple.”¹⁸ The appearance of clocks in the factory, for example, best represents these new work relations and the new kind of work with which laborers in the early 1840s had to cope. When Henry Craig installed clocks at the Harper’s Ferry armory, workers replied with the clock strike of 1842.¹⁹ Many laborers refused to work when disciplinary techniques seemed outrageously restrictive. One worker, for instance, walked off the job when he discovered “regulations posted in his shop requiring all employees to be at their posts in their work clothes when the first bell rang, to remain there until the last bell, and to be prevented from leaving the works between those times by locked doors.”²⁰ Clocks and locked doors were just some of the controversial techniques deployed in order to dispossess workers of their bodies. Such strategies as these were trans-

forming the bodies of workers into territories upon which and over which they found themselves fighting to (re)own themselves.

Workers objected to what they experienced as a pernicious reconstruction and reterritorialization of their bodies. We need only turn to the controversy surrounding the Lowell mills, in which some female workers specifically complained about the negative effects of work on their bodies, others celebrated the salubrious environment of the mills, and visitors to the mills left with diametrically opposed opinions on the subject, in order to realize that the bodies of, in this case, female workers became a battleground upon which was waged a conflict about ownership and agency. Did a woman worker agree to disown herself once she entered “the Counting Room [and] receive[d] therefrom a Regulation paper, containing the rules by which she must be governed while in their employ?”²¹ And if so, what aspect of themselves as agents had they consented to dispossess? The case of the women workers of Lowell is especially illuminating, because the mills were understood by many (including the workers) to be ideal work spaces and were the subject of intense scrutiny in the antebellum period.²² Furthermore, because workers were exclusively women of childbearing age, special attention was given to the relation between factory labor and the body. The marks of labor on the female body alluded, as we shall see, to the potentially damaging effects of work on a woman’s femininity and, by extension, her ability to reproduce.

In one of the Factory Tracts of 1845, a series of articles written by operatives in the Lowell mills, “Julianna” addresses some of these explosive issues and predicts a rather horrible future for America’s labor force if the factory system continues unchanged: “What but ignorance, misery, and premature decay of both body and intellect? Our country will be but one great hospital filled with worn out operatives and colored slaves!”²³ “Julianna” points to the transformation of both body and mind experienced by female operatives and, most damagingly, conjoins it with slavery. This linkage appeared in many indictments of the northern factory system (from working-class to proslavery enthusiasts), and one need only look in the pages of the *Voice of Industry* to find statements such as the following: “They [those who believe in the inevitability of a poverty-stricken class of workers] hate, perhaps, black slavery, but must have forsooth a class of white slaves.”²⁴ The conjunction of slaves and workers powerfully situates the issue of ownership in terms of one’s own body and raises the emotional and ideological stakes of laborers’ self-representations.

In stark contrast to “Julianna’s” negative evaluation of factory life at Lowell, the *Lowell Offering* printed a series of articles and short stories

written by workers themselves, all of whom attested to the healthy life they led. In an 1842 editorial entitled "Health," the writer observes:

A favorable circumstance in connection with factory labor is its regularity; rising, sleeping, and eating, at the same hours on each successive day. . . . The appearance of the girls is generally that of health and cheerfulness; but yet there is sickness here, and far more than there need be. In many cases where health is lost the loser is greatly to blame, and yet it is spoken of as a necessary result of factory labor. The desire to lay upon others the blame of our own faults is "as old as Adam," and we see examples of it almost every day. There are thousands of girls in Lowell at that age when their constitutions are maturing, where girls are always most careless.²⁵

If one turns to "professional" opinions to clarify what appear to be the mutually exclusive statements of workers at Lowell, the contradictions simply reappear. On the one hand, we have Dr. Elisha Bartlett's *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills*, originally written in 1839, which claims that "*The manufacturing population of this city is the healthiest portion of the population*" because "their labor is sufficiently active and sufficiently light to avoid the evils arising from the two extremes of indolence and over-exertion."²⁶ Given Lowell's clean bill of health, it is difficult to know what to make of an anonymous pamphlet that appeared only two years later, entitled *Corporations and Operatives: Being an Exposition of the Condition [of] Factory Operatives, and a Review of the "Vindication," by Elisha Bartlett, M.D.*, which challenges all of Bartlett's observations. "They [the owners of the mills] regard them, but as mere parts of the machinery, with which they accumulate money, – and their greatest skill is used to keep that part of the machines, which is made of human *flesh, and blood, and bones*, in operation, the same number of hours, and at the same speed, as those parts, which are made of *iron and wood*."²⁷ Add to these the observations of the Reverend William Scoresby in *American Factories and Their Female Operatives*, and the situation seems impossible to figure out: "After a year or two they have to procure shoes of a size or two larger than before they came," and "the right hand, which is used in stopping and starting the loom, becomes larger than the left."²⁸ It would seem that these documents allow us to conclude that we cannot come to any conclusion about the "real" understanding of the effects of the factory system upon the health of the Lowell operatives.

This, however, does not mean that we cannot reach any conclusions. Indeed, what becomes obvious in this debate is the fact that the multiple communities of Lowell, whether its workers, its doctors, or its visitors, were deeply committed to understanding the problems posed by the

relation between factories and the health of the workers and to defending their own versions of that relation. Furthermore, debates about Lowell suggest that anxieties about mechanization in the workplace grounded themselves in questions about the body and the problematic signs of labor that made visible its effects on the body. If one could not see the signs of factory labor, that is if the operatives wrote bucolic sketches for the *Lowell Offering* and maintained their healthful vigor, then this new kind of labor was innocent of the charges leveled against it. If, however, the signs of factory labor were visible, that is if bodies were decaying or changing in grotesque ways, as suggested by “Julianna” and Scoresby, then this new kind of labor was guilty as charged. In the case of the female body, new modes of production endangered female reproduction. If hands and feet were metamorphosing, what about the other parts of the female body? And last, at the very moment that the ideological foundations of the work ethic were being called into question by new conditions of labor, the best guarantee of a salutary work ethic was the invisibility of work itself. The body, then, either became a marked (or remarkable, to invoke John A. B. C. Smith) text upon which was written the visible signs of labor gone amok or a blank page whose very invisibility was a kind of sign too, but one that referred to a much more salvific version of labor. This ideal of invisible labor eventually functioned as an aesthetic paradigm according to which readers assessed the merits and demerits of literary texts.

Erasing the visible signs of labor became a cultural imperative, whether in factories, in landscapes, or in fictions.²⁹ To conclude that these signs needed erasure meant to admit that new kinds of labor, especially labor that was mechanical, repetitive, and simple, were, at the very least, potentially damaging to both workers and the work ethic. All labor, whether performed by men or women, becomes potentially damaging as anxieties about the role of industrialization in the production of individual character are reproduced in texts that not only have little to do with mechanical labor but explicitly aim to celebrate work. Thus even someone as committed to the work ethic as Woodbury made a plea on behalf of time spent away from work: “We are accustomed to think of ourselves as a nation of plodders, always and feverishly at work, with occasional remissions of toil, when we either express our playfulness in the most unparalleled noise and overwhelming din – as on Independence day – or give ourselves up to the worst indulgences, and call them relaxation and rest, instead of so combining the light with the heavy duties of life in such excellent and harmonious proportion, that each may temper and relieve the other, and both combined produce a full, rounded, and complete character.”³⁰ It is not simply the case that labor leads to “the development of our various faculties” (80), but “occasional remissions” from labor are now required to produce a

“complete character.”³⁰ A similar point is made by Daniel Eddy in *The Young Man’s Friend*, where he writes, “The body was not made for constant toil. . . . Had God designed man for ceaseless labor, he would not have given him such a body as he now possesses, he would have darkened the eye, deadened the ear, and blunted all the nicer sensibilities, and made the hand as hard as iron, and the foot as insensible as brass.”³¹ Here are John A. B. C. Smith and Ahab’s mechanical man.

Worries about the tendency of factory work not to promote character development (or to promote the wrong kind) are evident in Edward Bruce’s *The Century: Its Fruits and Its Festival*, in which at the very moment he tries to exonerate mechanical labor from the charge of aiding and abetting mental atrophy, he notes: “The dullest of factory-people are apt, as they observe the automatic movements of their senseless co-worker, to conceive points where this may be bettered and their condition improved. Should this aspiration take no shape and bear no perceptible fruit, the feeding and tending of their charge occupies the attention and keeps the mind more or less on the alert.”³² Although Bruce maintains that factory work requires some mental attention, his language reveals the dilemma presented to the work ethic by mechanization. Exactly whose condition will be improved? The “dullest of factory-people” or “their senseless co-worker”? While insisting upon the worker’s humanity (a dull one at that) in contrast to the machine’s senselessness, Bruce ends up blurring the distinctions between them, as “the automatic movements of the senseless co-worker,” which require “feeding and tending,” have taken on the characteristics of personhood. Moreover, if a worker’s observations lead to the improved condition of neither worker nor machine, then at least the human qualities of the machine will “keep the mind more or less on the alert.” The value of work has certainly diminished if now all one can expect is that work keep one somewhat alert.

