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Gender and Writing in Melville's Erased Marginalia to Shakespeare

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Abstract

This poster presentation explores Herman Melville's erased marginalia in his set of Shakespeare's The Dramatic Works and his attention as a reader to the ironies and paradoxes of human experiences, relationships, and social and gender identities and roles. Previously unaddressed in scholarship, the erasures range in character from attention to rhetorical style to themes of human nature, cynical views of marriage, misogynistic representations of women, and hostility toward messengers. Examination of extant marginalia in relation to erased reveals thematically parallel content and inconsistent targeting of marginalia for erasure, provoking questions as to whether the erasures are due to self-consciousness or backtracking on Melville's part or to the embarrassment of family members due to some of the marked passages' offensive content. Given Melville's exploration of society, gender, and identity in his writing, his attention to offensive language in The Dramatic Works may not entail agreement with the ideas presented so much as a fascination with Shakespeare's subtle subversions of social norms and creation of characters in whom gendered gualities paradoxically coexist. Parallel themes in his first novel, Typee, and his 1850 essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses", indicate a potential similarity between women and writers based on a shared experience of vilification, censorship, and the resulting necessity of strategies for selfexpression, suggesting his preoccupation with the importance of social criticism in literature. The erasures in the Shakespeare set contribute to understanding of Melville's development as a writer who alternately reflected and challenged social perspectives of his day. The poster includes filtered imaging to illustrate erased evidence as well as visualizations of XML-encoded text to quantify erased and extant marginalia.



Gender and Writing in Melville's Erased Marginalia to Shakespeare Netanya Hitchcock, Dr. Olsen-Smith, Dr. Barney Smith

Melville Reading & Writing Social Criticism

Herman Melville's erased marginalia in his copy of Shakespeare's *The Dramatic Works* include passages on fallen human nature, negative representations of women, cynical views of marriage, and hostility toward messengers. Little to no scholarship has examined the erasures in detail, although the markings related to female characters have been described as "misogynous" (Cowen xix). Evidence of Melville's portrayals of women in his writing, his frequently gendered outlook on the human condition, and filtered imaging of and thematic parallels among his erased and extant marginalia indicate his critical thinking as a writer who alternately reflected and challenged social perspectives of his day. Melville's debut book, *Typee*, his 1850 essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses", and excerpts from his correspondence reflect his interest in society's censorship and vilification of writers.

Melville?

- Self-consciousness
- Reinterpretation ** Re-categorization
- Family reputation Controversial representations of women,

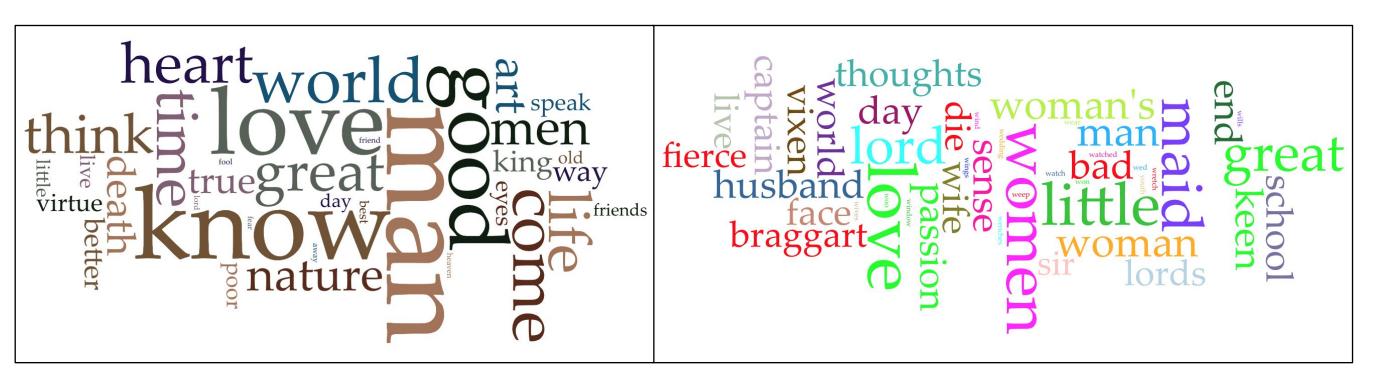
Or Family Members?

