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"Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past"—so declares Melville's Pierre in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* as he elects orphanhood, choosing to occupy a narrative of liberation invested with the kinship metaphors and sacred overtones of a revolutionary heritage. Both parricide and orphaned victim, agent and object, Pierre reveals the complex affective terrain of an autogenic authority. His choice is put into relief as the other characters also explore or break from all former ties of kinship. Melville sets the trope of elective orphanhood against the female sentimental orphan, a common protagonist of sentimental novels, whose authority is located in her ability to discipline herself into an intimate possession. This essay argues that Melville pushes these doubled tropes of orphanhood to excess in order to critique their currency as narratives of liberation.

> Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.
>
> Epilogue to *Moby Dick*

So ends *Moby-Dick*, with Ishmael floating on a coffin at sea, the sole survivor who has lived to tell the tale. It is not by accident the last word of the novel is "orphan," nor the rescuing ship named the *Rachel*, whose captain earlier pleaded with Ahab to help find his son lost at sea. Conjuring the biblical Rachel weeping for her missing children (Matthew 2:18), the ship that rescues Ishmael emphasizes the mortal separation of parents and children. The ship is yet another coffin floating upon the sea, an apt metaphor for Ishmael's identity as orphan, defined by loss. Melville would expand this theme in his next novel, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1852). As Eric J. Sundquist

notes, if *Moby-Dick* can be thought of as a novel that vacates paternal authority until Ishmael ends an orphan, *Pierre* commences with that paternal authority already absent (156).

Most critical readings of the novel explore its family relations by way of incest, but I believe that the incest clarifies the larger matter of orphanhood, as *Pierre* is "buoyed up by [the] coffin" of orphanhood excessively and insistently. As a dominant theme in antebellum US writing, orphanhood has most often been considered a common plot convention of the sentimental novel, whose "radical origins" depend on the "biological family in shards" (Weinstein 21). As Cindy Weinstein and others argue, the sentimental novel has at its heart the loss of a stable family, a loss that structures a narrative of choice and sympathy, rather than biology, in kinship relations. Melville's insistence on orphanhood as a self-authorizing act in *Pierre* suggests an intentional investigation of the patri-filial metaphors that structure both Revolutionary discourse and the rhetoric of descent from the Founding Fathers. Already orphaned with the loss of his father as a child, Pierre chooses to disown his mother as well as his paternity (and patrimony) in an act of orphaning that has both happened to him and that he elects, a choice that echoes the rhetoric of consanguinity through which the nation claimed and justified independence. Pierre's coming of age as an orphan reveals the conflicting affective terrain implicit in that rhetoric of choosing orphanhood, for the novel asks what it means to view orphaning as a narrative of liberation, an ideal of choice over biology. In this way, *Pierre* explores the ways in which choosing orphanhood as a means to determine one's authority constitutes agency as a kind of victimhood or lack of agency. Pierre desires an "untrammeledly . . . ever-present self," but finds this idea a paradox, for to be "ever-present" is to detach oneself from the past, or define oneself through loss: an agency articulated in terms of victimhood. Melville explores the contradictions of an agency founded on metaphorical orphaning, a specific woundedness that Peter Coviello explores as the "affective cohesion" (452–53) that Jefferson imagined would hold the new nation-state together. The capacity for shared feeling that Jefferson articulates in the draft of the Declaration of Independence, Coviello writes, both allows for the renouncing of the ties that connected the colonies to Britain and for forming the new ties that would consolidate the citizenry: "As imagined here, in this climactic moment, Jefferson's is an American citizenry essentially trau-matized into fellowship: wounded and bereaved by the severance of their dear-est ties, and made one, in turn, by the bereavement they share" (452). In other words, in order to commit parricide, one must feel oneself an orphan.

The figure of the elective orphan, central to the pamphlet literature of the American Revolution, became a useful and often-used trope for testing the mythos of autogenic authority in novels of the post-Revolution period. In

his influential *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, Jay Fliegelman argues that the English debates of the seventeenth century about the nature of the social contract and power analogized state power as familial, with the King as father and the subjects as children. The family served as a miniature power structure, one that was recast in the writing of John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment, in a state of transition away from patriarchal authority toward contract and sympathy. The American colonies were viewed as the children of the British on both sides of the Atlantic during the Revolutionary period, reinforcing the notion of the patriarchal family and state as mirror entities. The symbols of Mother Country and Father King were so powerful that the Revolutionaries did not try to unravel their rhetorical influence or assert a different kind of tie. Instead, they made use of the idea of kinship as a means to argue *for* Independence, revising the emotional thrust of the symbols in their tracts. Fliegelman argues that emergence from familial dependence became the "quintessential motif" of the American Revolution (3).