If this were so, a new space was required to realize the moral values of the work ethic, and this was the space of leisure. This would certainly be the logic governing *The First Century of the Republic*, a homage to American progress, which nevertheless concedes that industrial progress has meant the breakdown of the work ethic and the inability of work to develop what Woodbury had earlier called “manly and noble” character: “Much of the necessary work of the laboring people fails to develop character . . . hence, as the labor of production becomes more and more a matter of machinery and apparatus rather than of individual exertion of brain and muscle, [the capability for enjoyment] . . . must come from culture and education outside their work, and not in the work itself.”³³ In a society so committed to the ethical importance of labor, “the hardest wrench of values” writes Rodgers, “was to admit that work under modern industrial conditions was inherently harmful, its ‘damage’ to be un-

done only by leisure” (93). But it is important to note that these industrial conditions permeated the space of leisure as well; that is, the space of leisure not only had to provide a refuge from the damages done by work, but if the ideology of the work ethic could no longer function in the workplace because of changes in work, leisure had the additional task of disseminating the work ethic. Thus, at the same time that industrialized labor changed the physical contours of the workplace, leisure time took on an increasingly significant role in the dissemination and maintenance of the work ethic. The paradox, of course, was that the failure of the work ethic was proportionally related to the significance of leisure.

III. WORK AND LEISURE: THE CASE OF MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY

The complicated relation between work and leisure is vividly illustrated in Edward Everett Hale’s *Public Amusement for Poor and Rich*, a lecture delivered in 1857 to his congregation in Worcester’s Church of the Unity. Hale rails against what he considers to be the naive assumption that work alone is good and “rest, or recreation” is bad, and criticizes the legacy left by the Puritans, who “educate the soul alone, and mortify body and mind together.”³⁴ At first Hale sounds surprisingly like those factory workers who were complaining about assaults upon their bodies. His perspective, however, turns out to be radically different, as is evident in his definition of rest: “I say rest, or recreation, because recreation or amusement are but other names for rest. Such is the place which the hours of rest hold, in the subdivision of our time, – in our arrangements for it” (7). Although Hale begins by separating rest and work, his description of rest, with its “subdivision of time” and its “arrangements,” sounds suspiciously like work. Hale, it turns out, is not nearly as concerned about rest for “the rich, the educated, who can supply, in their own homes, the necessity for entertainment,” as for the “poor and the ignorant [who] are supplied by Public Amusements alone” (8). Of course, Hale’s worries stem from the fact that he does not like those amusements, such as card playing, drinking, or concertgoing, with which the poor entertain themselves. Given the problematic amusements of the poor, leisure finds itself having a great deal of work to do: “In our gradual work for the improvement of public amusement . . . we need to undertake the management of the people’s entertainment” (21–3). Hale, then, becomes a kind of scientific manager of the working-class leisure circuit.

Hale’s lecture demonstrates that transformations in the workplace generated changes in cultural spaces outside work which, at the very moment that they were meant to mark their difference from work, reduplicated the

rhetoric and structures of work (and for that matter, the industrialized labor of subdivision and management) in their purest form. Although Hale concerns himself in this instance with the amusements of the working class, analogous examples abound in the case of the middle class. In *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, domestic economist Catharine Beecher characterizes the health problems of those whom she calls “brainworkers”: “One portion of the world weakens their muscular system, either by entire inaction of both brain and muscle, or by the excess of brainwork and the neglect of muscular exercise [while] another large portion . . . overwork their bodies and neglect their minds.”³⁵ The mental muscles of these middle-class brainworkers are unnaturally overdeveloped compared with Hale’s working-class carousers, whose brains have apparently not been well developed enough in the teachings of middle-class ideology. To combat this “overwork,” Beecher proposes the construction of a building, a “Temple of Health,” in which “a great variety of apparatus and accommodations for the in-door amusements that *exercise the muscles*” would be made available to those who experienced the symptoms of physical atrophy which might accompany a mentally demanding job.³⁶ By emphasizing the recuperative nature of leisure, Hale and Beecher indicate the extent to which all kinds of work had become vulnerable to attack.

Clearly, innovations in the workplace meant not only the importation of machines, though this was a significant component, to be sure, but also that the meanings of one’s labor had to be reconceptualized and the relation between work and leisure to be reevaluated.³⁷ It is certainly the case that “the transition to industrial society entailed a severe restructuring of working habits – new disciplines, new incentives, and a new human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively,” as E. P. Thompson claims, but it is equally true that this transition brought with it a significant restructuring of leisure habits.³⁸ The discussion that follows looks at the changing expectations brought to the experience of leisure time, those elements that produced or denied pleasure whether one were strolling through a New England cemetery or reading a work of American fiction, and how those expectations and pleasures were inextricably grounded in the ideology of the work ethic.

One can only hope that death brings an end to work and inaugurates an eternity of leisure. It is hard to imagine a space more cut off from the world of work than a cemetery. But in this unlikeliest place of all, the logic of the work ethic is in full force. If death is the ultimate space of leisure, and that space is being reconstructed as an idealized image of work, then our reading of Mount Auburn Cemetery will exhume the (body of) work that is the underlying principle of the cemetery.

Mount Auburn is an especially interesting cemetery to examine be-

cause its founder, Jacob Bigelow, had a dual career as vocal proponent of the virtues of technology and industrialization and active participant in the cemetery reform movement, which Ann Douglas has described as a “transformation of death” that turned cemeteries into “places of resort, well suited to holiday excursions.”³⁹ In other words, Bigelow covered his bases by simultaneously helping to refashion and destabilize the worlds of both work and leisure while attempting to keep the values of work firmly in place (even if that meant disseminating them in a cemetery). The reconstruction of leisure habits in Mount Auburn Cemetery suggests the somewhat bizarre lengths to which some Americans would go in order to satisfy what I have identified as a cultural imperative to conceal the signs of labor. Labor at Mount Auburn was inevitably linked to the corruptions of the market economy, and so a tremendous amount of pressure was exerted to preserve the illusion of naturalness and effortless-ness. Although its founders intended to provide a leisure world outside the world of work, one soon discovers that work is in fact *the* constitutive category of Mount Auburn. Furthermore, this example seems especially relevant to our discussion, given the fact that Bigelow’s Mount Auburn project includes some of the same players who were active in the construction and operation of the Lowell mills.

During the 1820s and 1830s, Bigelow not only occupied himself with spreading the gospel of technology but also became active in the reform movements of the day. Most attractive to him were the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, in which he served as an officer, and the crusade for the beautification of cemeteries. In his *History of the Mount Auburn Cemetery*, Bigelow boasts: “In the course of a few years, when the hand of Taste shall have passed over the luxuriance of Nature, we may challenge the rivalry of the world to produce another such abiding place for the spirit of beauty.”⁴⁰ Whereas his activities in the field of technology promulgated the conversion of “natural agents into ministers of our pleasure and power,” his participation in the campaign to reform Cambridge’s Mount Auburn Cemetery reveals the seemingly contradictory desire to safeguard nature from technological conversion.⁴¹ Ironically, Bigelow’s attempts to protect nature from “the application of acquired knowledge” (4) depended upon technological artifice.

Upon reading Bigelow’s *History*, we discover that his “hand of Taste” had a far more active role than Bigelow would have us at first believe. For example, General Charles Dearborn, an avid horticulturalist and one of the earliest members of the Mount Auburn planning committee, “zealously devoted himself nearly the whole of this time to the examination of the ground, the laying out of roads, and superintending the workmen” (20). Furthermore, contracts were made with various Cambridge entrepreneurs in order to procure the necessary fences, gates, and statuary.

Last, Bigelow informs us of a certain twenty-four acres of land, “belonging to David Stone and others, and to Ann Cutter,” that were “deemed desirable to secure” (27) and were eventually obtained by the Corporation of Mount Auburn. Unfortunately, Bigelow never tells us what happened to the previous proprietors of the land, but we may safely conjecture that they did not benefit as much from the conversion of “natural agents into ministers” as did the Corporation. Presumably the activities of the Mount Auburn Corporation, some having to do with taste and others with money, made up at least a few of the fingers on Bigelow’s “hand of Taste.”

The crusades for cemetery improvement reflected the desire to preserve the beauty of nature against the intrusions of industrialization, where people were hands: “Where else shall we go with the musings of Sadness, or for the indulgence of Grief; where to cool the burning brow of Ambition, or relieve the swelling heart of Disappointment? We can find no better spot for the rambles of curiosity, health, or pleasure; none sweeter, for the whispers of affection among the living; none lovelier, for the last rest of our kindred” (14). The beauty of Mount Auburn promulgated family unity and moral discipline as well, precisely those values that many believed were being undermined by the world of work. Mount Auburn was not alone in promoting this utopia of middle-class ideology. In his guide to the Philadelphia Laurel Hill Cemetery, Nehemiah Cleveland echoes many of Bigelow’s sentiments: “Here the man of business . . . would often reassure his hesitating virtue.”⁴² Rural cemeteries offered an escape from the worries of everyday life to the metaphysical worries of life and death. But even death itself could be left behind as “Nature thr[ew] an air of cheerfulness over the labors of Death” (13). The very idea of death was both transformed in Mount Auburn and erased by an act of exchange in which one could trade loss for cheerfulness and erase the “labors” of mournfulness. The power of Mount Auburn, or rather the reconstruction of nature by technology, was indeed awesome: it had managed to transcend death in the middle of a cemetery.