human nature, relationships, and society

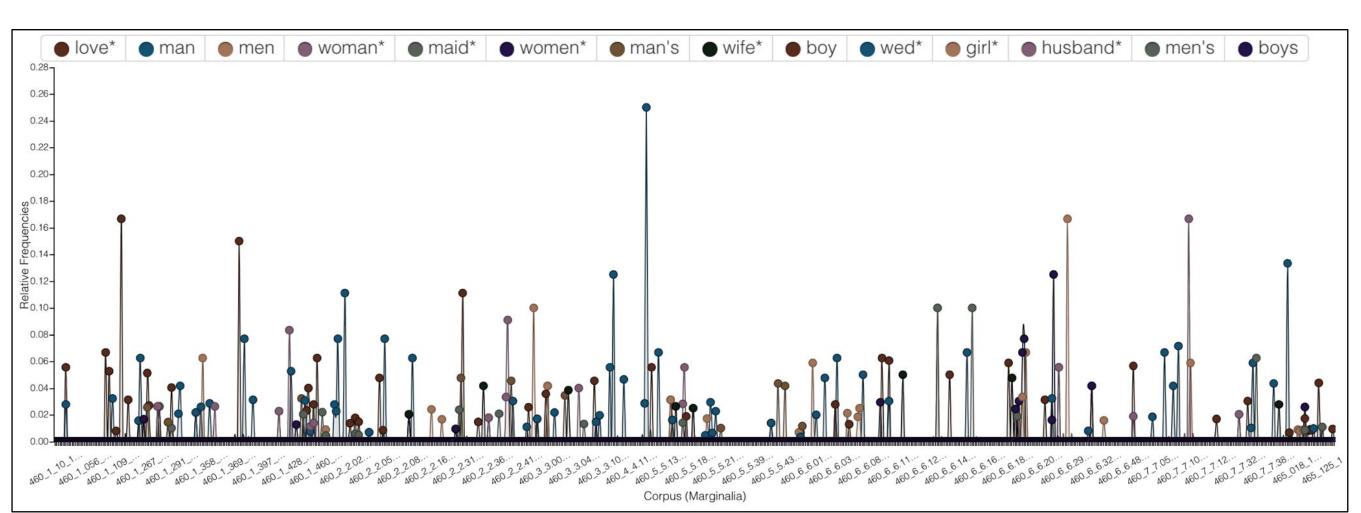
Melville Reading Shakespeare

Visualizations of high-frequency terms show a disparity in subject matter between erased and extant content:

- Emphasis on human condition vs. women & marriage
- Lesser quantity of erased marginalia: approximately 33 instances



Shakespeare's plays frequently center on gender and relationships. The trends graph visualization of marginalia regarding gender and male-female relationships (featured below) includes Melville's copy of the *Sonnets* and reflects his consistent attention to Shakespeare's extensive interest in the topics.



Shakespeare Muzzled

Melville viewed Shakespeare as a messianic figure (Correspondence 119) who, as an Elizabethan man, wore a "muzzle...on [his] soul" (122).

- Admired Shakespeare's covert social criticism ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 523)
- Described his writing as "short, quick probings at the very axis of reality" (522)

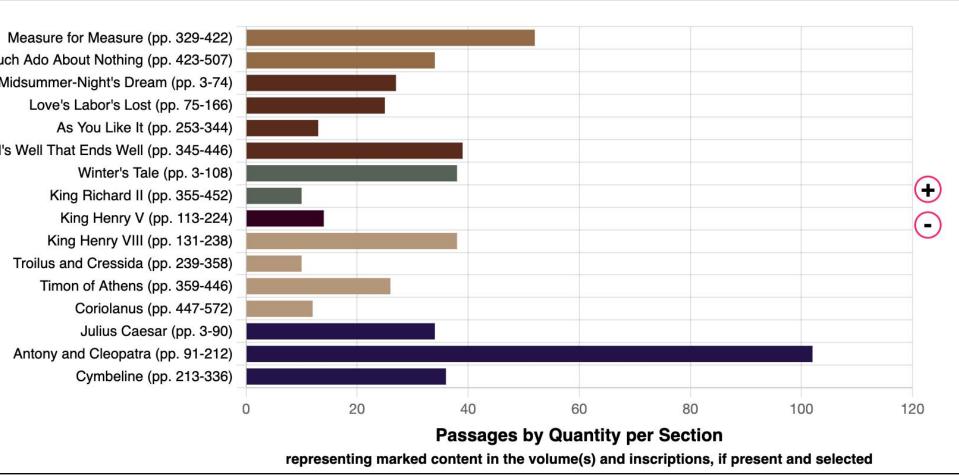
Melville's attention to gender role conflicts in the plays suggests possible interest in Shakespeare's experience as a writer during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. Religious and political censorship

Possible sense of shared experience with Shakespeare

Ambiguous Motives Behind Erasure

Elizabethan Gender Conventions

- Shakespeare's female characters reflect qualities of Queen Elizabeth I who challenged gender conventions (Oh 369)
- ✤ Leadership as masculine
- Silence as feminine signifying "chastity and obedience" (353)
- Silence as a gender-specific strategy in a patriarchal system (369) Elizabeth I used silence to avoid making final decisions on marriage (353) Melville's marginalia on gender suggests his interest in Shakespeare's alternate
- reflection and subversion of gender conventions.



