

Boise State University

ScholarWorks

2018 Undergraduate Research and Scholarship
Conference

Undergraduate Research and Scholarship
Showcases

4-16-2018

A Measure of Ideological Formation: Visualizing the Metaphysical in Melville's Marginalia

Denise Holbrook
Boise State University

Cheyene Austin
Boise State University

Cora Oxley
Boise State University

—

A Measure of Ideological Formation: Visualizing the Metaphysical in Melville's Marginalia

Abstract

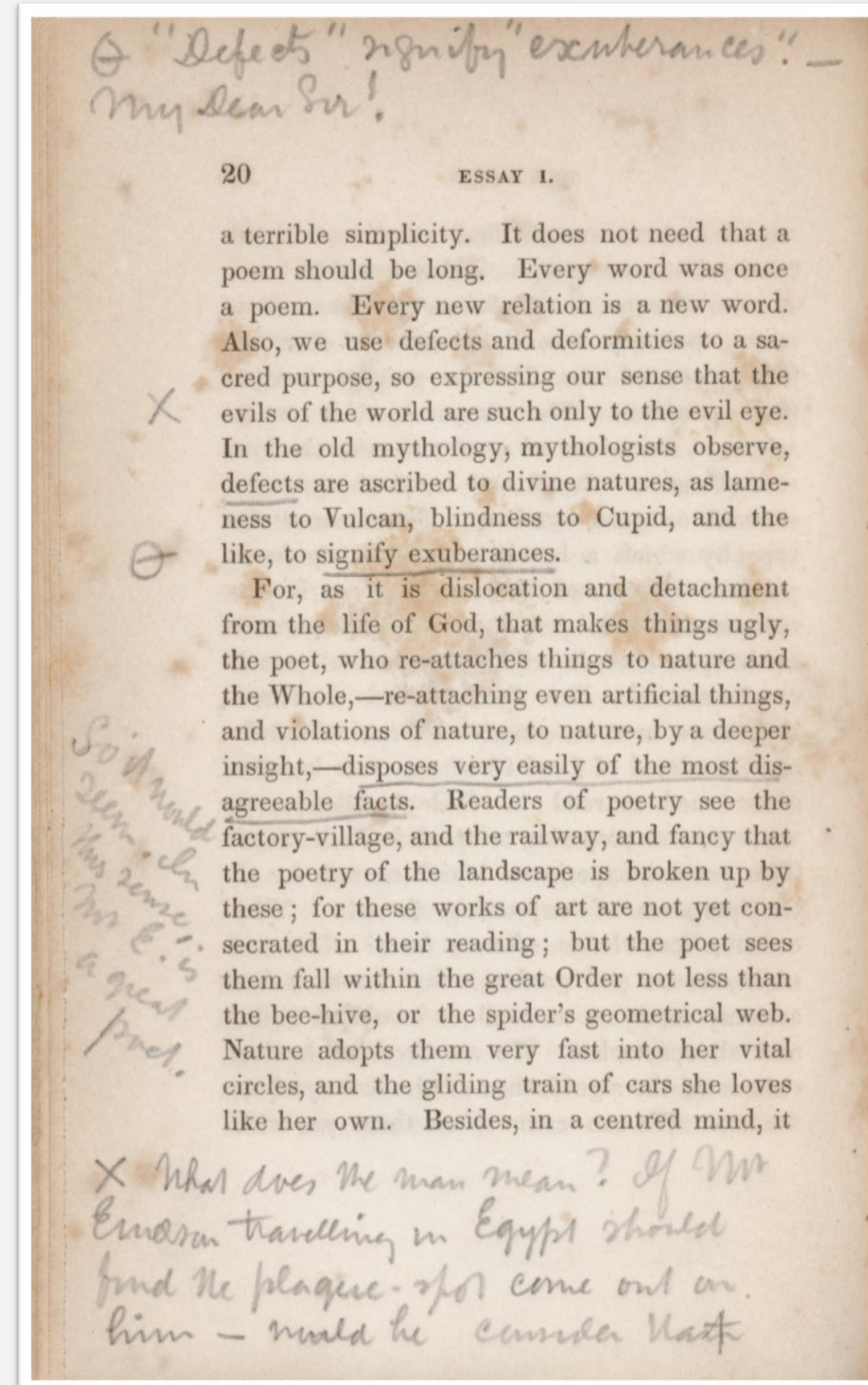
Herman Melville acquired Owen Chase's *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Whaleship Essex* and Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* in the early 1850s, and he acquired Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays* in the early 1860s. His markings and annotations in the nautical books reveal his interest in raw material for poetic expression in *Moby-Dick*, as well as how he symbolized the conflict between good and evil in the catastrophic conclusion of his masterwork. That preoccupation with cosmic and metaphysical subjects resurfaces in his reading of Emerson's essays ten years later. In examining Melville's agreements and disagreements with Emerson's ideas, we focus on frequencies of words such as "good," "evil." While we examine the significance of these terms as frequencies, we also explore how they function as pairings, or "collocates," in passages Melville marked and annotated. With three separate but inter-related posters, we analyze such points of disagreement, as well as Melville's obvious appreciation for some of Emerson's ideas, and we explore Melville's continuing ideological development after his publication of *Moby-Dick*.