As a way of concluding this analysis of the cemetery, it is necessary to address the pleasure of this particular cultural text, because those in charge of Mount Auburn were convinced that the “cheerfulness” one derived from a cemetery was a direct result of how successfully they managed to erase any signs of the labor that went into its construction and how well they protected Mount Auburn from the world of labor outside its gates. Douglas maintains that the rural cemetery “functioned not like experience but like literature; it was in several senses a sentimental reader’s paradise.”⁴³ Mount Auburn, like the sentimental novel and like the antebellum home, offered its visitors “quiet, seclusion, and privacy” while also

creating an appropriate context in which “the enduring strength of family ties” could be renewed.⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, visitors derived a great deal of comfort from Mount Auburn because it successfully provided an atmosphere in which one could escape the pressures of work and everyday annoyances. The rural cemetery, however, generated pleasure in a more subtle way as well. At the very moment that it provided a haven from the world of labor, Mount Auburn vigorously promoted an ideal of work that operated according to two basic principles: (1) the labor required to construct and maintain Mount Auburn existed outside the competitive and corrupt marketplace, and (2) the pleasure experienced by the visitors to the cemetery derived from the erasure of any signs of labor. Therefore, the extent to which labor was simultaneously expended and erased constituted the pleasure one got out of the cemetery, or to put the equation in Lukácsian terms, one’s pleasure was determined by the degree to which “second nature” successfully imitated “first” nature.⁴⁵

An 1860 collection of poems and prose entitled *Mount Auburn: Its Scenes, Its Beauties, Its Lessons* reflects in miniature the struggle between first and second nature that the entire institution of Mount Auburn represents. Wilson Flagg, the editor of the collection, includes a short piece of his own, “Flowers Around Graves,” which is meant to distinguish between proper and improper displays of flowers upon graves:

There is a very simple and practicable method by which flowers might be made to grow upon a new-made grave, without resorting to cultivation. This is to procure the turfs that are to be placed upon the surface of the mound, from some wild pasture that is sprinkled with violets, anemones, columbines, and other flowers, which are not too rank in their growth to injure the smooth appearance of the turf. The little wildings of the wood and the pasture are the evidence that we are in the presence of nature. We feel, while we behold them unmixed with the artificial flowers of the florist, that we are treading upon nature’s own ground, and we are led to pleasing meditations, which the scenes of a voluptuous flower garden could never inspire.⁴⁶

The someone who would not only have to “procure the turfs that are to be placed upon the surface of the mound” but also lay them without injuring its smooth appearance disappears in the passive-voice constructions. It is as if the flowers would simply be there. Both the absence of agency and the illusion of naturalness here work together to bring about the “pleasing meditations” experienced in a cemetery. Although the word “made” appears twice in the first sentence, Flagg insists that the flowers upon the grave exist “without resorting to cultivation.” The pressure to maintain this absence of agency is truly astonishing in this sentence, as

both the made and the newly made lack makers. The discourse of nature in Flagg's piece functions to mystify the artifice (and artificer) necessary to make this environment seemingly natural.

Flagg's concern about the importation of "the artificial flowers of the florist" into Mount Auburn was very much to the point; it illustrates how almost any issue related to the cemetery led to the problematization of the boundary between the natural and the artificial, between the realms of work and leisure. In fact, the history of Mount Auburn reveals that this "problem" existed from the very start. Alongside the rural cemetery that had been proposed by Bigelow and powerful New England industrialists Abbott Lawrence, Charles Lowell, and Samuel Appleton, other Mount Auburn activists, most notably Dearborn and Zebedee Cook, suggested that some of the cemetery land might be used for the purposes of horticulture. According to Blanche Linden-Ward's history of Mount Auburn, Dearborn wished to found an "institution for the Education of Scientific and Practical Gardeners," while Cook wanted to "domesticate foreign plants and develop new hybrids, with sections devoted to fruit trees, timber trees, ornamentals and shrubs, vegetables, flowers, orangeries, hotbeds, vineries, and greenhouses."⁴⁷ Although a horticultural center was never established because of economic and institutional difficulties, I would add that the enterprise was doomed to failure because it located itself on the wrong side of the natural-artificial dichotomy. Flagg's "Flowers Around Graves" illustrates the horticultural dilemma: "Affection, that loves to see the dead surrounded with images borrowed from nature and the skies, cannot be thus cheated by its own artifices" (56). Flagg recommends the "spontaneous wildings of nature, rather than the careful products of art and cultivation [because] wild flowers are more poetic than those of the florist, which always suggest the idea of art, and of something that is to be bought and sold," and concludes, "A wild rose would be more pleasing than a garden rose, as an ornament of a grave, because the former is a literal production of nature, while the latter is associated with the wreaths and bouquets of a confectionary store" (57). The roses of a florist do not belong in a rural cemetery, a place intended to mark the boundary between rural and urban, between the hectic round of work and the serene atmosphere of contemplation, because the imported roses bring both the world of artifice and the market economy, that locus of exchange, into an alleged refuge from exchange.

But this concern with mixing the natural and the cultivated came from both sides; that is, Flagg worried about the mixing from the position of one who wished to preserve the integrity of the naturalness of the flowers, whereas Dearborn worried about the mixing from the position of one who wished to maintain the integrity of the cultivated. The intense pressure for taxonomic clarity is evident in Dearborn's *Guide Through*

Mount Auburn, which includes a warning against mixing flowers from outside the cemetery gates with flowers from within: “Any person who shall be found in possession of flowers or shrubs, while in the grounds or before leaving them, will be deemed to have tortiously taken them in the grounds, and will be prosecuted accordingly. N. B. Persons carrying flowers INTO the Cemetery, to be placed on any lot or grave, as offerings or memorials, are requested to notify the Gatekeeper as they pass in; in every other case, flowers brought to the Cemetery must be left without the gate.”⁴⁸ The importation of flowers from the florist had to be documented, since such activity threatened to unravel the already vulnerable distinction between the natural and artificial. This documentation functions, moreover, as part of a strategy to enforce the rights of ownership, or “possession.” Persons failing to register their possessions will not only lose them but will be punished. Dearborn’s rather disciplinary approach to infractions against the flower code was echoed in a poem by Mrs. C. W. Hunt entitled “Touch Not the Flowers,” a maudlin and humorous verse which Dearborn printed on the back page of the 1858 edition of his guide, whose concluding lines read: “God speaks in every glorious hue, / Bright words of promise unto you; / O’er all his healing love he sheds: / Touch not the flowers. They are the dead’s” (48). Interestingly, Hunt requests that visitors to the cemetery refrain from picking flowers not because they belong to the Corporation of Mount Auburn but because they belong to the dead. Those buried in this cemetery would be pleased to know that their rights as owners transcend even death. This suggests that the values of the market were safely ensconced in Mount Auburn.⁴⁹

Although the flowers developed by the Mount Auburn horticulturalists did not find their way into the economy of exchange, they were, nevertheless, a far cry from the “literal production of nature” championed by Flagg. Like Mount Auburn, horticulture was constituted as an activity separate and apart from the damaging world of mechanical labor. Horticulture was, as historian Tamara Plakins Thornton reminds us, tasteful labor that was performed by persons of impeccable taste. But even though horticulture referred more to the Jeffersonian ideal of pastoral rather than factory labor, the stated relation between horticulture and labor resonated enough with the problematic status of labor at the time to make horticulture an unwelcome presence at Mount Auburn. Ultimately, horticulture took away from the pleasurable experience of going to the cemetery by calling attention to the fact of both its madeness and new-madness. It undermined the dominant ideology of work at Mount Auburn.

The basic structure of this ideology appears in the figure of Bigelow’s “hand of Taste,” which conceded the necessity for labor while in the same

breath calling for its invisibility. A logic of erasure governs Bigelow's metaphoric choice. In his formulation, taste is another word for the kind of unlaborious labor required to transform the beauty of nature into the beauty of Mount Auburn. The figure of the hand was, of course, a commonly used metonymy for the laborer. This figure, then, simultaneously conjoins two representations of labor as well as two classes of laborers: a distasteful kind of labor evoked by the term "hand" and the more satisfactory, more genteel, less visible kind, to which Mount Auburn is dedicated, suggested by the term "taste."⁵⁰ Here labor itself is not so much the problem as a particular type of labor which calls attention to itself as "effort" or as "artifice," to return to the terms of the *Mardi* review. This kind of labor bore the ambiguous signs of a developing industrial market economy in which workers were "hands" and work was defined according to its exchange value in the market. Bronson Alcott, transcendentalist and founder of Fruitlands, projects a utopian vision of "tasteful" labor like the hand of taste in Mount Auburn: "A race of more worthy artists shall take the place of our present vulgar artisans, and clean and tasteful products shall spring from their labours . . . [and] artists will not trade [their spirit] in the market or profane it by vulgar toil."⁵¹

IV. THE LABOR OF ALLEGORY: VERSIONS OF THE (LITERARY) WORK ETHIC

The ideology that informs Bigelow's hand of taste not only applies to the sphere of cemetery reform but serves as a representative figure for a nineteenth-century aesthetic that consistently acknowledged and denied the hand(s) of labor. This aesthetic appears in the general discussions of literature and the numerous literary reviews of the period, which often valorized those texts that most successfully camouflaged the labor that went into their making. In the June 1855 issue of the *Tribune*, for instance, one reviewer praised the writings of popular novelist Charles Reade because they successfully avoided "the conventionalities of fictitious writing, and often ha[d] a salient freshness which [went] far to account for their attractions, without referring to any skill in construction of plot, or the delineation of character."⁵² No one denied the fact that writing fiction was hard work, but nineteenth-century taste was predicated on its absence. And no wonder. We have seen this language in discussions about the value of work and, in particular, the problematic relation between labor and character development. Literary versions of the work ethic make their presence felt in reviews which validated authors and texts to the extent that they exhibited, according to the *North American Review*, "the development of character";⁵³ in other words, to the extent that literature was safely insulated from difficult questions

having to do with labor and character. The issues surrounding the production of workers' bodies and individual character in the Lowell mills were reappearing in debates about literary texts. The developing literary marketplace was formulating an aesthetic ideology in keeping with the ideology of the marketplace: did authors foreground or erase their labors? did the signs of labor uphold or undermine the work ethic? were their characters round or flat? Even though the scene of work was different (literary texts, unlike workers' bodies, were not produced in a factory), the requirements of invisible labor were, nevertheless, the same. The remainder of this chapter thus focuses on literary versions of the work ethic, or what will be identified as the discourse of literary labor. I will consider why this labor proved especially problematic for nineteenth-century readers and why allegory became the discursive locus around which the controversy surrounding authorial labor played itself out.