Against charges from the Tories that the colonies were ungrateful and disobedient children needing discipline, or worse, parricidal, the "*Sons* of Liberty" asserted that the colonies had achieved the age of independence and were ready to be set free into the self-governance of national adulthood, an argument Jefferson used in the original draft of the Declaration of Independence. In addition to the argument that the colonies had reached the age of rational maturity, some, like John Adams and Benjamin Frankin, asserted that the parent country had abused her children and therefore severed the ties of kinship. Both of these symbolic subject positions—rational adolescent and maltreated child—are deeply problematic, but together they provide affective traction for a revolutionary and post-revolutionary imagining of the nation. I propose that the figure of the elective orphan captures the oscillation between these positions, creating a space that embodies both the violence of parricide and the victimhood of persecution. By simultaneously invoking these two subject positions of agent and victim (or object), elective orphanhood embodies parricide while claiming victimization from the subsequent loss of kinship. Only through replicating the initial symbolic terms that constructed an autogenic authority could the elective orphan in post-revolutionary literature both mimic the rhetoric of the founders, and, as Russ Castronovo writes of parricidal criticism, "slay . . . the father's controlling metaphors, fracturing the unbroken linearity of national narrative" (9).[1] Though this narrative suggests a shared mourning as well as a common ability to unite as a new national family, its ambivalence highlights the dangers posed by attempting the impossible project of autogenesis in a post-revolutionary culture of ancestor worship that depended on faithfulness to the memory of the founding fathers. The elective orphan figure

encapsulates the dilemma, loss, and possibility of an autogenic authority, and Melville uses the trope to thwart the general compulsion toward a narrative of coherence and descent from the Revolutionary generation. Pierre is able to create a self-legitimating authority for himself by couching it in specific language that registers the rhetorics of republicanism and masculine sensibility at the heart of elective orphanhood. Rather than provide the coherence this rhetoric promises, *Pierre* reveals the incongruities and irresolution in the genealogical metaphor for nationhood by exploring the affective consequences of the original separation from the Father King. Melville locates the fatal flaw not in the post-revolutionary failure of the sons to continue the Revolutionary legacy, but in the genealogical metaphor of the Revolution, which posits authority in autogenesis and parricidal victimhood. The novel reenacts and empties out the genealogical mythos of the political foundations of the nation by entwining elective orphanhood with a figure whose very identity hinges on the loss inherent in orphanhood: the sentimental orphan.

The sentimental orphan was prominent in US literature in the mid-nineteenth century. Where (conventionally male) elective orphans choose to disown their kinship ties, the (conventionally female) sentimental orphans are stock protagonists in novels that feature the destruction of the family as a necessary pre-condition for narrative. The choice to disown one's kinship ties is not one that sentimental orphans get to make, and yet sentimental orphans can be read as an outgrowth of elective orphanhood, echoing the agency implied in this condition but limiting the field of action to themselves through self-control and discipline, rather than changing their role in the social sphere. In *Pierre*, Melville excavates the sentimental orphan's roots in elective orphanhood in order to make legible the omissions in the foundational narrative of autogenesis. Melville's desire for *Pierre* to be a popular romance led him to examine the conventions popular to the literary market of the 1850s and to consider how the elective orphan's oscillation from agent to object had been turned entirely inward.

The Sentimental Orphan

During the antebellum period, the sentimental orphan became the prominent literary reincarnation of the orphan figure. Critics have read the sentimental orphan as either a democratic figure representing agency or, conversely, a conservative one revealing the class anxiety underwriting the rise of domesticity. She is a democratic figure when considered in relation to her lack of kinship ties; she must choose or recuperate those ties according to sympathy rather than blood, contract rather than consanguinity.

From this perspective, she reveals the supposedly leveling shift within the family from patriarchal authority to one based on Lockean notions of contract. Orphanhood offered an authorizing narrative of identity that resonated deeply in the post-Revolution period. As Elizabeth Dill writes, the orphan "is the ultimate democratizing force that challenges the superiority of the family in a republic as one who ever only elects a family" (716). Viewed in this way, the sentimental orphan, like the elective orphan, is exiled from the biological family, but it is her agency to elect a family, with all of the political resonance that implies, that makes her such a germane and popular figure.

Yet the sentimental orphan reveals the limitations of this agency in two important ways. First, as a figure common to sentimental novels, she learns self-control and discipline, rather than choice, as the route to gaining familial love and as a role model for the reader. Additionally, the dynamic of the family in the mid-nineteenth century necessitates her objectification within what Lori Merish defines as the "autonomous emotional response" of "sentimental ownership," "a fantasy of intimate possession that is in fact—like the 'free market' itself—produced and sustained by laws and economic policies" (4). Thus, the sentimental orphan possesses a very limited kind of agency, which she gains through self-discipline, in order to find her social, religious, and affective identity as an "intimate possession." In order to be known and claimed by love, exactly the kind of possessive tie that the sentimental orphan lacks, she must be constituted through a liberation narrative that writes her as autonomous from the market, though paradoxically legible only in its terms.[2]

The most popular sentimental novels feature orphans originally from aristocratic or upper-class backgrounds whose poverty is a temporary obstacle. The sentimental orphan figure in these novels signifies the loss and recovery of class position, and betrays an anxiety about the position of the middle class at the top of the social hierarchy. Thus, biological kinship ties dictate one's identity in the end, when the sentimental orphan's true genealogy is revealed.[3] The sentimental orphan in most orphan tales is a conservative figure rather than a revolutionary one; she is a victim whose fate is already determined by her past, which she cannot escape.[4] And yet, she still stars in a narrative of liberation whose terms suggest the complex affective oscillation of the orphan as both agent and victim, though her woundedness in familial loss leads her not to kill the father in order to claim her own identity but to prove her authority over herself.