Visualizing the Metaphysical in Melville's Marginalia: Methodology

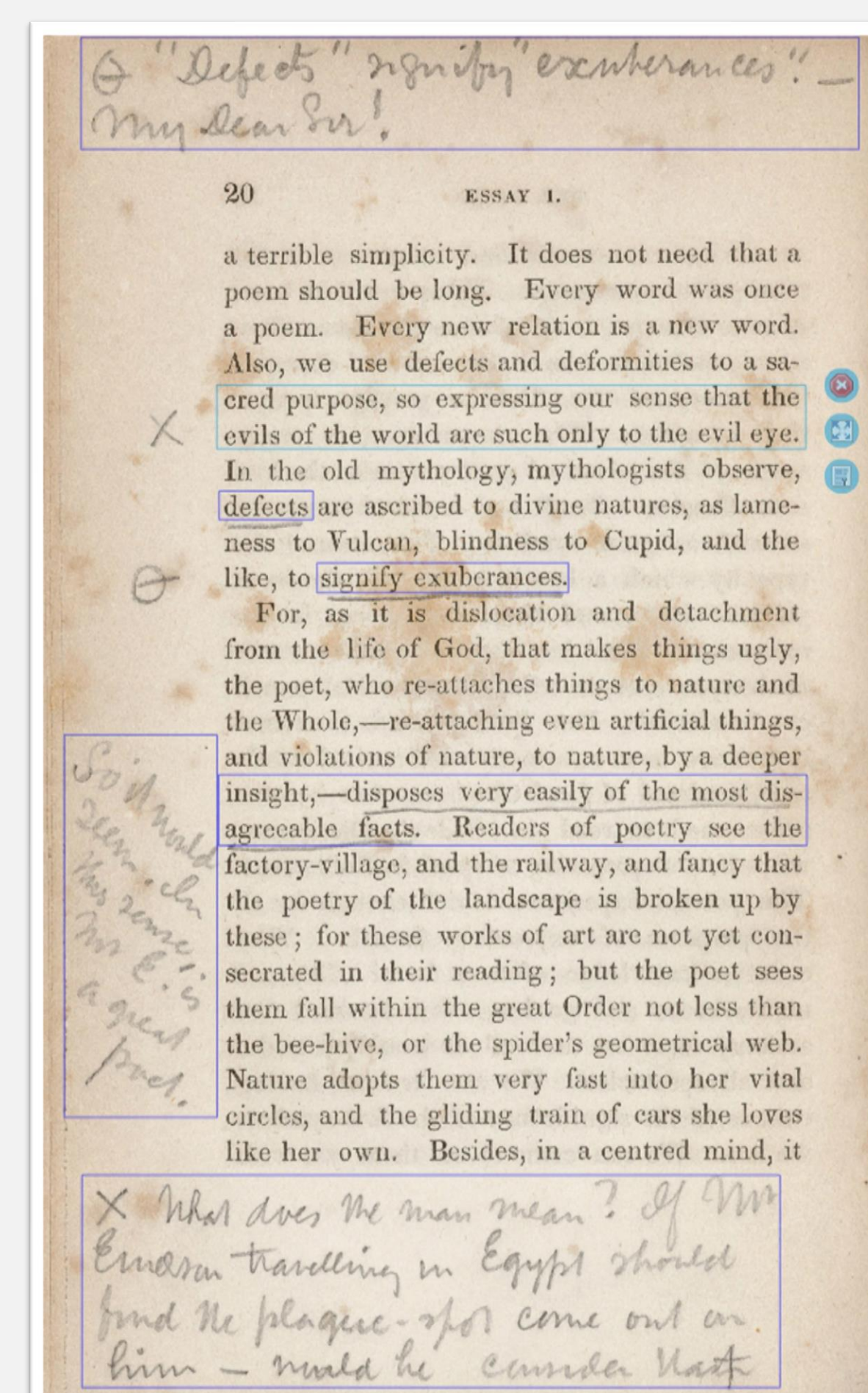
Dr. Olsen-Smith, Cheyene Austin, Denise Holbrook, Cora Lee Oxley

I. OCR Text Conversion



The first step of the procedure uses OCR (optical character recognition) software to convert raw images of physical text into machine readable text in XML format. Statistical algorithms match shapes to letters and symbols. Old documents, such as the one at left, often display brown spots from deterioration called foxing. This can interfere with the OCR software's ability to segment and extract each word. For this reason, the OCR output must be checked and edited for accuracy.

II. Zoning



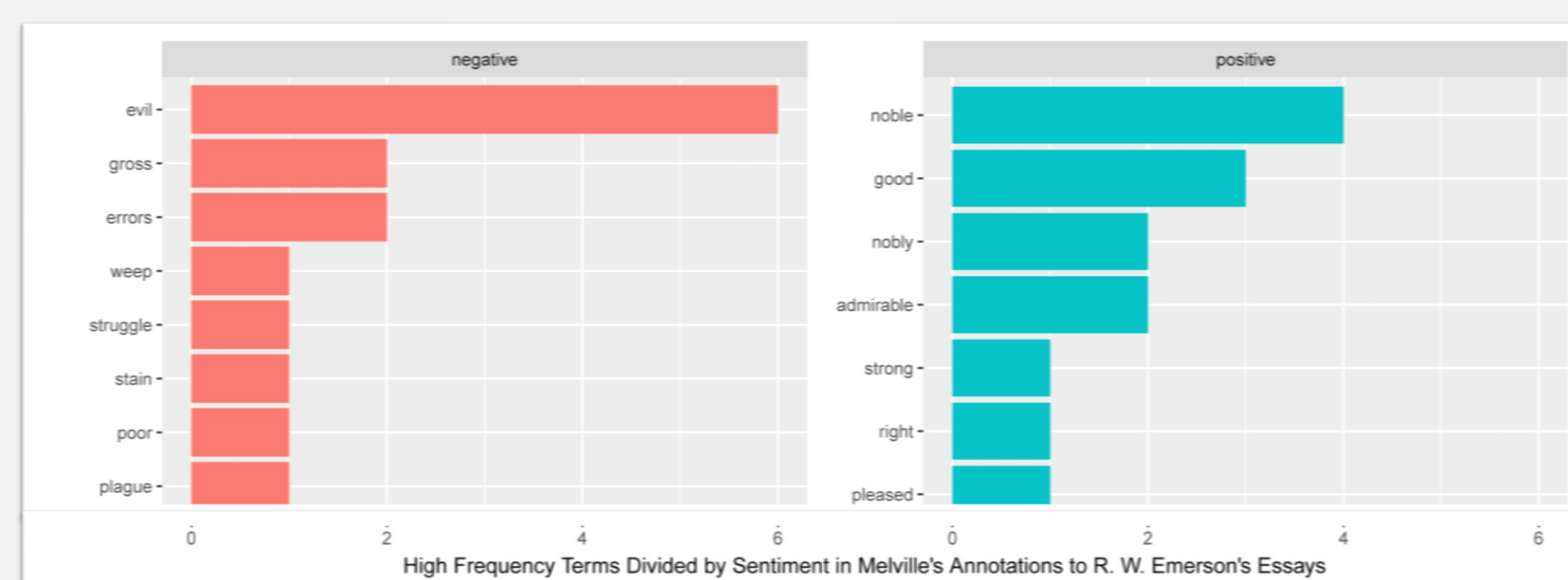
During the zoning process, markings on the page are captured manually by use of an in-browser application. Each created zone is assigned attributes that describe the type of markings and any symbols associated with them. Text captured within the zone is then mapped and the application provides pixel coordinates to describe the location of each word in the zone.

III. XML Markup

```
<div id="6" x="778" y="2043" width="1478" height="179" type="annotated" type2="underline" attribution="HM">
<line n="16" h="89" c="2087">
<w x="1099"/>
<w x="1363">disposes</w>
<w x="1529">very</w>
<w x="1738">easily</w>
<w x="1826">of</w>
<w x="1947">the</w>
<w x="2120">most</w>
<w x="2251">
<choice>
<hyph>dis-</hyph>
<reg>disagreeable</reg>
</choice>
</w>
</line>
<line n="17" h="89" c="2176">
<w x="1091"
endhyph="true">agreeable</w>
<w x="1297">facts.</w>
</line>
</div>
```

The XML Markup process involves using the coordinates and attributes created by zoning to make a machine-readable version of the text. Melville's marking types are indicated as attribute values. Different tags are used to account for hyphenations, archaic spellings, and words that span the borders of a zone. The final XML will be used to make the annotations and marked passages searchable on the Melville's Marginalia Online website.