The discourse of literary labor applies the ideology of the work ethic to a fictional text and valorizes those fictions that most effectively erase the signs of labor that go into the making of those texts. Because this discourse was meant to mark the boundaries between aesthetics and work, between leisure and labor, an inherent paradox emerges. Once fictional texts are judged within the context of the work ethic, those discursive boundaries immediately break down. Although a detailed analysis of this discourse will be provided in this chapter, let us for a moment linger upon one example of it which appeared in an unsigned 1850 *Boston Post* review of *White-Jacket*. The reviewer, whom we know to be Charles Gordon Greene, raises the issue of Melville's competence to discuss the complexities of naval discipline and the Articles of War, and concludes that Melville was not, in fact, competent to do so. Of particular interest, however, is the way in which he formulates his objection: "The mind as well as the body is subject to the 'Division of Labor,' and, in most cases, those gifts and acquirements which enable one to produce a good romance unfit him for the calm, comprehensive and practical consideration of questions of jurisprudence or policy."⁵⁴ The division of labor invoked by Greene speaks rather directly to the point of *White-Jacket*, because the *Neversink*, like the *Pequod*, reproduces many of the same divisions of labor that exist on shore. More important, Greene's reference suggests that the divisions of labor pertaining to the body ought to pertain to the mind as well – the authorial mind of Melville. In the hands of Greene's review, then, Melville's literary labor would undergo precisely the kind of subdivision experienced by other laborers, like the women of the Lowell mills, whose work was being similarly subdivided.

This subdivision is cogently described in a letter from James Stubblefield, superintendent of the Harper's Ferry armory, to investor George

Bomford. After singing the praises of improved tools and machinery, which have increased factory output, Stubblefield discusses a new principle of production which has also increased worker productivity: “By this division of labor, a great deal of expense and trouble are saved, a great amount of tools is saved, and the work can be executed with infinitely more ease, more rapidly, as well as more perfectly and uniformly; and moreover, a hand can be taught, in one-tenth part of the time, to be a good workman when he has but one component part to work upon.”⁵⁵ Stubblefield is not merely subdividing the time to perform a task (one-tenth) or the task itself (one component part), but the workman (a hand) as well. It is hard to imagine how the work ethic could incorporate this scene of work into its vision of the moral value of labor. The point is that it could not.

This division of labor, we recall, received mixed reviews among workers of all sorts, whether factory workers or literary laborers. Melville figures this subdivision of labor in one of *White-Jacket's* most extraordinary scenes – the operation conducted by one of the *Neversink's* most “professional” crew members, Cadwallader Cuticle, M.D.⁵⁶ The radical instability of this new kind of (subdivided) work is nowhere more pointedly and ghoulishly and comically figured than with this allegorical character, who incarnates the problematic relation between an allegorical character and work. His utter commitment to his “eminent vocation” (251), a vocation of amputation that he literally embodies and seeks to embody in others, is what leads him to stage such gruesome acts of violence. In one of the longest chapters of the book, the surgeon Cuticle, who “can drop a leg in one minute and ten seconds” (257), amputates the leg of a sailor, who, though forbidden to leave the ship, had attempted to escape and was shot. Instead of simply removing the piece of artillery, Cuticle insists that “amputation is the only resource” (253). Before commencing the ultimately fatal operation, Cuticle “snatched off [his] wig, placing it on the gun-deck capstan; then took out his set of false teeth, and placed it by the side of the wig; and, lastly, putting his forefinger to the inner angle of his blind eye, spirted out the glass optic with professional dexterity, and deposited that, also, next to the wig and false teeth” (258). Once Cuticle “divest[s] [himself] of nearly all inorganic appurtenances” (258), his lust for the organic emerges. The narrator emphasizes Cuticle’s enjoyment of “an unusually beautiful” (261) amputation that did not need to occur except for the fact that he wanted to operate upon an unusually “splendid subject” (262). After amputating his helpless patient’s leg, Cuticle, with “bloody” (262) and “ensanguined” (263) hands, passionately lectures his fellow surgeons on the procedure they have just witnessed. In the operating room, Cuticle both takes back the properties of the natural body, in the form of blood, and inflicts his own state of inorganicism

upon his patient's body; that is, he carves up bodies in order to replace organic body parts with prosthetic ones. His lust for work turns out to be a zest for death.

Cuticle illustrates the allegorical character's relation to work and the particularly problematic configuration of agency within which the work ethic operates. Cuticle's work is both the way for Cuticle to possess agency and the means by which he dispossesses the agency of others. Whereas the "possessive individualism" of the market, to use C. B. Macpherson's phrase, produces a version of agency in which one's own agency depends upon the territorial appropriation of another's, the work ethic formulates agency as a matter of individual pursuit that is at once constituted within but removed from the contingencies of the marketplace. The work ethic, though, fully cooperates with the possessive individualism of the market. Allegorical characters are at once in possession of individual agency, as promised by the work ethic, and have been dispossessed of individual agency, as required by the efficient operation of the market. The agency of allegorical characters is located within the complexities of the market – more often than not they are in the position of either possessing agency or not possessing it at all, or, as the case of Cuticle suggests, they are most lacking agency at the very moment that they are most possessing it. Their agency is at once deeply parodic and deeply discomfiting, because even though they can really only occupy two positions in the network of power – either they have a lot of it or they do not have any at all – it is never clear which position they are in.

If Cuticle appeared in a Hawthorne story, we might make a convincing argument for Cuticle as the violent artist figure with whom Hawthorne identified and from whom he wished to distance himself. A slightly different conclusion obtains when we consider Melville's relation to Cuticle, especially in light of Melville's infamous relation to his readership.⁵⁷ It is possible, in other words, to read Cuticle as Melville's response to reviewers like Greene who recommended the subdivision of Melville's literary labors. Clearly, Cuticle displaces the violence that has been done to him through violent acts against others. (The) Cuticle is what remains when the hands and fingers, the metonymies of labor, have been erased. Cuticle's violence dramatizes a last-ditch effort to keep visible the signs of labor, no matter how unsavory they may be. Greene's call for the division of labor, itself a violent amputation of the author's self, occasions the acts of violence committed by the laborer Cuticle. As an example of labor gone berserk, the violence and power of Cuticle's expression of agency derive from his own experience of self-violation and his experience of violating others. In occupying these seemingly mutually exclusive positions at one and the same time, Cuticle illustrates the divided subjectivity of the allegorical agent who circulates within the economy of power made available

by the market and reinscribes that economy in his doctor–patient relations. The connection between literary reviews and potential amputation even occurs in an early chapter of *White-Jacket*, in which the narrator praises the literary sensibility of the noble Captain Jack Chase, who “was not ill qualified to play the true part of a *Quarterly Review*; – which is, to give quarter at last, however severe the critique”(41). Unlike reviewers like Charles Greene, who play a false part and “quarter” (hence, the *Quarterly Review*) authors like Melville, Jack Chase would instead “play the true part” and “give quarter.”

The signs of Melville’s literary labor as embodied by Cuticle were not pleasing, according to an aesthetic ideology that demanded the erasure of those signs. Cuticle is uncomfortably like those Lowell mill workers who, we recall, registered transformations in their bodies that seemed to be the result of new forms of labor. We might usefully compare the unsatisfying reading experience generated by a character like Cuticle with a text like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* – one which antebellum readers imagined to be in keeping with the aesthetic logic of Mount Auburn Cemetery and one which naturalized work and sentimentalized death to the point of their mutual invisibility. We need only quote a passage from Little Eva’s death scene to realize that the aesthetic informing Mount Auburn finds its literary counterpart in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “St. Clare smiled. . . . For so bright and placid was the farewell voyage of the little spirit, – by such sweet and fragrant breezes was the small bark borne towards the heavenly shores, – that it was impossible to realize that it was death that was approaching.”⁵⁸ The naturalizing, aestheticizing experience of Little Eva’s death scene is a far cry from the death-by-amputation scene in *White-Jacket*. Stowe’s sentimental aesthetic anesthetizes Cuticle’s pain. What Melville foregrounds, Stowe erases. A brief glance at *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the most popular book in antebellum America, registers the marked opposition between Melville’s adherence to the visibility and palpability of literary labor and Stowe’s commitment to its erasure.