In the sentimental orphan, the elective orphan's parricidal thrust has been internalized into a didactic and disciplinary program in which she frees herself from all but selfless desire. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault theorizes the gradual interiorizing of discipline in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century from a physical punishment enacted on the body of the wrongdoer

to more pervasive but less visible technologies of control.[5] Richard Brodhead terms "discipline through love" the defining American middle-class creation of the nineteenth century; in it, the mother, focused solely on child-rearing as her labor, builds the child's moral compass through nurture and affection, effectively internalizing her authority over the child. Without a mother to actively discipline (love) her, the sentimental orphan must either find a mother figure or discipline herself. There is no declaration of freedom from the ties to the past that kinship embodies, only a freedom to locate her value as an intimate possession in the domestic sphere.

This shift embodies what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon regards as sentimentalism's transformation of the concept of "liberation" from a resistance to labor located in aesthetic play, choice, and imagination (in other words, breaking free of oppressive social norms) to ideas of autonomy and citizenship premised on the family as embodying anti-utilitarianism or freedom from the market.[6] Accordingly, sentimental orphanhood is the logical outgrowth of the volition of elective orphanhood, the ultimate expression of liberation and autonomy in the cultural moment in which Melville was writing, and writing against. It is tempting to read sentimental orphanhood as the female equivalent of elective orphanhood, but such a conclusion misses the larger cultural shift to which Melville is pointing.

By twinning these two orphan narratives in the story of Pierre, Melville examines the structuring of narratives of liberation through kinship as a complex and ambiguous revolutionary inheritance. The dual positions of agent and victim, as well as the oscillation between them, are the means through which the elective orphan narrative captures the affective terrain of revolutionary metaphors of consanguinity. In sentimental orphan narratives, the protagonist must claim herself an object in order to be an autonomous subject, much like the elective orphan who claims himself a victim to ground his agency.

"Doubly an Orphan": Pierre

When a stranger, Isabel Banford, mysteriously appears and claims to be the illegitimate daughter of his dead father, Pierre Glendinning's understanding of his relation to his world is fractured. Pierre's father died when Pierre was twelve years old, and his mother Mary Glendinning shares the paternal authority of the household with his exalted memory. Pierre projects his familial crisis onto a young portrait of his father, painted while he was in love with a woman whom Pierre conjectures is Isabel's mother; Pierre puts the portrait in a chest and declares, "'I will no more have a father'" (87). The strong wording of his statement, enacting an emotional

severance of relation, is a linguistic action he wills into being. Pierre realizes that his relationship with his mother is now forever fractured, for he knows he cannot share his emotional upheaval with her; furthermore her pride would not allow Isabel any place in their family. At this moment, he breaks with all parental authority; by choosing to throw in his lot with Isabel rather than continuing the family line, he must no longer be the person his mother and father created him to be, the proud heir of the Glendinning estate. He has consciously turned his back on his family, lineage, and a past that explicitly echoes the nation's history, with grandfathers who served in the Revolutionary War and land gained through Indian deed. Yet Pierre finds, instead of an absence of authority, "an indefinite but potential faith, which could rule in the interregnum of all hereditary beliefs, and circumstantial persuasions; not wholly, he felt, was his soul in anarchy" (87). The diction, especially "interregnum" and "anarchy," emphasize the political aspect of this break with a surprising lexical nod to the precursor of American political theory, British republicanism. At this moment of his turning away from the past, Pierre finds not "anarchy" or an absence of government, but a familiar political mode granting himself authority. Melville's emphasis here on the way Pierre's overflow of passion feels like an enlightened decision highlights the affective potential of the narrative of elective orphanhood.

Melville goes on to unambiguously present Pierre's discovery of his authority as akin to an orphaning, though it is wholly his own internal circumstances that have changed:

> Then Pierre felt that deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness, that owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely lonesome, and orphan-like. Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; tho' purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael in the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him. (89)

That his blossoming awareness of his will is earlier called "an indefinite but potential faith" and here a "divine unidentifiableness" stresses that his new sense of identity is cast through with religious feeling as well as political import, an open-ended potentiality. The unfixed nature of his authority is perhaps what makes it seems divine, so that breaking with the past, "own[ing] no earthly kith or kin," is a kind of liberty. And yet, his sense of loss is overwhelming and reiterated as an orphaning:

> Oh heartless, proud, ice-gilded world, how I hate thee, he thought, that thy tyrannous, insatiate grasp, thus now in my bitterest need—thus doth rob me even of my mother; thus doeth make me now doubly an orphan, without a green grave to bedew. My tears,—could I weep them,—must now be wept in

> the desolate places; now to me is it, as through both father and mother had gone on distant voyages, and, returning, died in unknown seas. (90)

Pierre has lost his previous unblemished idealizations of his parents. He mourns for his own lost connection to purity upon perceiving his parents as fallen humans rather than images of divine perfection. That he understands his sense of loss as an orphaning speaks to the power of the orphan narrative and its association with a national mythos of autogenic authority. He evades his decision to choose Isabel and thereby become an orphan, blaming instead the "heartless, proud, ice-gilded world." He frames his experience as an orphaning because it lends his newfound sense of himself a legible framework, one invested with the sacred overtones of a revolutionary heritage. In this way, his newfound authority is recognizable and legitimized.