IV. Visualizations



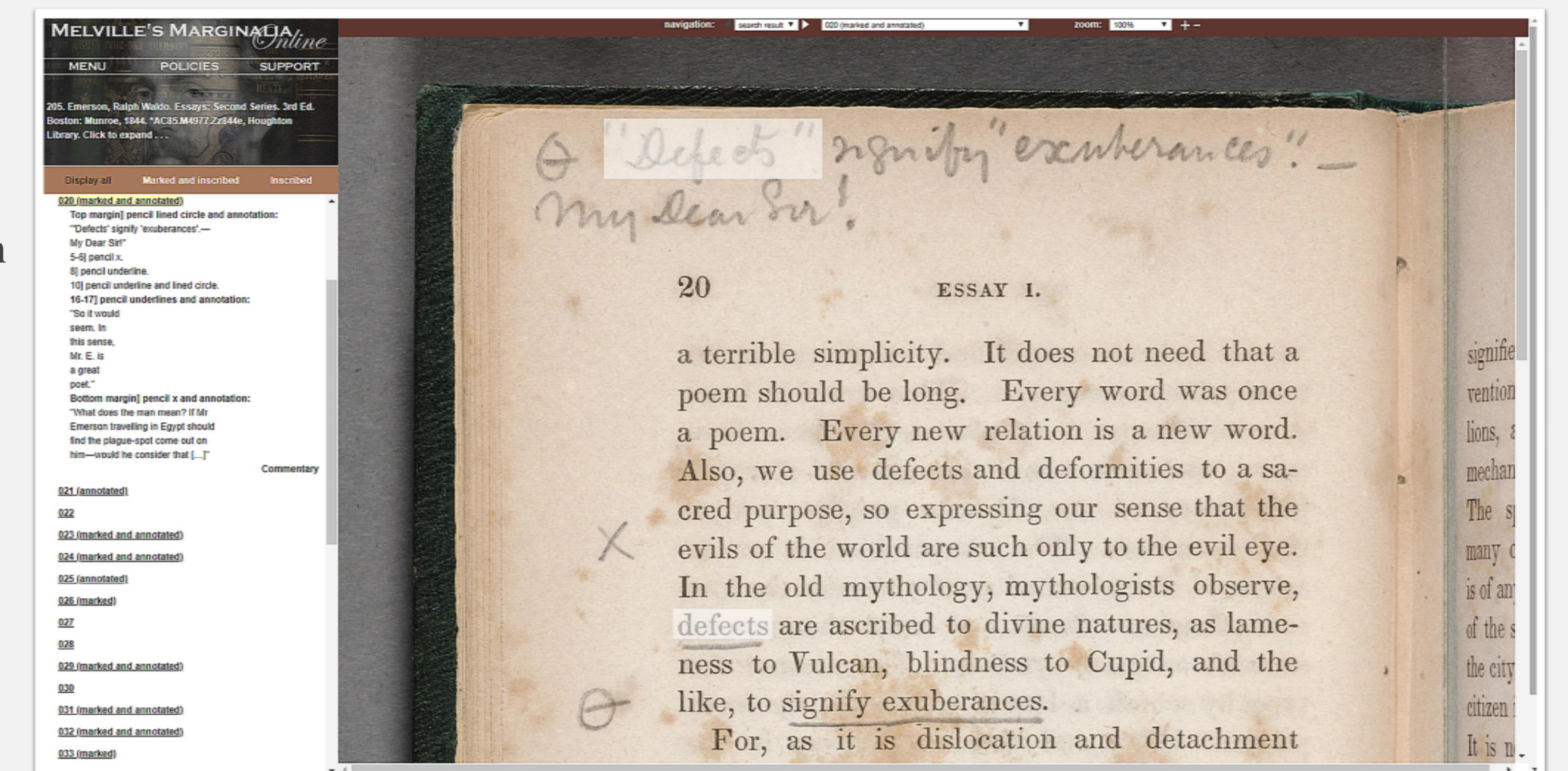
Once the XML Markup files have been completed, data representing the marked and annotated content can then be analyzed through different visualization tools. The coding languages R and MatLab, and the web-based tool Voyant, are used to convert numerical data into images.



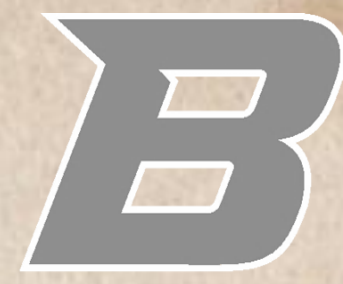
As shown in the top left figure, sentiment graphs register the frequency of terms and their positive or negative associations. As in the bottom left figure, word clouds indicate the frequency of a word by its relative size. These graphs and charts can be helpful during critical analysis as the relationship among terms becomes visible and tangible.

V. Keyword Search

The final XML product is used to make the markings and annotations searchable. Upon visiting the Melville's Marginalia Online site a user can search for keywords or phrases throughout the entirety of the Melville collection by use of the search function. Users can browse the keyword search returns and see which volumes contain the word or phrase and the number of times the word occurs in each volume.



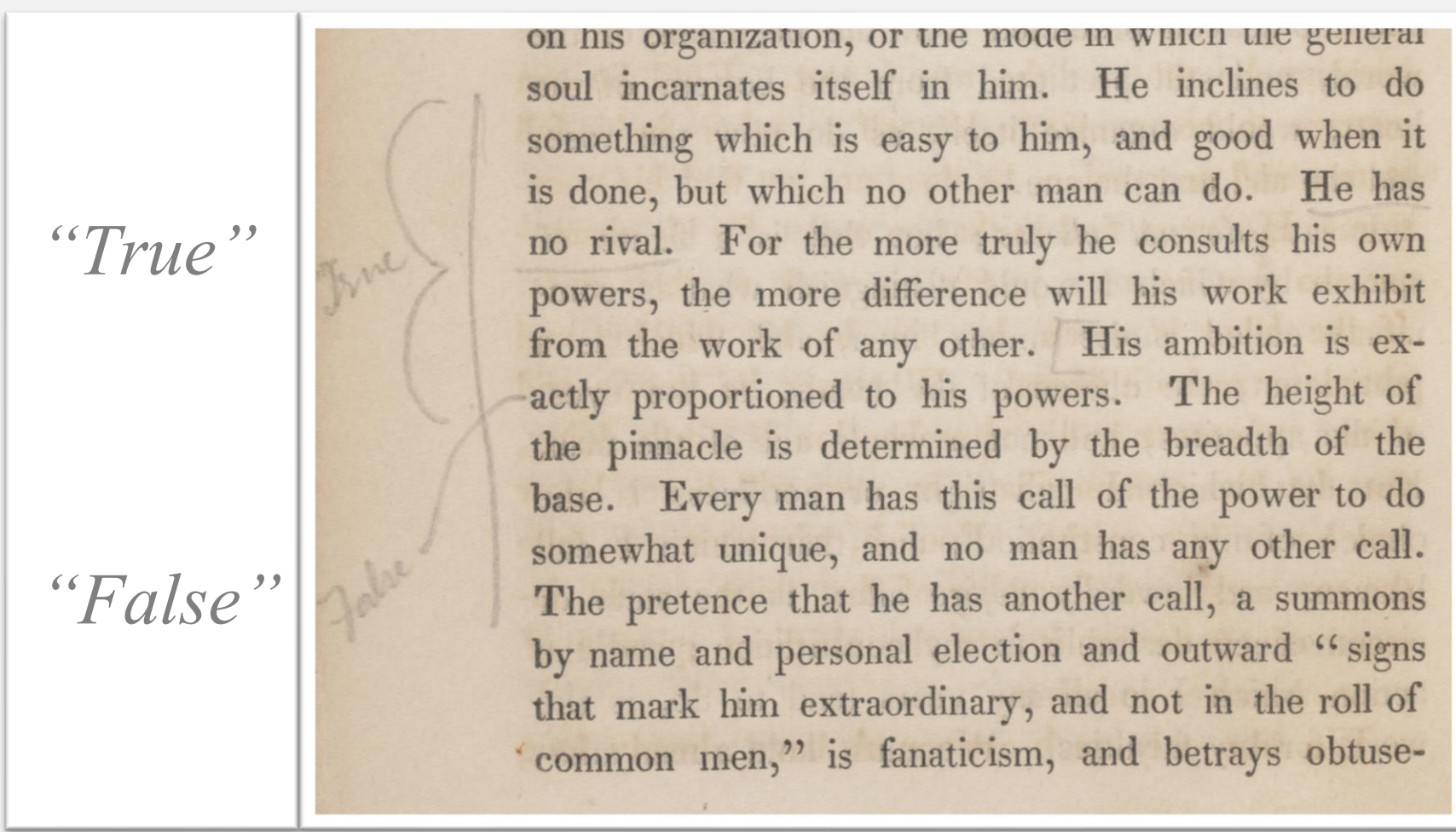
Here, the keyword search return highlights the instances of the term "defects" in white. The highlighted zones appear in both Emerson's original text and in Herman Melville's hand written annotation.