Clearly, it is not the case that Stowe’s presence does not make itself felt throughout *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. We need only remind ourselves of the many authorial intrusions that punctuate the narrative, such as when Mr. and Mrs. Bird decide to assist Eliza in her escape by giving her son Harry the clothes of their dead son Henry: “And oh! mother that reads this, has there never been in your house a drawer, or a closet, the opening of which has been to you like the opening again of a little grave? Ah! happy mother that you are, if it has not been so” (153–4). Eliza’s escape is complicated by difficulties encountered on a muddy road about which Stowe has the following to say: “But we forbear, out of sympathy to our readers’ bones. Western travellers, who have beguiled the midnight hour in the interesting process of pulling down rail fences, to pry their car-

riages out of mud holes, will have a respectful and mournful sympathy with our unfortunate hero. We beg them to drop a silent tear, and pass on" (158). Stowe's continual appeals to the emotions direct her readers, according to Jane Tompkins, toward "salvation, communion, reconciliation" (132) and instruct them to "see to it [that] *they feel right*" (624). Although "feeling right" requires one to work at attaining "the sympathies of Christ" (624), this emotional labor, according to Stowe, is no labor at all but rather a matter of allowing one to be governed by the "natural" sympathies that are inherent in all persons. In a scene between Tom and another slave, John, who has just been separated from his wife, this sanctification of the "natural" is especially evident: "Poor John! *It was rather natural*; and the tears that fell, as he spoke, came as naturally as if he had been a white man" (199). The "natural" erases the differences between black and white, female and male, poor and rich, because it creates an invisible atmosphere where such oppositions are overcome, where "an atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being" (624). The power of this atmosphere is demonstrated when Mrs. Shelby must tell Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom that they are to be separated. "For a few moments they all wept in company. And in those tears they all shed together, the high and the lowly, melted away all the heart-burnings and anger of the oppressed" (167).

Not only does Stowe intervene in the narrative to instruct her readers in "real sympathy" (167), but she frequently calls attention to her own act of narrating, as in this account of a slave warehouse: "The reader may be curious to take a peep at the corresponding apartment allotted to the women" (470), or in this description of Aunt Chloe: "Just at present, however, Aunt Chloe is looking into the bake-pan; in which congenial operation we shall leave her till we finish our picture of the cottage" (67). Stowe's presence, unlike Melville's, is designed not so as to obtrude into the reading experience but rather to make that experience as straightforward and smooth as possible. These interventions, in other words, do not call attention to themselves as signs of the difficulties inherent in literary labor (as in the case of Cuticle) but rather successfully and gracefully propel the story forward. Stowe is continually anticipating her readers' needs: "There is danger that our humble friend Tom be neglected amid the adventures of the higher born; but, if our readers will accompany us up to a little loft over the stable, they may, perhaps, learn a little of his affairs" (348), or "Our readers may not be unwilling to glance back, for a brief interval, at Uncle Tom's Cabin, on the Kentucky farm, and see what has been transpiring among those whom he had left behind" (371). Passages like this foreground Stowe's capacity for sympathy because we see her worried not only about neglecting Tom and Chloe but about us readers, who may want to know what has been happening to

them. Thus Stowe's authorial intrusions, whether they comment upon the subject matter or the actual act of narrating the subject matter, function to enlarge her readers' capacity for sympathy by showing readers in her own relation to them its powerfully unifying effect. Although Stowe's literary labors are indeed evident in the text, they do not become the sole object of our focus, because Stowe has naturalized them and made them insignificant by inserting them into a fictional world which values sympathy and feeling above all else.⁵⁹

The popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other sentimental novels, like the success of Mount Auburn Cemetery, can thus be understood from the point of view of antebellum aesthetic ideology and its adherence to an ideal of invisible labor. This ideal is especially clear in the "introduction to Miss Ophelia":

Whoever has travelled in the New England States will remember, in some cool village, the large farmhouse, with its clean-swept grassy yard, shaded by the dense and massive foliage of the sugar maple; and remember the air of order and stillness, of perpetuity and unchanging repose, that seemed to breathe over the whole place. . . . There are no servants in the house, but the lady in the snowy cap, with the spectacles, who sits sewing every afternoon among her daughters, as if nothing ever had been done, or were to be done, – she and her girls, in some long-forgotten fore part of the day, "*did up the work,*" and for the rest of the time, probably, at all hours when you would see them, it is "*done up.*" The old kitchen floor never seems stained or spotted; the tables, the chairs, and the various cooking utensils, never seem deranged or disordered; though three and sometimes four meals a day are got there, though the family washing and ironing is there performed, and though pounds of butter and cheese are in some silent and mysterious manner there brought into existence. (244–5)

The passage begins with an image of "unchanging repose" (and ahistoricism) which we have seen was concretized in Mount Auburn. More interesting, perhaps, is the discussion of work with which the passage concludes. The labor that the women "did up" has already been forgotten; so forgotten that it can be better thought of in the passive voice, or as having been "done up." The proliferation of passive-voice constructions suggests an ideal of labor in which the agent performing the labor disappears, thus creating the exceedingly pleasurable illusion that the family's dairy products "are in some silent and mysterious manner there brought into existence."⁶⁰

Labor is not absent from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the ideal of absent labor is everywhere present.⁶¹ The image of the hand, which has been so pervasive in our discussion thus far, appears once again in Stowe's text and unfolds in ways which suggest this ideal of invisibility. The hand

appears as early as the first chapter, "A Man of Humanity," in which a deal is made between Haley, the slave trader, and Mr. Shelby, who sadly says, "I don't like parting with any of my hands, that's a fact" (43). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* thus begins with the problem of hands, and not only the selling of hands but the fact that people are being identified as hands and that a slave's "hands," according to the logic of slavery, belong to someone else. Mr. Shelby can imagine selling his "hands" because at the level of corporeality his "hands" are not his hands. This sense of hands continues into the chapter "The Feelings of Living Property" as Mr. Shelby has the uncomfortable task of reporting this state of affairs to his wife: "I shall have to sell some of my hands" (82). But the figure of the hand undergoes significant transformations in the text first when Uncle Tom says, "I'm in the Lord's hands" (163) and later when St. Clare is reminded of one of his mother's favorite Bible passages: "It is true what she told me; if we want to give sight to the blind, we must be willing to do as Christ did, – call them to us, and *put our hands on them*" (410). As human hands become Christ's hands (or Christ-like), the proper relation between persons and hands is reestablished. Thus Little Eva's death leads to St. Clare's "turning away in agony, and wringing Tom's hand, scarce conscious of what he was doing," and to Tom's "ha[ving] his master's hands between his own" (427). The figure of the hand no longer operates as a synecdoche signifying the laborer as hand, as it did in the early chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but rather the hand now signifies the irrefutable ownership one has over one's hands which has been made possible by Christ. Although this final passage culminates in the liberating moment in which Tom gets "his own" hands, it voices this liberation in a language that also suggests that Tom's hands are not entirely his own; that is, how can Tom have his own hands when St. Clare's hands are still imagined as "his master's hands"? The appeal to Christ's hands in Stowe is meant to avert the situation in which one's hands are never one's own, but it would seem that even Christ's hands cannot completely erase the vestigial sense of the hand as (slave) labor.

Even though Stowe's ideal of invisible labor does not function quite as seamlessly as she might have wished, her own representation of writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* nevertheless confirms her commitment to an aesthetics of sentimentalism which denies the hands of literary labor as foregrounded by Melville. In fact, the creation myth of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is right out of the annals of Romantic ideology, with the requisite amount of spontaneity and inspiration: "The first part of the book ever committed to writing was the death of Uncle Tom. This Scene presented itself almost as a tangible vision to her mind while sitting at the communion table in the little church in Brunswick. . . . Scenes, incidents, conversations, rushed upon her with a vividness and importunity that would not

be denied. The book insisted upon getting itself into being, and would take no denial.”⁶² One might suspect that someone other than Stowe wrote these words, given the third-person identification of the author. But Stowe herself wrote them, attesting to an invisibility that fits with her depiction of the book as having its own being separate and apart from Stowe as author, and an invisibility with which Melville would have nothing to do. Stowe presents us with an image of writing in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* radically unlike the figure of writing suggested by Cuticle. It is the image of the dying Little Eva with “her little transparent fingers lying listlessly between the leaves” (413) of the Bible. In representing herself as a medium (of transparent fingers) through which the story of Uncle Tom tells itself, Stowe's sentimental aesthetic wholeheartedly validates the aesthetics of the literary marketplace, to which we now turn.