Pierre's complex woundedness, embedded in his act of independence, recalls the emotional thrust of the rhetoric of the Revolution. He rationally elects orphanhood as an assertion of a self-created identity independent of biology, inheritance, and tradition, while simultaneously claiming to have been "robbed" of his relations. This emotional constellation is what makes him an elective orphan. Pierre's wounded affect, his emotional pitch, justifies his actions.

In turning away from his parents' external authority and choosing instead his own internal sense of right, Pierre enacts the idea of self-government presented in texts such as Locke's "Some Thoughts Concerning Education." Tellingly, however, Pierre's decision does not result from having internalized a sense of restraint over his passions, but, as in the case of the sentimental orphan, from an entirely different impulse: emotion. By following the dictates of his heart—disobeying his mother and "marrying" Isabel—Pierre loses his claim to the family patrimony and estate. He sees the chair portrait of his father lying among his few belongings packed from his former home, and burns it. Melville describes Pierre as desperate to the point of madness in this act, reaching out into the flames to grab for his father's face and burning his hand in the process, which he fails to notice. This act of burning, done to destroy what he considers proof of his father's misdeeds so as to "'hold his public memory inviolate'" (198), is accompanied by the destruction of family letters and other "memorials in paper" (198), a bizarre ceremony that dramatizes his break from the past. The act ritualizes his own authority as autogenic, as he declares in no uncertain terms: "'Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammeledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!'" (199). He calls himself "twice-disinherited": his first orphaning is the devastating loss of his idealized relationship with his

parents, and the second is his burning the portrait and materially enacting his elective orphanhood as a reification of his "ever-present self." Pierre's speech to himself is a declaration of independence. Or, more to the point, his pronouncement contains the emotional logic that Jefferson initially wrote in his draft of the Declaration, but that Congress removed.

Thomas Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence argued that the colonies had come of an age "to assume the equal and independent station to which the law of nature and of nature's God entitle them."[7] As the ur-text of American political authority, this document participates in the rhetoric of kinship in order to argue for autonomy. As Jay Fliegelman explains, the case for the American Revolution, including the case made in the "original Rough draught" of the Declaration, was structured by familial rhetoric concerned with "natural" bonds of obedience and duty between parents and children. In the passages Congress excised, much to Jefferson's anger, he articulates the elective orphanhood paradigm in terms of a doubled rhetoric oscillating between agency and victimhood, rationality and emotion, choice and loss. He conjures, in classic familial imagery, the colonies as the offspring of the King and Mother country, referring to the British as "Brethren" and discussing the colonies' previous petitions on the ground of the "ties of our common kindred" and "consanguinity." This kind of symbolism evokes an intricate and loaded emotional tie: the colonies, declaring independence, are disobedient and parricidal, or else, wronged and abused, they are reluctantly striking out for self-preservation. In the movement back and forth between agency and victimhood, Jefferson's excised passage reveals the deep loss underwriting the project of autogenesis and self-fashioning. In the second to last paragraph, talking of his "British brethren," he writes:

> at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & a great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state, and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu!

The colonies are envisioned as wronged kindred, necessarily but reluctantly turning away from a vital relationship gone sour. When Jefferson uses hyperbolic sentimental language to imagine this difficult emotional turn ("these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection"), it is not the decision to divorce

oneself from the national family that is "agonizing," but the affection itself that prompts the discomfort. He emphasizes that this attachment must be severed, first and foremost, in order to declare Independence: "we must endeavor to forget our former love for them." He even envisions a future of familial peace no longer possible ("we might have been a free & great people together"), in order to drive home the message of loss at the heart of this passage. Only then, by relying on the vocabulary of masculine feeling, what he terms "manly spirit," can he tap into the communal sensibility that holds a people together, as Adam Smith first proposed in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).[8]

Jefferson suggests that there is a deep loss of love involved, but that the colonies must acknowledge the emotional logic of a wounded heart and "acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu." This passage is often referred to in order to make legible the role of sentiment in the Declaration of Independence. According to Peter Coviello, in this excised passage Jefferson solves the dilemma of revolutionary authority by relying on emotion's unifying power. Coviello writes, "A citizen's capacity for affect—here for grief-strickenness—is nothing less than a capacity for national belonging" (454). Jefferson posits the experience of orphanhood, or woundedness over the loss of familial love, as the common emotion that will create a sense of shared virtuous citizenship. Only after he has hit this particular affective register can he propose the revolutionary act of Independence. As Russ Castronovo has demonstrated, the emotional logic of the ubiquitous patrifilial metaphor for political relation was used often by the Revolutionary generation, and consequently was up for reconsideration in the post-Revolution period, as writers like Melville considered what had been left out in the making of a coherent national narrative.

Property and The Sentimental Orphan: Isabel

If Pierre voices the parricidal agency of the elective orphan, an agency bent on establishing an autogenic authority, Isabel Banford's narrative explores her orphanhood as the lack of all but disciplinary agency, in which the self becomes an object within the relations of "sentimental ownership."[9] The sentimental orphan makes legible the gap between ideas of liberation from the Revolutionary period and the mid-nineteenth century of Melville's *Pierre*, when liberation is reconceived through the terms of capital.