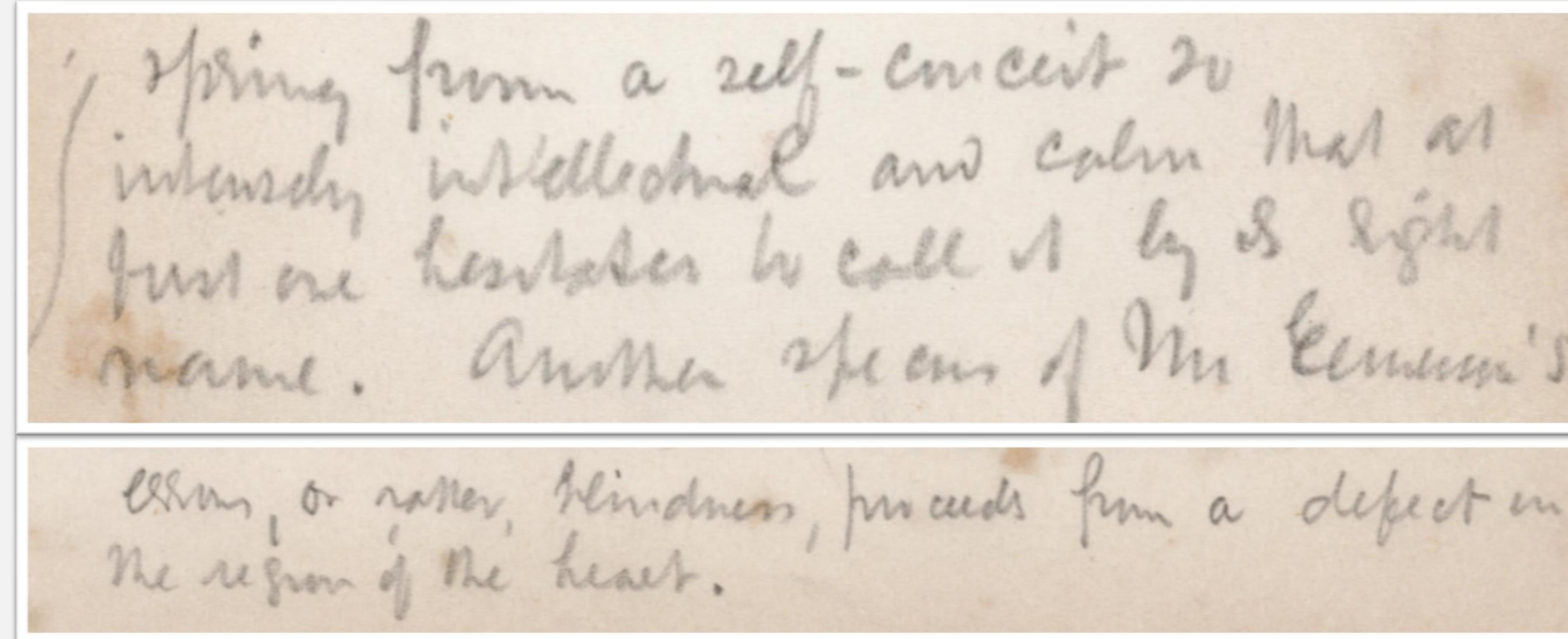
Visualizing the Metaphysical in Melville's Marginalia: Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dr. Olsen-Smith, Cheyene Austin, Denise Holbrook, Cora Lee Oxley

Emerson's Essays: Series I and II



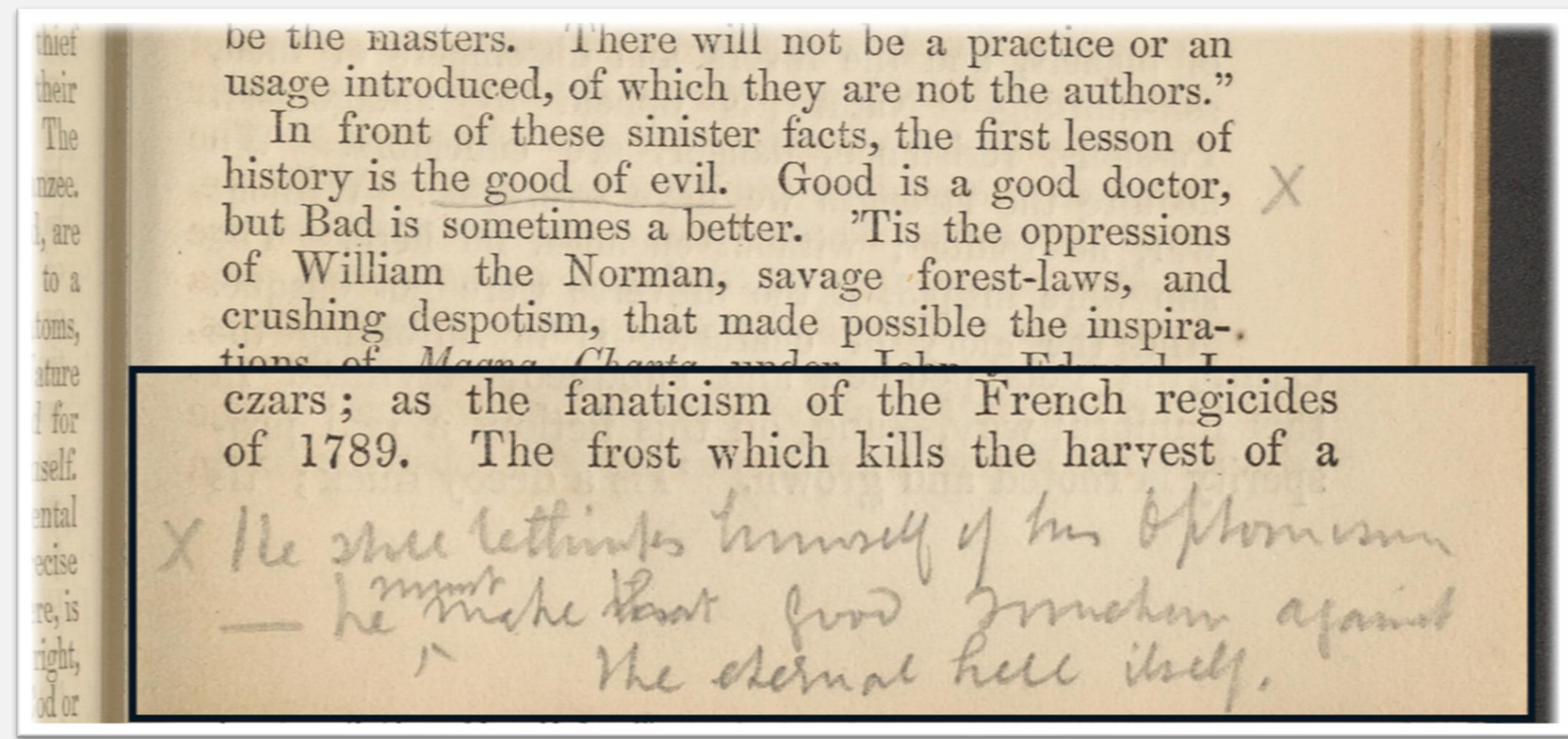
The proximity of Melville's agreement and subsequent disagreement in this passage is the epitome of his polarized reaction to Emerson. Melville affirms the idea that every man holds potential for his own natural and unique contribution. However, he expresses dissent toward the sentiment that man only aspires to a height which he is truly capable of achieving. It is this ability to desire beyond our means and hope beyond our experience that Melville considers the tragedy of human existence, but Emerson makes no such distinction.