My general analysis of the discourse of literary labor begins with a consideration of what might best be described as advice literature for authors in training – those literary reviews and essays that claimed to represent the taste of middle-class antebellum readers. In a collection of essays entitled *Eyes and Ears*, Henry Ward Beecher provides an account of the function of literature in his essay “Reading.” Reading permits one to see the world “so refashioned that we no longer know where we are, or what we are, but seem to ourselves carried back scores of years, and walking up and down again the ways of childhood.”⁶³ The geographical, temporal, and historical displacements that should occur when we read, according to Beecher, are reiterated in an 1850 *Harper's* article depicting the ideal style of writing that would promote the ideal experience of reading: “[The author] is the invisible agent that moves the magic machinery by which you are transported into a region of illusory enchantments. . . . The moment you perceive the finger of a man the fond deception vanishes.”⁶⁴ The pleasure of reading depends upon the fiction of an agency that invisibly controls the magic machinery of the text. Displeasure comes about when the reader detects the presence of agency, an agency that is metonymically figured as the author's finger (transparent fingers, I might add, are permissible). Bigelow's hand of taste has once again reappeared, but this time as a finger. The finger, though, is a metonymy on two levels. Not only does it synecdochically represent the author as laborer (in the same way that the hand represents the laborer in Mount Auburn Cemetery), but it also metonymically represents the author's actual labor in that the finger is the part of the author's body that holds the pen that transforms thoughts into language. In describing the relation between authorship and labor, then, this review fragments both the author's body and the authorial labor of writing itself.

The discourse of literary labor often acknowledged the author's labor,

whether synecdochically in the *Harper's* article or more directly in the case of Beecher when he claims that "the masterpieces of antiquity, as well in literature, as in art, are known to have received their extreme finish, from an almost incredible continuance of labor upon them," only to urge its erasure.⁶⁵ The work ethic was alive and well in the production of literature, even though the traces of labor (and laborer) were better left out of the picture (or the text). Horace Bushnell, who along with Emerson was widely recognized as one of America's most important religious thinkers and philosophers of language, articulates a variant (he adds the weight of religious belief to the discourse) of this position in his 1848 oration "Work and Play": "The writer himself is hidden and can not even suggest his existence. Hence egotism, which also is a form of work, the dullest, most insipid, least inspiring of all kinds of endeavor, is nowhere allowed to obtrude itself."⁶⁶ By excising the traces of "labor," "historic results," and the writer's existence, the text "becomes to the cultivated reader a spring of the intensest and most captivating spiritual incitement" (22). The pleasure of this text, like the text of Mount Auburn, depended upon the erasure of work and, more radically, of agency.⁶⁷ In contrast to the satisfaction derived from an adherence to the ideal of invisible labor, the appearance of authorial labor often made the reviewer quite strident, as is evident in Bushnell's essay as well as in this 1850 *Harper's* review: "The scene, which is frequently shifted without sufficient regard to the locomotive faculties of the reader, betrays occasional inaccuracies and anachronisms, showing the hand of a writer who has not gained a perfect mastery of his materials. . . . Recourse is had to an awkward and improbable plot, many of the details of which are, in a high degree, unnatural, and often grossly revolting."⁶⁸

The situation seems paradoxical. On the one hand, we find a culture representing and celebrating the valiant struggle to attain virtue through industrious behavior, while we find, on the other hand, that same culture disdaining a literary text because it represents its own labor. As the very idea of labor in antebellum America underwent radical transformations, literary critics called upon authors to keep their labor to themselves. This paradox begins to make sense, however, once we consider that at the same time that actual machinery gained visibility on a scale previously unknown, in factories like the textile mills of Fall River and Lowell, and reconfigured the modes (and means) of production, literary critics were advising authors to hide their own machinery. The discourse of literary labor marked the discomfort with this transformation; it defined literature as a self-contained sphere, invulnerable to the dilemmas being faced in the world of work while using the language of labor to make the point. The problem was that at the very moment that these critics wished to separate literature from labor, they themselves constructed a version of

literature's relation to labor that looked remarkably like the problematic relation that seemed to exist between the new machinery in the workplace and laborers. The discourse of literary labor repeated the basic elements in the discourse of labor: ideals of invisible labor, subdivided labor, and absent agency. The invisibility of authorial agency and the synecdochic fragmentation of the author's body which we have seen in the discourse of literary labor are strikingly like workers' anxieties about their lack of agency and the corporeal changes brought about by new kinds of labor. The attempt to make authorial labor invisible so as to keep literature safely outside this debate paradoxically brought literature even further into the cultural fray. The discourse of literary labor thus collapsed the very distinction it meant to preserve.

The literary labor that seemed most fully to illustrate this destabilization of work and the work ethic was allegory and, in particular, the allegorical representation of fictional character. The discomfort that often accompanied the presence of allegorical characters in fiction went beyond the confined boundaries of literary taste. Although critics furnished their reviews with a variety of aesthetic reasons for the unacceptability of allegory, I shall make clear that the aesthetic headache brought on by allegory had some rather painful cultural and, in particular, economic sources. Allegorical characters foregrounded many of the most difficult and challenging issues being faced by nineteenth-century Americans: the problematic status of agency, the reconstruction of the body, and the changing nature of work, and that is why allegory was denounced. If allegory caused the dis-ease, the symbol provided the cure.

A brief overview of the expectations nineteenth-century readers brought to fictional texts reveals why allegory became a favorite target for reviewers. It will become evident that even though reviewers did not always use the term allegory, their language suggests that they leveled their criticism at the allegorical elements in the story. In her study of antebellum responses to fiction, Nina Baym convincingly demonstrates that most readers connected allegory to inadequate characterization and offers a persuasive account of why this kind of characterization proved so obnoxious to reviewers. An 1855 review in *Putnam's* criticized those incompetent writers who failed to spend enough time developing the complexity of human character and praised others who made "the nicest distinctions and shades of character with a keen, firm touch, and without those strong and exaggerated contrasts, which are too often evidences of confused conceptions, and imperfect execution."⁶⁹ Similarly, we find Poe castigating Bulwer-Lytton for his "absurd sacrifices of verisimilitude, as regards the connexion of his *dramatis personae*," or a review in the *Home Journal* congratulating a writer for her admirable depiction of "the progressive development of character."⁷⁰

According to Baym, nineteenth-century readers expected “a change in the reader’s knowledge of that character, an increasing discovery of what was already there.”⁷¹ Readers wanted to experience what E. M. Forster would later call surprise, but not the surprise that would come from the discovery that there was nothing more to know about a fictional character than had already been presented. Lack of character development was part of an even larger problem. Baym correctly identifies the problematic status of agency as the element of allegory that readers found especially difficult to accept: “Characters in fiction were devised as the agents of action, in allegory they were vehicles for concepts. . . . [Allegory] was not and could not be a popular form. Hence, much as our reviewers wanted better novels, they did not want them to become allegory.”⁷² In focusing attention on the problematics of agency and the related issue of character development in antebellum culture, we get to the heart of its objections about allegory. Once allegory was reconfigured as an attack on individual agency, an ideal of self-made and self-reliant agency that was being undermined in the workplace, the fundamental reason for its devaluation and marginalization becomes obvious. As the paradigm of individual agency through the work ethic came to seem more and more illusory, one could, presumably, always rescue agency in the space of leisure. But if allegorical agency occupied that space as well, the recuperation could not take place.

*V. HISTORICIZING ALLEGORY: FROM COLERIDGE
TO DE MAN*

Allegory, it should be recalled, was not always negatively regarded. One need only think of Dante and Bunyan to realize that the antipathy toward allegory (whose currency has finally run out) was a product of the Romantic ideology which culminated in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Thus, although the debate about allegory appears throughout the history of literary criticism, beginning as early as the fourth century B.C. with Philo and Origen, dominating the writings of Saint Augustine and Dante, and continuing through the Renaissance with Milton and Spenser, my own narrative will begin in the nineteenth century with Coleridge’s attack on allegory in “The Statesman’s Manual.” After all, it was Coleridge’s forceful articulation of his theory of symbol and allegory in this essay which had the greatest impact on antebellum theories of figurative language and has informed some of the most influential readings of American literature. The specific focus of this discussion will be the relation between allegory and history. My claim is that Benjamin’s theory of allegory, in contrast to the theories of Coleridge, Fletcher, and de Man, most compellingly works out the relation

between allegory and history and thus provides us with a model for reconfiguring allegory in the context of nineteenth-century American culture.

A symbol, according to Coleridge, “always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative” (30). Allegories, by contrast, “are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter” (30). One of Coleridge’s most significant theoretical moves, which had a lasting impact on Emerson as well as on much American literary criticism in the twentieth century, was to hierarchize these figures according to an aesthetic framework that valorized symbols to the degree that they instantiated universal laws of nature and transcended history, and that debased allegories to the degree that they obeyed the laws of “mechanic philosophy” (28) and exemplified the “counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding” (30). The realm of allegory, according to Coleridge, is best characterized by a mechanical worldview consisting of “the depthless abstractions of fleeting phenomena, the shadows of sailing vapors, [and] the colorless repetitions of rain-bows” (23). Given his wish to move beyond “the hollowness of abstractions” (28), the abstract, mechanical, and depthless qualities of allegory will never be as aesthetically pleasing as what he deemed the organic, unifying quality of the symbol. But the aesthetics of symbol and allegory in this essay are conceptualized in relation to profoundly political and historical phenomena. Here Coleridge seeks to map the mechanical and abstract nature of allegory onto a political landscape, alluding to the politics of the French Revolution: “In periods of popular tumult and innovation the more abstract a notion is, the more readily has it been found to combine, the closer has appeared its affinity, with the feelings of a people and with all their immediate impulses to action” (15). In contrast, the symbolic order has the capacity to unify “the contradictory interests of ten millions,” who can “be reconciled in the unity of the national interest” (21). It might be useful to remind ourselves that “*The Statesman’s Manual*” was not addressed to “a promiscuous audience” of persons infected with “the general contagion of its mechanical philosophy” (28) (some of whom are presumably mechanics) but rather to “the higher classes of society.”⁷³ Clearly, the aesthetics of allegory and symbol are conceived of in relation to labor and class, where allegory is aligned with the lower class of mechanics and symbol with the higher classes. Catherine Gallagher notes the continuity between Coleridge’s political and literary theories of representation: “Although Coleridge hoped that all citizens would internalize the idea of the state and thus submit to its governance, most citizens, he claimed, are incapable of independently

interpreting and representing the Idea.”⁷⁴ Clearly, Coleridge’s paradigm is not in itself ahistorical. Its privileging of the symbol is, however, a consequence of the (negative) historicity of allegory.