Isabel's story is built around her quest for a family, which she gains through sympathy, despite her poor and unknown origins, or rather because of those origins. She is the epitome of sentimental orphanhood in that she has already been disciplined into a negativity of desire and self, other than the

desire for "'some one of my own blood to know me, and to own me, though but once, and then away'" (158). This yearning motivates her to write to Pierre and reveal their blood connection. She denies authority for even this act, since by the logic of sentimental orphanhood she cannot claim access to the agency it would imply. She attributes this act to a power outside of herself: "'God called thee, Pierre, not poor Bell'" (159). She has had no loving authority figure to teach her the ways of self-discipline, but is an adept self-learner, aided by the cruelty and neglect inflicted on her by unsympathetic caretakers. For example, she explains that, upon learning what she believes is her father's surname, she "'repressed all undue curiosity, if any such has ever filled my breast'" (147). Having learned to conquer her desire, she is primed for domesticity, except that she lacks a family and is of the wrong class. Melville writes *Pierre* as the answer to Isabel's lack: Pierre will be brother, lover, and parent to her, the only one who can exert proper "sentimental ownership" over her, turning her from a wage worker into a woman whose does not labor, or whose labor is the act of love. The domestic realm, though so often articulated in sentimental novels as divorced from a public sphere and early capitalism, is in fact predicated on them, as an arena of control and ownership (Gillian Brown 3). Following Foucault, Lori Merish develops the idea of "subjection" as a meshing of agency and constraint inherent to female subjectivity as expressed in domesticity.[10] By exerting "sentimental ownership" over Isabel, Pierre suggests how the sentimental orphan's agency (indeed all agency) is a consent to capitalism. Narratives of sentimental orphanhood begin with the loss of the power and property relations associated with the nuclear family. These narratives depict a limited agency twinned with constraint and accommodations to the structures of power, accommodations that Melville reveals and critiques in *Pierre*.

Melville represents Isabel as a being whose main property is her emotion; much like her guitar, she is a feeling object. She believes her guitar belonged to her mother and was fated to end up in her possession. The guitar serves as an emotional connection to her lost mother and appears to respond to Isabel in a loving and supernatural conversation enacted through music as a signifier of loss. This emotional call and response is so powerful that Pierre, upon witnessing it, is "[a]lmost deprived of consciousness by the spell flung over him" (150). Thus absence is reified in the novel and also connected to ideas of possession and property. The guitar's anthropomorphic quality illustrates the trope of domestic animism in sentimental literature: objects are endowed with spiritual qualities inside domestic spaces in order to show the regenerative affective power of the home.[11] The guitar, as object, is the embodiment of the parent's absence, of the affect of orphanhood; not surprisingly its music cements the relation between Pierre and Isabel. Through the logic of

"sentimental ownership," Isabel is claimed by Pierre's love, animated by the act of being possessed, much as the guitar reveals loving as an act accomplished through and made evident by objects. Melville embodies Isabel's mother in the guitar, where she continues to speak to Isabel, raising the object to the status of person, indeed making them equivalent. It is not a far leap for Pierre to claim Isabel as loved object, a logic evident in how both Pierre and Isabel consider her role in relation to labor.

The anti-utilitarian nature of Isabel's role and her objecthood are made clear when Lucy comes to live with her and Pierre. Immediately upon settling into their home, Lucy mentions her desire to labor by "practicing her crayon art professionally" (330), that is, by making and selling portraits. Lucy's plan to earn her keep affects Isabel strangely. She raves: "'But she shall not get the start of me! Pierre, some way I must work for thee! See, I will sell this hair; have these teeth pulled out; but some way I will earn money for thee!'" (333). In this moment of jealous rage, Isabel literalizes herself as property. Her status as object is so complete that, at first, she can only imagine labor as a dismembering of her body, something inflicted upon her. We can read this plea for dismemberment as akin to the sentimental orphan's hollowing out of her self in order to be part of the domestic sphere. Isabel's plea demonstrates the oscillation between subjecthood and objecthood, laying bare the logic of accommodation that sentimental orphanhood requires. Isabel quickly realizes how deranged her cry sounds, and calmly requests that Pierre find music students for her, so that she may, like Lucy, labor. Though happy to hear Lucy's plan, Pierre dismisses Isabel's request, telling her, "'thou art the mistress of the natural sweetness of the guitar, not of its invented regulated artifices; and these are all that the silly pupil will pay for learning . . . Ah, thy sweet ignorance is all transporting to me! my sweet!—dear, divine girl!'" (334). He values her unproductive role within the household and her ignorance of the market, though she is actually the only one in their household to have worked for pay. Isabel's capacity to feel (the "natural sweetness of the guitar") is a marker of her new class position and the reason why she must remain outside of the market.