"[His illusions] spring from a self-conceit so intensely intellectual and calm that at first one hesitates to call it by its right name. Another species of Mr Emerson's errors, or rather, blindness, proceeds from a defect in the region of the heart."

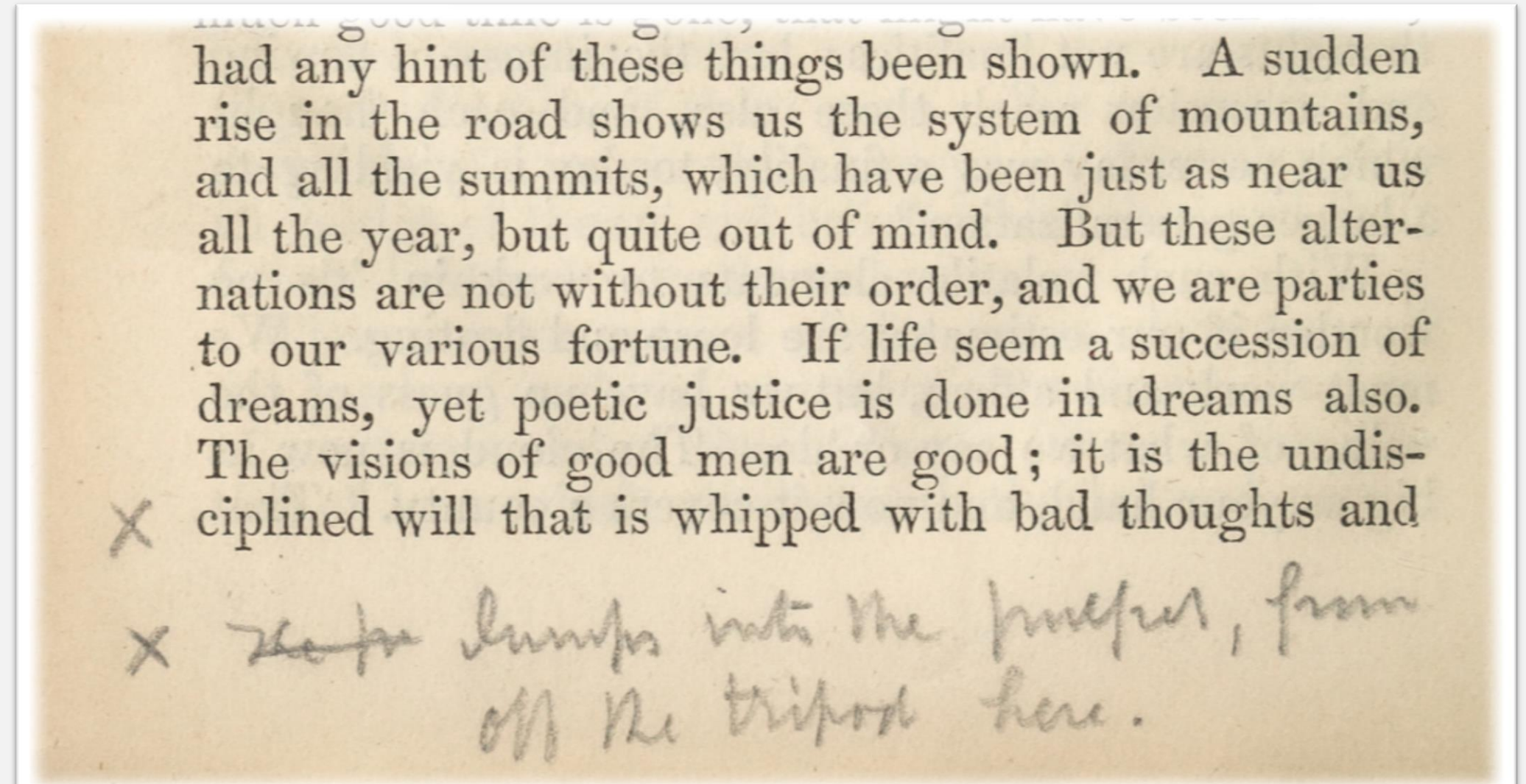
Here, Melville summarizes his opinions of Emerson's rhetoric. Though at times Emerson appears quite logical and composed, Melville probes at what he perceives are really lapses in sympathy. He suggests such lapses are due to an arrogance that has disguised itself as optimistic intellect. This idea is at the axis of Melville's conflict with Emerson, as his disagreement seems to arise when Emerson determines to transform his beautiful and noble metaphors into laws that fail to consider inconvenient realities.

The Conduct of Life



"He still bethinks himself of his optimism —he must make that good somehow against the eternal hell itself."

This excerpt and annotated response display Melville's tendency to counter Emerson's assertions on good and evil. Melville takes issue with the phrase "the good of evil" as applied to historical atrocities, and questions how Emerson can maintain such indiscriminate and certain optimism, even in the face of serious depravity.