Coleridge’s theory of the transcendent symbol offered Americans a powerful way out of the contradictions at the heart of the discourse of literary labor, and Emerson effectively deployed it. The Coleridgean preference for the symbol is borne out in any number of Emerson’s essays, but “The Poet” offers an especially vivid illustration of the powers inherent in the symbol. In this 1844 essay, Emerson celebrates the poet’s ability to absorb and “re-attach things to nature and the Whole, – re-attaching even artificial things, and violations of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight” and then goes on to explain the relation between literature and the world of work:

Readers of poetry see the factory-village, and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these . . . the poet sees them fall within the greater Order not less than the bee-hive, or the spider’s geometrical web. Nature adopts them very fast into her vital circles, and the gliding train of cars she loves like her own. Besides, in a centred mind, it signifies nothing how many mechanical inventions you exhibit. Though you add millions, and never so surprising, the fact of mechanics has not gained a grain’s weight. The spiritual fact remains unalterable, by many or by few particulars; as no mountain is of any appreciable height to break the curve of the sphere.⁷⁵

This is indeed the language of the Coleridgean symbol, with its valorization of the great order achieved by poetic vision and the centered mind that sees coherence where others, perhaps, might not. By the end of this passage, “the fact of mechanics” has lost all of its power to ruin the poetry of the landscape. Against the forces of unchanging “spiritual facts,” these other facts, such as the factory village and the railway, have been reduced to utter irrelevance.⁷⁶ The natural language of the poet has appropriated the millions of mechanical inventions until they fail to signify at all. By nullifying the signs of labor, Emerson has effectively done away with the problematic relation between literature and labor. Simply put, labor no longer exists. Against the discourse of literary labor, which unsuccessfully attempts to preserve the distinction between literature and labor, Emerson’s essay illustrates the proper understanding of the relation between literature and labor: the power of the symbolic imagination to unify these two seemingly separate spheres and in so doing to provide a model of literary labor that would keep at bay the problematics of labor foregrounded by allegory. The strategy here, of course, is that instead of erasing the agency of the poet, the Emersonian symbol wipes out every-

thing in its path, except what he calls the one unalterable spiritual fact. Paradoxically, Emerson's American Scholar can only be complete by an imaginative act of erasure.⁷⁷

In contrast to Emerson's full-scale appropriation of the Coleridgean distinction between symbol and allegory, contemporary theorists have challenged Coleridge on a number of issues. One of the most influential and powerful of these critiques appears in Angus Fletcher's *Allegory*, which seeks to repair the damaged reputation of allegory. At the end of his introductory chapter, Fletcher remarks: "Allegories are far less often the dull systems that they are reputed to be than they are symbolic power struggles. If they are often rigid, muscle-bound structures, that follows from their involvement with authoritarian conflict. If they are abstract, harsh, mechanistic, and remote from everyday life, that may sometimes answer a genuine need."⁷⁸ The first sentence of this passage marks Fletcher's strategy. By conflating allegory and symbol, he signals a departure from the Coleridgean model. Although he agrees with Coleridge's description of allegory as "abstract, harsh, [and] mechanistic," Fletcher distances himself from an evaluative use of such terms: "The word 'symbol' in particular has become a banner for confusion, since it lends itself to a falsely evaluative function whenever it is used to mean 'good' ('symbolic') poetry as opposed to 'bad' ('allegorical') poetry" (14).

Fletcher, however, recapitulates the value system he wishes to critique, because his analysis ultimately depends upon the Coleridgean model, whose premise is, of course, the opposition between symbol and allegory and, most important, the valorization of the former. Although Fletcher challenges this basic structure, one of its fundamental pillars remains solidly in place. This is the ahistoricism that results in Coleridge's devaluation of allegory. In his introduction to *Allegory*, Fletcher claims that he will validate allegory first by dismantling Coleridge's oppositional model and second by systematizing the "overall purposes [of allegory] . . . without damaging the minor subtleties" (23). This taxonomic clarity is achieved by excising "certain special historical confusions" (13) from the debate. While occasionally referring to an historical component of allegory, as in an early passage where he alludes to the "conflict between rival authorities" (22) or where he acknowledges the fact that "allegory is serving major social and spiritual needs" (23), Fletcher is uninterested in the difference between symbol and allegory, because "this unhappy controversy . . . is a primarily historical matter, since it concerns romantic conceptions of the mind, and of 'imagination' in particular" (13). Because he ultimately wishes to "formulate a theory cutting across historical lines," (13) he is more like Coleridge (and Emerson) than he might prefer to believe. According to this logic, the influence of history upon allegory must be contained in order to rescue allegory from its Coleridgean fate.

Unsurprisingly, this flight from history has significant consequences, none more important than the oppositions between allegory and realism and allegory and history. In explaining the first opposition, Fletcher claims that allegories must often be “abstract, harsh, mechanistic, and remote from everyday life” (23) because “the price of a lack of mimetic naturalness is what the allegorist . . . must pay in order to force his reader into an analytic frame of mind” (107). Allegory, the argument goes, grabs the reader’s attention and forces her to contemplate that which she might otherwise read uncritically. The measure of allegory’s success is the extent to which it remains separate from the banalities of everyday life. Although Fletcher’s proposition might work for the Metaphysical poetry he discusses, the opposition between allegory and mimetic naturalness surely does not “cut across historical lines” – at least not in the case of allegory in nineteenth-century America. The example of Cuticle contradicts this logic, where allegory and realism gruesomely come together as Cuticle’s allegorical (and allegorizing) body dramatizes the work ethic gone awry that might seem all too familiar to readers. Furthermore, Fletcher’s opposition between allegory and mimesis does not permit an historical reading of “harsh, mechanistic” characters such as the Carpenter in *Moby-Dick* or the Duplicate workers in *The Mysterious Stranger, #44* or the “child of steam and the brother of the dynamo” in *The Education of Henry Adams*.⁷⁹ These allegorical figures force us to rethink the traditional dichotomy between allegory and realism; they demonstrate a new conception of realism in which what seems remote is in fact close, if not perilously close, to everyday life.

The theoretical move away from history (and the history of the everyday) is also a move away from the body in that the body bears upon it the marks of history. But even though Fletcher does not directly address the relation between allegory and the body (after all, his analysis of allegory is primarily a formal one), his language comes suggestively close to providing us with a corporeal model of allegory, as does Coleridge’s.⁸⁰ In describing the kind of abstract thinking he had earlier linked to allegory, Coleridge notes that “the widest maxims of prudence are like arms without hearts, muscles without nerves” (17). Similarly, a number of passages in Fletcher’s text use the language of the body to describe allegory: for example, in my first quotation above, he refers to its “rigid, muscle-bound structures”; elsewhere he accounts for the ability of allegory to evoke powerful responses in readers by pointing to its “surrealistic surface texture” (107); and in a lengthy footnote he claims, “There is a tendency for the ornamental image of clothing external to the body to merge with the body itself, and we find in fact an extensive use of the body-image in allegorical and mythopoeic poetry” (114). Fletcher’s debt to Coleridge, and the fact that *Allegory* was written in the heyday of the

new criticism, means that his suggestive allusions to the body will remain just that – suggestive.

Historicizing allegory permits us to “flesh out” these shadowy presences of the body and to give them their hermeneutic due. To dismiss the corporeal element of allegorical characters is to miss the ways in which the allegory of labor, as I have identified its contours in antebellum America, is inscribed upon the bodies of workers. And to dismiss the corporeal element in attacks on the labor of allegory is to miss the fact that literary labor was marginalized precisely because of the visible, bodily signs of authorial agency, whether they be an author’s hand, finger, or cuticle. Erasures of the body, like erasures of history, prevent us from realizing the extent to which critiques of allegory were grounded in anxieties about the changing relations between workers, be they in fiction or factories, and their bodies.

Coleridge’s (and by extension, Fletcher’s) definition of allegory as “mechanical” and “abstract” and of the symbol as “living” and “real” has had drastic consequences for the interpretation of American texts and requirements for canonicity. We can find these assumptions about allegory and symbol in many of the earliest and most influential discussions of American literature. Richard Chase, for example, dichotomizes American texts according to their affinities with “the romance” or “the novel.” Although his terms are different, the categories the romance and the novel recapitulate the distinctions made between allegory and symbol. Characters and events in romances such as *Moby-Dick*, according to Chase, have “a kind of abstracted simplicity about them . . . character may be deep but it is narrow and predictable. Events take place within a formalized clarity. And certainly it cannot be argued that society and the social life of man are shown to be complex in these fictions.”⁸¹ According to this standard and by now time-worn formulation, the novel has the virtue of realistic representation, whereas the romance, with its use of symbol and allegory (Chase does not distinguish between the various modes of figural discourse), makes human character narrow and abstract and thereby fails to be realistic. The incompatibility of realism and romance simply rehearses Fletcher’s opposition between realism and allegory.