Lack is the defining aspect of Isabel's character, as Priscilla Wald and Sianne Ngai have argued. Her actual lack—her orphanhood—offsets Pierre's self-imposed one, and suggests the problematic posture of familial loss as a catalyst for self-fashioning. She is bereft of actual parents, but also a coherent narrative of the past; she relates her fragmented history to Pierre alongside a haunted, magical song that she plays with her guitar. Her narrative, as she tells it to Pierre, begins, "'I never knew a mortal mother'" (114). Much like the way in which slave narratives recall and thwart the factual conventions of autobiographical detail, such as the naming of a birthplace and birthday, Isabel's

narrative suggests the indefinite quality of all memory, especially childhood memory. Without the narrative reinforcement and knowledge of self that one gains from living within a family, she can only relate physical impressions. As an adult recalling sensations in place of autobiographical detail, she is acutely aware of her lack, and she uses it to emphasize her orphanhood. She says, "'Always in me, the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities. Never have I wholly recovered from the effects of my strange early life'" (117). Isabel fills the iteration of her narrative with pauses that she commands: "'Let me be silent now; do not speak to me'" (118). She narrates both her past lack of happiness and her current personhood as a kind of exile. A symbol of utter lack, she prompts a crisis of agency in Pierre.

Pierre's agency, once he claims Isabel, takes on that oscillation between agent and object that lies at the heart of elective orphanhood. Sianne Ngai's approach to Pierre's agency is instructive. Ngai suggests that the movement from agent to object is itself a kind of fantasy of liberation. She views Pierre's anxiety as a gendered response to objecthood and victimhood in the face of the lack that Isabel figures, which prompts Pierre's own desire to be an object. Through the symbolism of the Terror Stone, that "patriarchal rock" (Ngai 240) that Pierre projects himself onto and under (his name literally means "stone" in French), as well as the myth of Enceladus, an anthropomorphic stone thrown from the father mountain, Ngai analyzes Pierre's fantasy of becoming a stone. As "an object that hurls itself back at the paternal mass" (Ngai 244), masculine agency is restored through a turning away from the kinds of negative spaces that Isabel narrates. Ngai argues that "the projective character Pierre's anxiety comes to assume, as a form of displacement marked by an implicit movement from agent to object, or center to periphery, performs a more conservative function" (245) as a fantasy of "self-liberation" (246) through projection. Isabel's transition to being owned as property within the domestic structure is presented as a kind of liberation, existing, as it does, within the logic of liberal subjection. Pierre's desire to be an object speaks to Melville's (de)construction of the complexity and complicity of narratives of self-liberation.

The Collision of Orphanhoods: Lucy

Pierre's first love and original fiancée, Lucy Tartan, is an altogether different iteration of the orphan, combining the agency of the elective orphan and the self-discipline of the sentimental orphan. She is constructed as the light to Isabel's darkness, in personality, circumstance, and coloration.[12] Lucy is wealthy and of a respectable family, while Isabel is of mysterious parentage; Lucy seems mature, while Isabel appears child-like. Lucy is Pierre's intended

bride, chosen not only by his mother, but also by Pierre himself, until his discovery of kinship with Isabel changes his path. Pierre decides to fake a marriage to Isabel and promptly informs his fiancée, "'Lucy, I am married'" (183), breaking her heart. Lucy then disappears from the novel, while Pierre and Isabel, "married" and suddenly poor and homeless, move to the city and find refuge in a dwelling for artists and Pierre attempts to write a great mature novel.

When Lucy resurfaces near the end of the novel, we learn that she mysteriously understands that some secret and selfless reason has compelled Pierre to marry Isabel and that she is on her way to live with them in the guise of Pierre's chaste cousin, despite the consequences to her reputation. Like Isabel, she has mystical powers, which she attributes to extreme emotion outside of language: "'Grief,—deep, unspeakable grief, hath made me this seer'" (309). Her irrational decision to join Pierre and Isabel is articulated as an abiding faith in him, who has given her no outward reason for trust; however, her decision makes sense within the logic of the novel, in which all decisions are narrated not as reasoned and willed choices but as the acting out of one's nature.[13] Deciding to live with Pierre and Isabel, Lucy becomes another orphan, willingly exchanging her ties with her family for an ambiguous and dishonest relation in a sham marriage. She becomes a sentimental orphan when she tells Pierre, "'thou art my mother and my brothers, and all the world, and all heaven, and all the universe to me—thou *art* my Pierre'" (311).

Lucy's decision is tested in much the same way as Pierre's; she too privileges the affective realm over every consideration and confronts the deep grief involved in losing one's inherited identity and loved ones. We are told that "her entire family would renounce her; and though she should be starving, would not bestow one morsel upon such a recreant, and infinitely worse than dishonorable girl" (327). The threat of dishonor and familial exile does not dissuade her.

Her agency in this orphanhood is made clear, for she first writes and then reads the following to her mother, "'I am Lucy Tartan. I have come to dwell during their pleasure with Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Glendinning, of my own unsolicited free-will. If they desire it, I shall go; but no other power shall remove me, except by violence; and against any violence I have the ordinary appeal to the law'" (328). Read closely, this recitation begins with a statement of her identity, followed by an admission that she understands the marriage of Pierre and Isabel, and still chooses to live with them. It ends by wrapping her in the mantle of the law, which, she claims, protects her. Writing it down and then reading it aloud lends an air of legality and finality, a claim of agency made concrete. Her mother matches this dramatic finality by telling her, "'I forever cast thee off'" (329). Thus Lucy elects orphanhood.