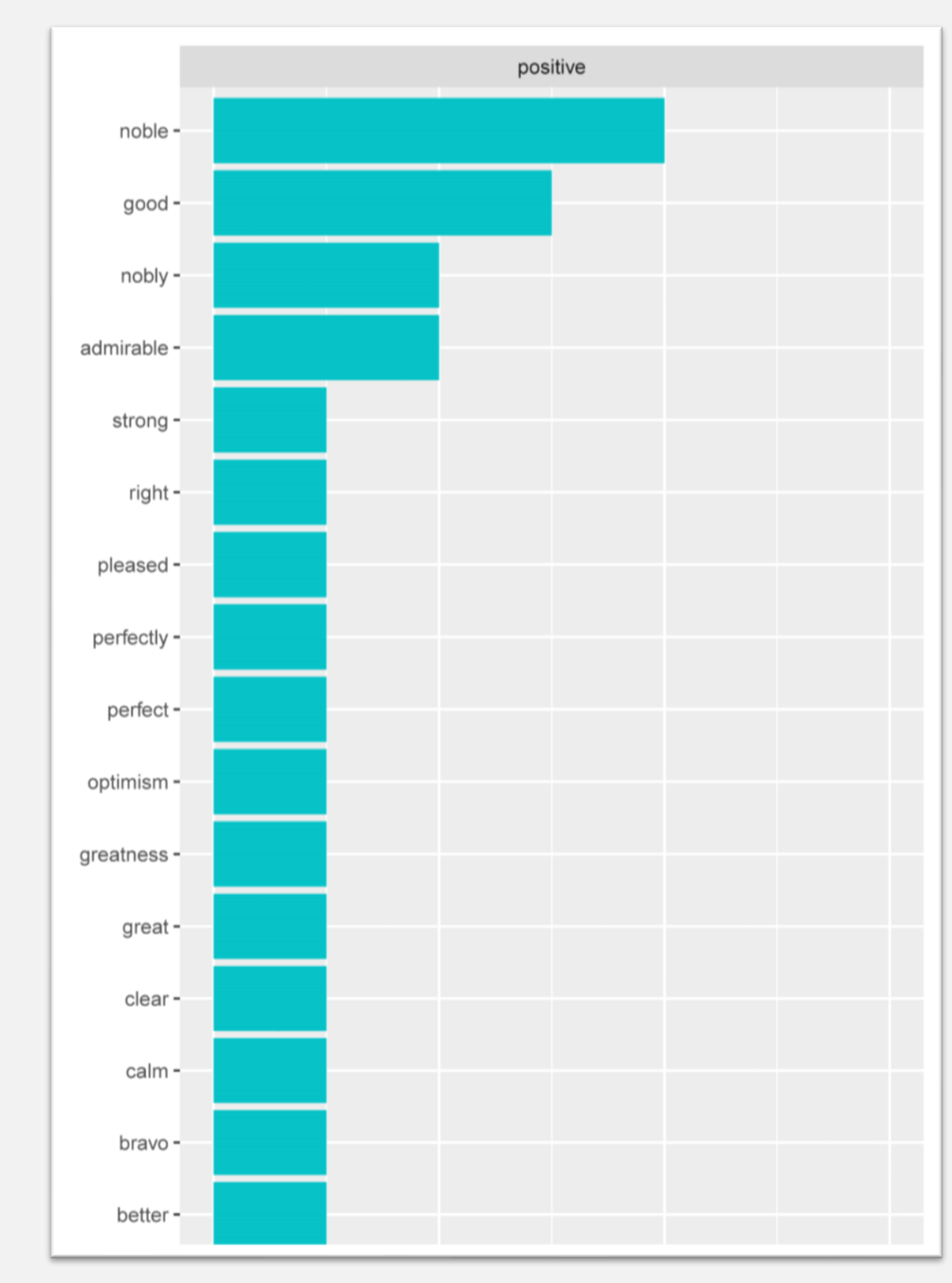


"Jumps into the pulpit, from off the tripod here."

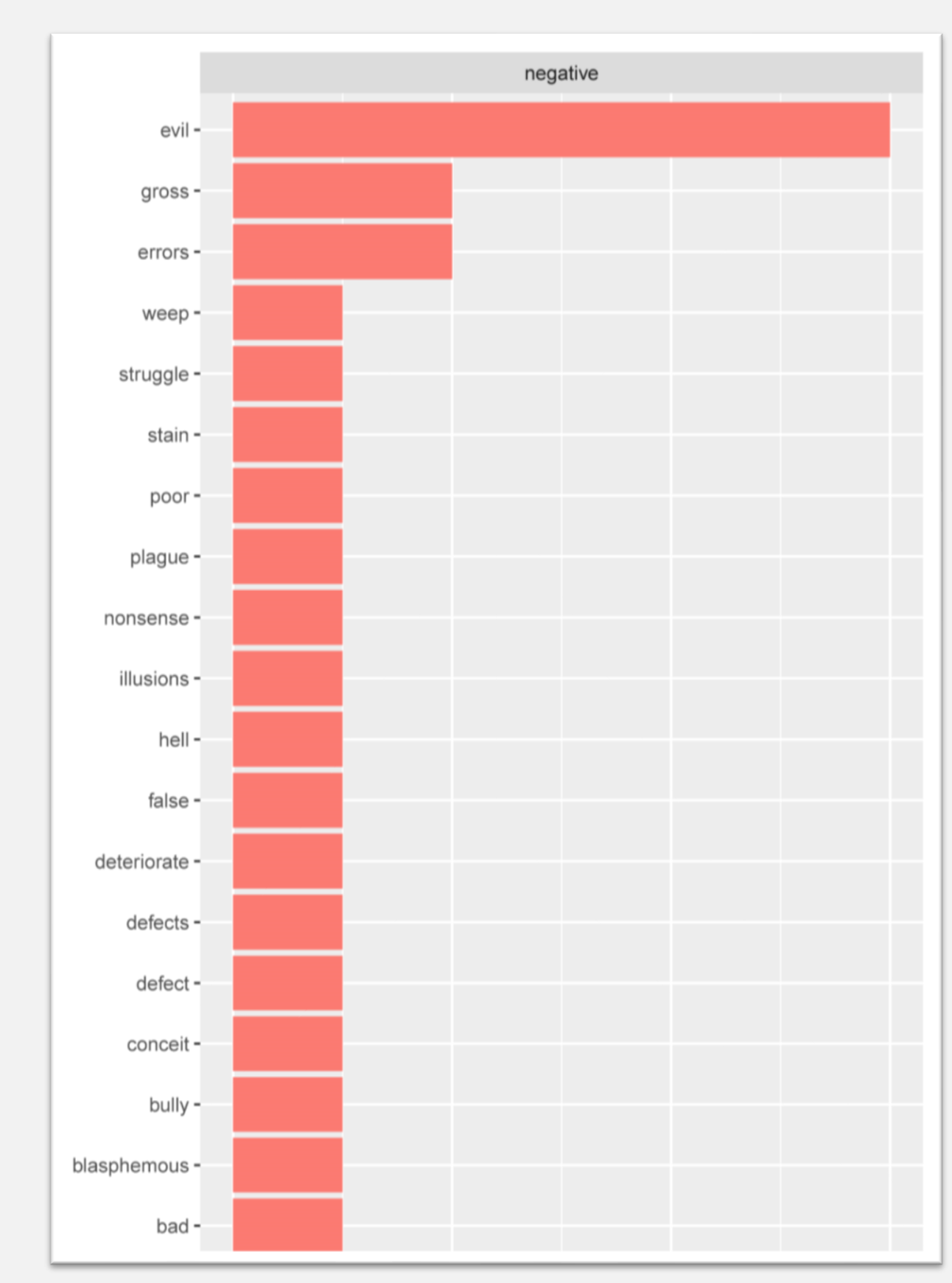
This annotation is representative of instances wherein Melville disagrees with the constricted nature of Emerson's claims. Here, his dissent is a remark on Emerson's tone shifting from that of an observant spectator to that of a preaching minister who has taken it upon himself to ridicule the follies of man. Emerson begins the passage with a thoughtful image of the mountains in the distance, but transgresses toward his ultimate claim that the "undisciplined will" is the point-source of misfortune and misdeeds. Melville cannot refrain from noting the narrow and chastising nature of Emerson's position.