The most theoretically sophisticated articulation of this Coleridgean model as it applies to the American Renaissance can be found in the work of Charles Feidelson. He arrives at the same conclusions as Chase but brings a knowledge of linguistic theory to the debate. His disdain for allegory assumes the following form: “Allegory was safe because it preserved the conventional distinction between thought and things. . . . Symbolism leads to an inconclusive luxuriance of meaning, while allegory imposes the pat moral and the simplified character.”⁸² Although Feidelson, like Chase and Forster, correctly describes allegorical figures

as simplified, he incorrectly concludes that this means they are simple. We could begin to challenge this claim by interrogating Feidelson's use of the word character. Are we to assume that Feidelson is referring to the simplicity of the (fictional) character; that is, the way in which the character is drawn? Or might he be referring to the simplicity of the character's character? Clearly, the complexities within the very word character undermine the notion of simplicity. Simplified characters, then, do not by definition have simple functions, especially when those functions are best determined by dialogically reading characters in relation to a variety of complex cultural contexts.

This dialogic reading of allegory has, in fact, already been proposed by Walter Benjamin, whose work has gained increasing influence in the field of literary criticism. His analysis of allegory, which is most fully developed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, significantly differs from the model offered by Coleridge and Fletcher in that Benjamin's interpretation of allegory depends upon history, more specifically the relation between seventeenth-century German culture and German Baroque drama. If the theoretical strength of Benjamin's analysis resides in its rigorous historicizing of seventeenth-century allegory, can one account for Benjamin's applicability to a nineteenth-century study of allegory in America and leave intact that historicization that seemed so compelling in the first place? Yes, says Jonathan Arac. And his explanation makes a great deal of sense. In *Critical Genealogies*, he directly confronts the potential problems of using Benjamin's historicized model of allegory for cultures other than seventeenth-century Germany: "Even if literature and society are interrelated, this does not mean that the 'same' literary features have the 'same' meaning when they appear in different socio-historical circumstances," and as an example of this he cites Benjamin himself, who "did not want simply to repeat in his Baudelaire study the insights into allegory he had achieved in the book on seventeenth-century *Trauerspiel*."⁸³ At the same time that Benjamin claims for allegory a general relation to history, Arac argues that the meanings generated by this relation are historically specific. History is both the common denominator and the locus of difference.

Let us read the differences between Benjamin and his predecessors. Benjamin challenges the valorization of symbol at the expense of allegory and defends allegory on precisely the ground upon which it had been earlier attacked; that is, the fact that it does not transcend its historical limits. "The decisive category of time . . . permits the incisive, formal definition of the relationship between symbol and allegory. Whereas in the symbol, destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape."⁸⁴ Rather than valorizing allegory by making it more like a

symbol, as Fletcher tried to do in *Allegory*, Benjamin highlights their differences. In the symbol, history is revealed as redemptive because nature remains unscathed by the marks of history. Allegory, on the other hand, includes no such idealization or transfiguration. Whereas the symbol attempts to erase the signs of history within nature, allegory is compelled to foreground them.

Benjamin's account of allegory is grounded in a reading of seventeenth-century German culture and, more specifically, the Baroque drama. He connects the presence of ruins in the dramatic landscape and corporeal fragmentation with the Reformation, a cultural movement which, he claims, denied the significance of good works by "making the soul dependent on grace through faith," and created a world in which "human actions were deprived of all value" (138). The ruptured connection between human activity and spiritual fate had grave consequences for the culture's representations of itself. The ruins of the Baroque drama articulated the pain experienced by "those who looked deeper [and] saw the scene of their existence as a rubbish heap of partial, inauthentic actions" (139). The allegory of the German Baroque drama thus spoke to the mournfulness of a culture whose religious foundations depended upon the diminution of human agency.⁸⁵

This disempowerment is figured as a radical change in the body's relation to itself, and it is clear that with this attention to the body, Benjamin distances himself even further from traditional readings of allegory that viewed it as abstract and disembodied. Benjamin uses Dürer's *Melancholia*, where "the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor as objects of contemplation" (140), as a representative example of the shift in the experience of one's body. He argues that the body, which up until the Reformation had usefully performed good works, was now consigned to the status of an object of contemplation. He calls this new relation to the body "a symptom of depersonalization" (140), which is a corporealized experience of the loss of agency. This loss, however, becomes the precondition for an even greater gain: "The false appearance of totality is extinguished" in order to behold "the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature" (176). It is only by giving up the illusion of totality, by experiencing one's own lack of freedom, that one can begin to be truly free. It is only by seeing oneself (and all objects) as completely inscribed by history that one can begin, in the words of Terry Eagleton, to be "liberated into polyvalence."⁸⁶ This loss of agency, which is figured in the Baroque drama as a depersonalized relation to one's own body, becomes an occasion for a peculiarly postmodern paradigm of liberation.⁸⁷ It is necessary to distance ourselves from the misplaced romanticism that underlies both Benjamin and Eagleton's casting of

this liberation, because it undermines Benjamin's otherwise compelling historicizing of allegory. The basis of this liberation into polyvalence is, after all, the fact of our complete and utter contextualization.

If allegory is a liberation into polyvalence for Benjamin and Eagleton, it is radically unlike the "vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" proposed by de Man, whose prominent role requires our attention.⁸⁸ Rescuing allegory requires that de Man, like Benjamin before him, rehearse the Coleridgean distinction between symbol and allegory and argue for its incoherence. De Man does this in "Rhetoric and Temporality" by deconstructing the notion of a stable subject who "borrow[ed] from the outside world a temporal stability which it lacked within itself."⁸⁹ Thus allegory, in contrast to symbol, acknowledges and foregrounds the temporal disjunction between the subject and nature, a disjunction which allegory is, nevertheless, doomed to repeat because this knowledge does not ultimately matter very much; it does not, indeed it cannot, lead to that temporal stability which de Man has argued is always already a mystification. Benjamin, by contrast, challenges the Coleridgean model by studying the role of allegory in German Baroque drama, where, he discovers, "history merges into the setting. And in the pastoral plays above all, history is scattered like seeds over the ground" (92). Whereas de Man ends up by claiming "the impossibility of our being historical" (211), Benjamin wishes "to make historical content, such as provides the basis of every important work of art, into a philosophical truth" (182). De Man grounds many of his claims about allegory in a reading of Benjamin which sympathizes with the project of releasing allegory from its Coleridgean fate, but his own analysis deletes one of Benjamin's most important claims: "In the last analysis structure and detail are always historically charged" (182). Although de Man makes the relation between allegory and temporality the centerpiece of his discussion, his conception of temporality is shorn of any resemblance to historical context, or, as Frank Lentricchia puts it, "history, at least in its conventional senses, is denied altogether."⁹⁰ Temporality, for de Man, means "that the allegorical sign refer[s] to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority" (207). Temporality, in other words, refers not to the possible relations between language and history (which has become as impossible as our being historical) but rather to the intertextual relations within language itself.

Temporality is, indeed, a crucial feature of allegory, but this temporality must be understood in decidedly historical terms, particularly because the antipathy to allegory in American culture was, as I have argued,

conceived of in relation to the discursive field of labor. In other words, de Man's ahistorical, or what one critic of deconstruction has called anti-historical, configuration of allegory does not adequately explain allegory in nineteenth-century America.⁹¹ This is not to say, however, that the notion of temporality should simply be dismissed, but rather the repetition that de Man sees as a central feature of allegory needs to be historicized. Benjamin says as much when he claims, "Allegory, like many other old forms of expression, has not simply lost its meaning by 'becoming antiquated.' What takes place here, as so often, is a conflict between the earlier and the later form" (161). The disjunction between the earlier and the later form must be conceptualized not in exclusively linguistic terms but rather in terms of the relation between language and historical context. When "archaic" formations, to use Raymond Williams's terms once again, like allegory are redeployed in different temporal contexts, accretions and transformations of meaning inevitably take place. This requires us to acknowledge and explain the ways in which rhetorical forms, to use de Man's terms, like allegory are mediated, nuanced, and changed by those specific contexts.

Benjamin grounds his account of allegory in the specificity of seventeenth-century Germany, and this is its strength. If some of the same issues raised by Benjamin's analysis resonate in our reading of allegory in nineteenth-century American culture, it is certainly not because Baroque drama anticipated the American novel but rather because the undermining of agency, which Benjamin reads as an effect of the Reformation, has an American counterpart in the dissolution of the work ethic. This historically specific difference, however, opens up a reading of allegory that turns out to be dramatically unlike what Benjamin proposes in *The Origin*, one that reads the antipathy to allegory in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the uncomfortable similarity between allegorical and economic constructions of agency. Hence, we see the development of an "economics of allegory." The work ethic seemed to be a discourse that unified a variety of cultural activities – all professions required an adherence to it. But literary taste urged texts not to foreground the work that went into their construction. The work ethic when applied to literature, then, meant the erasure of literary work. Allegorical texts spurned this advice and often were castigated and marginalized as a consequence. I have up to this point mapped out the ideological motivation behind this advice; now let us look at two tales by Hawthorne and see whether or not he heeds it.