"At woman's command": Melville's Attention to Conflict of Wills

All's Well That Ends Well, 2.362, 9-15] extant score Clo. That man should be at woman's command and yet no hurt done !- Though honesty be no puritan. yet it will do no hurt; it will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart.²-I am

Antony & Cleopatra, 6.100, 26-29], erased score *Eno.* Under a compelling occasion, let women die. It were pity to cast them away for nothing; though, between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing. Cleopatra, catching but the least Antony & Cleopatra, 6.117, 14-15] erased checkmar

The third o' the world is yours; which with a snaffle! You may pace easy, but not such a wife you doidw to T



King Lear, 7.111, 19] erased checkmark O undistinguished space of woman's will !?--------A plot upon her virtuous husband's life ; 1 al

Erased and extant markings indicate a pattern of attention to hostility between men and women.

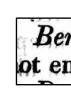
- Shared themes among marked passages
 - Conflict of wills
 - ✤ Women as inferior
 - ✤ Women's speech, autonomy, & required submission
 - ✤ speech as a strategy for self-sovereignty
 - ✤ intelligence evidenced in speech vilification as a consequence
 - ✤ Marriage
 - Resentment of women
 - Taming of women

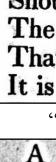
Defining Masculinity & Femininity

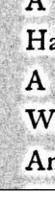
- Attention to gendered characteristics
 - Characters' strategies for denying accountability and silencing women
 - Evidence of masculine & feminine qualities interdependent/coexistent in individuals
 - Extant markings indicate some attention to generalizations regarding men













A bar graph visualization of erased and extant marginalia in The *Dramatic Works*, excluding plays that feature less than ten marked passages, shows that Melville paid particular attention to Antony and Cleopatra. Believed to have been written after Elizabeth I's death (Dramatic Works 6.091), the play features political and romantic conflicts between an ill-fated, unmarried female sovereign and male rulers.

Taming of the Shrew, 2.488, 14-20] erased score O, you are novices ! 'Tis a world to see,' How tame, when men and women are alone, with y A meacock² wretch can make the curstest shrew.

Love's Labor's Lost, 2.108, 9-11] erased score Boyet. Do not curst wives hold that self-sovereignty Only for praise' sake, when they strive to be Lords o'er their lords ? In the strent upots and traise A Much Ado About Nothing, 1.430, 22-23] erased checkmarl ty as the first of May doth the last of December. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband; have you?

Love's Labor's Lost, 2.106, 9-14] erased score

What? I! I love! I sue! I seek a wife! A woman, that is like a German clock, Still a-repairing ; ever out of frame ; / Hade I And never going aright, being a watch, But being watched that it may still go right! Love's Labor's Lost, 2.144, 7-14] erased score

Boyet. The tongues of mocking wenches are as keen As is the razor's edge invisible, Cutting a smaller hair than may be seen; itsd a good I Above the sense of sense. So sensible Seemeth their conference; their conceits have wings, Fleeter than arrows, bullets, wind, thought, swifter things, i 19. I his human is not stranger (

Much Ado About Nothing, 1.445, 5-7] erased checkmark Bene. O God, sir, here's a dish I love not; I canot endure my lady Tongue. and to abie when iv fExit.

Cymbeline, 6.259, 5-6] erased score Should from encounter guard bu Could I find out and The woman's part in me! for there's no motion list?

That tends to vice in man, but Idaffirm It is the woman's part belit lying Inote titys dous on I "Sonnet XX", 1-14] erased triple cross-checks & extant checkmark A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted, Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion; & vd A woman's gentle heart, but not, acquainted insyned With shifting change, as is false women's fashion; An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,

Twelfth Night, 1.277, 28-32] extant arced score For, boy, however we do praise ourselves, Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,¹ Than women's are.

> Much Ado About Nothing, 1.488, 2-29] extant wavy score The like himself. Therefore give me no counsel; My griefs cry louder than advertisement.³ Ant. Therein do men from children nothing differ.