Analysis

This word cloud indicates Melville's contemplation of the nature of man and the world. It spans an eight-year range between his acquisitions of Emerson's works. "Power," "soul," "evil," and "good" are other repeated concepts.



This positive sentiment graph indicates themes in Emerson's essays that Melville applauds as "noble" and "great" in reference to their impressive scope and poetry. He recognizes Emerson's ability to understand the beautiful and heroic aspects of human nature, and is fascinated by the originality of Emerson's grasp on these subjects. This fascination is also the source of his efforts to differentiate between the true and the contrived beauty of humanity.



This negative sentiment graph reinforces the polarity of Melville's reaction to Emerson, as there is a large body of both positive and negative descriptions of Emerson's writings. Ideas of "good" and "evil" are at the forefront of this dichotomy as it is the threshold of these concepts upon which Melville and Emerson disagree. This axis of their division is both indicative of strong philosophical and literary divergence, as well as shared preoccupations.

Works Consulted: Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Conduct of Life*. London: Smith, Elder, 1860. Houghton Library, *AC85.M4977.Zz860e.
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Essays: First Series*. Boston: Munroe, 1847. 4th Ed. Houghton Library, *AC85.M4977.Zz847e.
"Melville's Marginalia in the Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson." Houghton Library, Harvard University, and Melville's Marginalia Online.
Silge, Julia and David Robinson. *Text Mining with R: A Tidy Approach*. O'Reilly, 2017.
Sinclair, Stéfán, Geoffrey Rockwell and the Voyant Tools Team. 2012. *Voyant Tools* (web application).



Visualizing the Metaphysical in Melville's Marginalia: Thomas Beale and Owen Chase

Dr. Olsen-Smith, Cheyene Austin, Denise Holbrook, Cora Lee Oxley

Poetic Transformation

The annotations Melville wrote in Thomas Beale's *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (figs. 1-3) were later transformed into poetic passages of *Moby-Dick*. Melville here associates the whale's act of breaching with defiance (fig. 1). This is incorporated into chapter 134 of his masterwork, as seen in the excerpt to the right.

In fig. 2, Beale describes the "flurry" that a whale enters just before death. Melville's annotation regarding that passage was later adapted to become an epic simile in chapter 81. The image of the "dying spout" again illustrates motifs of violence and death, and the "unseen hands" suggest the influence of fate or providence.

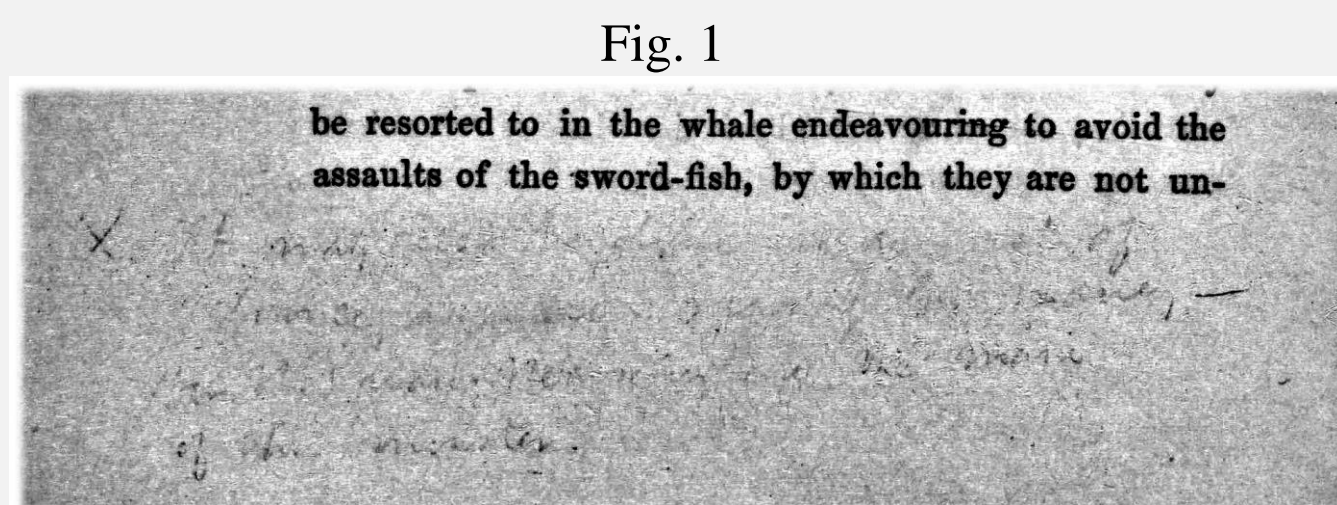


Fig. 1

"It may also be [it is] [?the whale's] act of defiance, as a [horse shaking his mane,— for the waves then seem like the mane of the monster."