Melville describes Lucy's elective orphanhood, like Pierre's, as an exceedingly ambiguous act. Like him, she self-fashions outside of the bounds of respectability dictated by middle-class domesticity,[14] though still choosing to remain inside the private realm of house and hearth. They both relinquish their class status for the affective familial space that domesticity itself enshrines. By privileging the emotional life over all else, over even basic human concerns, Lucy and Pierre fall into disrespect. In this way, Melville satirizes domestic culture, revealing respectability and societal control, rather than love, as its primary concern.

And yet, though she is clearly an elective orphan, Lucy is also a sentimental orphan. In classic sentimental orphan fashion, she uses her agency to become selfless, living for Pierre and Isabel rather than for herself. Before joining them, she writes to Pierre that she has "'vowed to dwell with thee forever; to serve thee and her, to guard thee and her without end'" (311); she transmutes their betrothal into "'one mute wooing of each other; with no declaration; no bridal; till we meet in the pure realms of God's final blessedness for us'" (310). As a sentimental orphan, her own desires have been thoroughly disciplined and conquered so that she wants nothing from the relationship except to love, which means, for her, to help construct and contribute to the domestic life of Pierre.

Illustrating the conventions of sentimental orphanhood, Lucy epitomizes the space between subjecthood and objecthood; as an elective orphan, she oscillates between agent and victim. If she were the proper center of the domestic sphere, then she, like Isabel, would not work for pay. In contrast, Lucy occupies a middle ground, where she expresses agency and is simultaneously valued for her abilities, specifically her labor as portrait-painter. However, like Pierre, she has no place once she has elected orphanhood. She aims to break free from the limits of respectability, but Melville suggests that liberation is only a fantasy for her. Though Lucy invokes elective orphanhood as a narrative of self-liberation, there is no narrative outside of "sentimental ownership" that she can inhabit, no way she cannot be written as a victim.

Lucy, Isabel, and Pierre appear to over-value the private, affective sphere, basing their household economy on the one kind of work Pierre can do from home: writing. Their domestic life revolves around Pierre's labor to write the great novel that he feels within his reach. His work, like Isabel's, lies outside of the marketplace despite his greatest efforts. While still living at Saddle Meadows, we learn, he had acquired fame as a juvenile author of poetry; earning money had made him feel independent and he savored the experience of being "not only his own Alpha and Omega" but "distinctly all the intermediate gradations" (261). When forced to survive upon his writing in New York City, however, he finds that despite his most concerted efforts he cannot, or will not, produce the desired product. After collecting cash advances for his novel,

he receives a letter from his publisher calling him a "'swindler'" for writing "'a blasphemous rhapsody, filched from the vile Atheists, Lucian and Voltaire,'" rather than the "'popular novel'" (356) he had been commissioned to write.[15] In the same post, he receives a letter declaiming his reputation. Pierre's discovery that his art and his reputation are deemed valueless in the marketplace psychologically breaks him, and shortly after he commits murder, killing his cousin Glen, who had taken his place as heir of the Glendinning estate. This murderous act suggests that Pierre sees no value outside of the public sphere, of what he calls "'[w]orld's bread of life and world's breath of honor'" (357), a judgment that unexpectedly devalues the private, domestic sphere that he has worked so hard to build and in which he has found the love of not one, but two, beautiful women. In this way, the liberatory potential of Pierre's autogenesis, and its root in the domestic sphere, are rendered empty.

Pierre's desire for a domestic sphere, which is at the heart of the novel, sheds light on orphanhood and incest, a matter one cannot ignore in the text. Pierre's relationship with his mother, with whom he flirted and whom he called "Sister" (14–19), set the stage for the overlapping of the romantic and familial, making incest an overriding theme of *Pierre*. Incest, moreover, can be read as an attempt to solve the problem of orphanhood. Pierre desires at once to break with his family and lineage, while also choosing to maintain his kinship ties within the domestic sphere, to own and be owned by blood relations. In other words, he wishes to become an elective orphan and break his consanguineous bonds, but at the same time he goes to great lengths to recreate a household with a direct blood tie by pretending to marry his sister. Pierre's apparent marriage to Isabel would at first appear to resolve the dilemma of elective orphanhood by allowing him the liberation narrative while still privileging the ideal of blood relation; at the same time, it resolves the dilemma of sentimental orphanhood by making the blood tie central to the act of possession that Isabel desires, as it would be in a nuclear family. By creating a domestic sphere steeped in a blood-based connection, Isabel and Pierre try to heal their wounded condition, an affective American inheritance. Pierre's efforts bring only destruction and death, and his failure is Melville's comment on the logic of orphan narratives as fantasies of liberation.

Narratives of Liberation: "Can'st Thou Crush?"

Though refracting different kinds of gendered agency, both elective orphan and sentimental orphan narratives reflect the liberatory resonance of Revolutionary depictions of the American colonies as a parent-less "child." *Pierre* utilizes these orphan narratives to excess, as the three major characters, and even some minor ones, must act out their autogenesis.[46] The novel *Pierre*,

like the Titan Enceladus envisioned in Pierre's dream, is an object Melville hurls back, an attack on the kinds of narratives that engender fantasies of self-liberation. Physically and mentally weakened by his failure, Pierre ultimately dies in jail in a joint suicide with Isabel, with Lucy's corpse nearby.