Gender & the Human Condition

Attention to Parolles of *All's* Well That Ends Well

- Themes of cowardice, hypocrisy, deception
- Possible projection of Parolles' qualities onto religious institutions
- Subterfuge needed to expose deceptive individuals

Writing Women

- The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids, 1855
- Working women's lives contrasted with London bachelors' luxury (2365)
- ✤ Girls compared to blank page (2371) *♦ The Confidence-Man*, 1857
- ✤ Goneril "her husband, no adept in the female nature, had tried to use reason with her, instead of something far more persuasive." (71)

Reading Women

Annotation to Germaine de Staël's comments on Goethe in *Germany* "It is delightful as well as wonderful

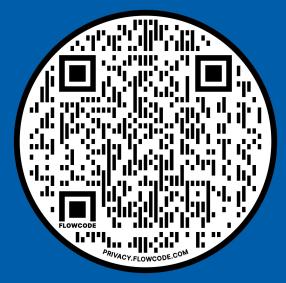
to see – passim – such penetration of understanding in a woman, who at the same time possesses so feminine & emotional a nature."

Germany, Vol II. Part II. CH. XXVIII. 2.060, Bottom margin] x & annotation X I's delightfull a nell as malegue to see - hamm not peretrahim of mudataning in a woman, who at he same time ponnes 20 finning enohal a nature

Silence & Censorship: Women & Writers

Erased and extant marginalia to themes of bad news infecting messengers reflect Melville's ongoing interest in the similarity between society's censorship of writers and messengers.

- Annotation in *Antony and Cleopatra* reiterates sentiments in 1846 novel, *Typee: A Peep at* Polynesian Life
 - Passage expurgated from 1846 American edition
- Anticipated the Church's negative reaction to criticism
- Self-association with Shakespeare
- Subversion of gender norms represented negatively
 - Shakespeare's Cleopatra
- Melville's Civilization



All's Well That Ends Well, 2.406, 7-8] erased checkmark; Bottom margin] erased checkmark and annotation: "As 2 & 2 made 4 in Noah's time, as now, so man [?figure]s ever. Here we have a character very common in the Rail Road Car of the [most] [mighty] [?nineteenth] century.'

2.410, 18-19] erased checkmark; Bottom margin] erased checkmark & annotation: "[5-7 unrecovered words] know [6-9 unrecovered words] that [?he must] [5-7 unrecovered words] [?churches]."

2 Lord. You do not know him, my lord, as we do certain it is, that he will steal himself into a man' favor, and, for a week, escape a great deal of discov-eries: but when you find him out, you have him ever and a De mai . 1 Road the Company in A of the much maple and be that he is?

♦ *Clarel*, 1876

- ✤ "She did but feel, true woman's way." (86) ✤ "A man betrayed the yearning god; / A man, yet with a woman's kiss. / 'Twas human, that unanimous cry, / '...crucify!'" (144-5)
- "After the Pleasure Party", 1891
- Barren imagery describes female scientist (312)
- ✤ *Billy Budd* manuscript, 1891
- * "the heart here [is] sometimes the feminine in man" (Melville Leaf 631)
- Lost, unpublished *The Isle of the Cross* ✤ Wife's integrity contrasted with husband's unfaithfulness (Correspondence 233-4)
- Annotations and markings to de Staël's description of Goethe's insight into the human heart as "profound" (2.059) but "discouraging" (2.060) suggest approving engagement. ✤ Markings in Part III, CH. XIX show attention to gender roles and spheres (2.270) as necessary to avoid conflict in the ongoing "war" between men and women (2.272).

Typee, Ch. 26 alluded to. In a word, here, as in every case where Civilization has in any way been introduced among those whom we call saages, she has scattered her vices, and withheld her blessings. As wise a man as Shakspeare has said, that the bearer of evil dings hath but a losing office; and so I suppose will it prove with me, in communicating to the trusting friends of the Hawiian Mission what has been disclosed in various portions of this nar-Antony & Cleopatra, 6.099, 9] extant pencil x; Bottom margin] pencil x and partially erased annotation: "It is curious in how many ways this idea is expressed by Shakespeare.–"The bearer of evil tidings hath but a [losing office.] [two and a half lines of additional unrecovered words]. Mess. The nature of bad news infects the teller. Antony and Cleopatra, 6.128, 26] extant pencil checkmark; 36-37] extant pencil score; Bottom margin] erased pencil checkmark and undeciphered annotation of 3-5 words. The man is innocent. Cleo. Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt. Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures Though it be honest, it is never good To bring bad news. Give to a gracious message