In the end, Melville vacates the potential of the orphan narratives, which is why his tone is so often impossible to classify. Though often satirical in content, form, and style, Melville is deeply concerned with exploring the metaphors disclosed by the narratives and their conventions. He searches them out, probes them with a keen desire to make legible their cultural work, rendering the novel tonally complex and difficult. *Pierre* is not simply satire because the distance between the author and his subject matter is unstable. Critics often point to the autobiographical qualities of *Pierre*, as if finding direct connections to Melville's life could explain the continually shifting authorial distance and complexities of tone. This instability is evident in a mercurial narrator who treats his role too lightly and yet is too heavy-handed at every turn. Melville pathologizes the orphan narratives he earnestly explores. He reconsiders the narratives of liberation associated with the dominant ideologies of liberalism, such as individualism, self-reliance, and self-fashioning, as well as their counterparts, domesticity and "sentimental ownership." He discovers, finally, that the ethos of autonomy constructed by the fantasy of autogenesis is, by the 1850s, bankrupt.

In Melville's narrative, neither the public nor private sphere offers transcendence for those who invest in fantasies of autogenesis and liberation. Explored to excess, orphanhood is revealed to be a dubious narrative, its aura of liberatory potential, resonating with the mythos of the political foundations of the nation, debunked and rendered empty. Pierre, after first meeting with Isabel, hikes into the woods to a familiar place of meditation, a huge rock, poised above a large vacant space, which he names the Terror Stone. He then climbs into that hollow, for the first time in his life, and speaks aloud a catalogue of negative outcomes and damaging philosophical possibilities generated by the thought of electing orphanhood. He dares the stone: "then do thou, Mute Massiveness, fall on me! Ages thou hast waited; and if these things be thus, then wait no more; for whom better canst thou crush than him who now lies here invoking thee!" (134). Indeed, *Pierre* itself is crushed under the massive burdens of orphanhood. Narratives of liberation, like the Terror Stone, remain poised in the air, menacing and immovable. *Pierre* is Melville's invocation to them to fall, and a dare to his readers to desire their falling.

Notes

[1] *Pierre* does what Castronovo pinpoints as central to the literary work of the 1850s: "narrating the country in a disjunctive mode that eschewed the consistency and congruity of most

historiography, taking up instead stories founded on dissonance, contradiction, and disruption" (12).

[2] See Weinauer and also Dimock.

[3] Some of the most popular sentimental novels use this formula, most notably *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) by Susan Warner and *The Lamplighter* (1854) by Maria Susanna Cummins. See Pazicky.

[4] Pazicky notes the exception of *The Newsboy*, by Elizabeth Oakes Smith (1854), whose male orphan appears to self-fashion entirely but ends in exile, undomesticated. *The Newsboy* is indeed constructed along different premises, possibly because the protagonist is male.

[5] Brodhead and Glen have discussed this cultural shift from corporal punishment to affective discipline as a major concern of the antebellum period.

[6] Dillon discusses sentimental literature as an outgrowth of aesthetics, and she sees the anti-utilitarian and its relation to women's labor as at the heart of the post-Revolution transformation in sentimentism (495–523). For a discussion of sympathy as rooted in masculine feeling, see Ellison.

[7] Jefferson's "original Rough draft" can be found on Princeton University's website, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson.*

[8] Ellison, Barnes, Burgett, and Hendler have argued that a masculine rhetoric of feeling promised to create a cohesive citizenship in the vacuum of authority.

[9] Merish writes "that sentimental sympathy promotes a deeply felt psychic investment in proprietary power over, and control of, objects of love, that I call 'sentimental ownership'" (4).

[10] Merish points out that the critical debates on sentimental literature continually re-articulate these two subject positions, liberation and constraint, focusing on gender without historicizing or adequately theorizing it as a category (24).

[11] On domestic animism, see Douglas, Samuels, Tompkins, and Bill Brown.

[12] Isabel herself makes this comparison: "methought she was that good angel, which some say, hovers over every human soul; and methought—oh, methought that I was thy other,—thy dark angel, Pierre" (314). For a discussion of Isabel as gothic, and the gothic as connected to a proprietary self, see Weinauer.

[13] As Pierre's mother Mary remarks to herself, "Then I will live my nature out. I will stand on pride. I will not budge. Let come what will, I shall not half-way run to meet it, to beat it off" (131).

[14] Dill emphasizes Lucy's radical metamorphosis from "angel in the house into an incestuous wooer," suggesting that her transformation into a sensationalist character turns her into a figure of disruption and "mutability" (728).

[15] Much criticism has been written linking Melville's dwindling literary reputation and Pierre's, most notably Parker's investigations into the overlap between the autobiographical and fictional in *Pierre.* See Higgins and Parker.

[16] Among the minor characters who become orphaned are Delly, whose parents disown her after she becomes an unwed mother, and Glen Stanly, who is orphaned before Pierre murders him.

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