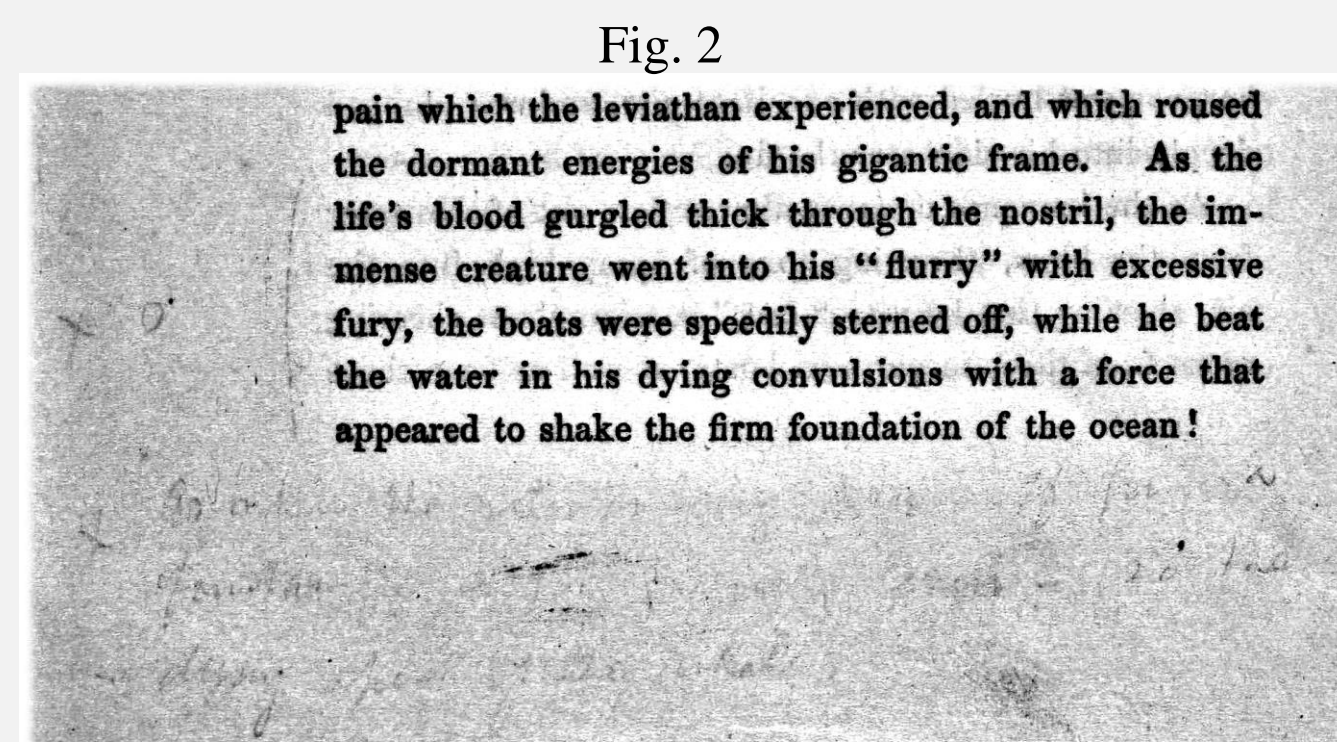


Fig. 2

"As when the water issuing [—?—] off from a fountain [—?—] & slowly lowers—so the dying spout of the whale."

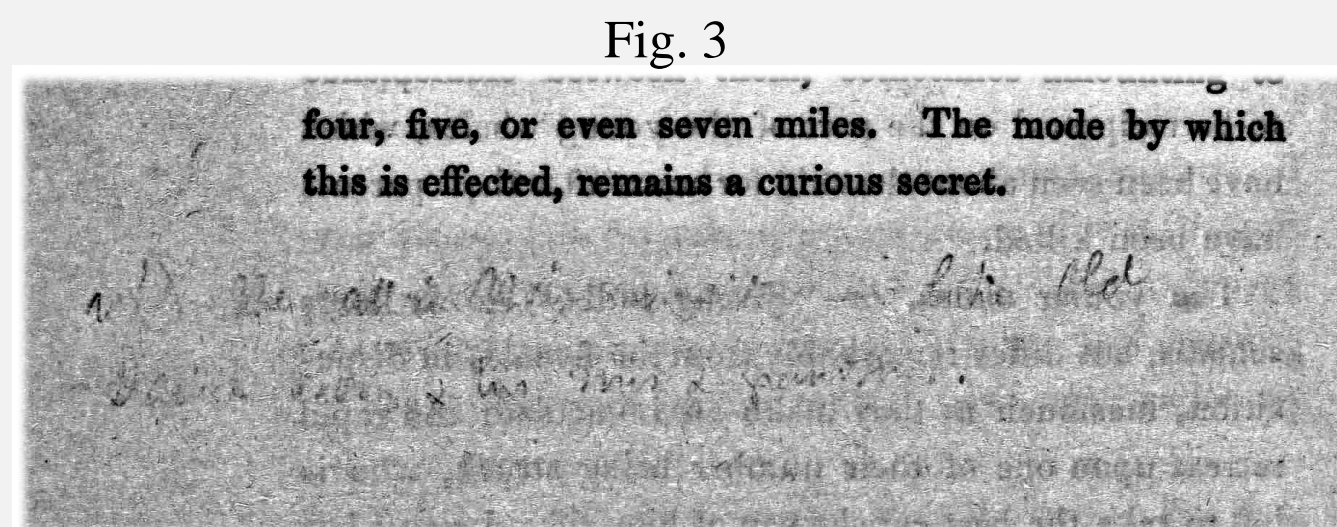


Fig. 3

"until they attain their [—?—] [—?—] like old Ixiion's [—?—] & his sins & punishment."

Melville's annotation referring to Ixiion (fig. 3) is significant in two ways. First, it exemplifies the book's major themes of retribution, confrontation, and the role of fate—a fitting conclusion to Ahab's monomaniacal revenge quest. Second, the circular imagery illustrates Melville's departure from the Transcendentalist perspective that the circle is an expanding, organic entity. As Walt Whitman said in "Leaves of Grass," "All goes onward and outward ... and nothing collapses." In contrast, Melville's circles are "ever contracting," denoting imprisonment and isolation. It is interesting to note that Beale's passage describes the difficulty of killing young bull sperm whales and has little to do with the poetic expression Melville extracts from it.

Corresponding Passages in *Moby-Dick*

"In those moments, the torn, enraged waves he shakes off, seem his mane; in some cases, this breaching is his act of defiance."
— Herman Melville (Chapter 134 of *Moby-Dick*)

"As when by unseen hands the water is gradually drawn off from some mighty fountain, and with half-stifled melancholy gurglings the spray-column lowers and lowers to the ground—so the last dying spout of the whale."
— Herman Melville (Chapter 81 of *Moby-Dick*)

"Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixiion I did revolve."
— Herman Melville (Epilogue of *Moby-Dick*)

Significance of Memorandum in Chase

In the memorandum to Chase's *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex* (fig. 4a), Melville reflects on the lives of Captain George Pollard and first mate Owen Chase after the tragedy. He refers to the "pertinaciousness of misfortune which pursued" them for the rest of their lives. Pollard's second sea voyage resulted in disaster—his ship was dashed against rocks and sunk. Chase's wife was unfaithful to him, and according to Melville on the next page, "He was a prey to the deepest gloom." Melville's focus on these negative experiences illustrates his acknowledgement of evil, in contrast to Emerson, who states that "the evils of the world are such only to the evil eye" (*Essays: Second Series*, 20). Melville disagreed with this sentiment at the time of writing *Moby-Dick* and nearly a decade later when he read the first and second series of Emerson's essays. He believed in evil as a real force that must be taken seriously. This is also illustrated in his marginalia in fig. 4c and the sentiment graph that displays positive- and negative-associated words in Melville's marginalia (fig. 5). The negative terms greatly outnumber the positive.

Works Consulted

Allaire, J.J. "RStudio: Integrated Development for R." Boston: RStudio Inc., 2011.
Beale, Thomas. *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale*. London: Van Voorst, 1839. Houghton Library. *AC85.M4977.Zz839b.
Chase, Owen. *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex*. New York: Gilley, 1821. Houghton Library. *AC85.M4977.R821c(B).
Gentleman, Robert, and Ross Ihaka. "R." Auckland: R Core Team, 1993.
Jockers, Matthew. *Text Analysis with R for Students of Literature*. Springer International, 2014.
Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002. Print.
———. *Melville's Marginalia Online*. Ed. Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon. 10 March 2018.
Silge, Julia and David Robinson. *Text Mining with R: A Tidy Approach*. O'Reilly, 2017.
Whitman, Walt. "Leaves of Grass." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 5th ed. Vol. 1. Ed. Nina Baym. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. pp. 2100. Print.

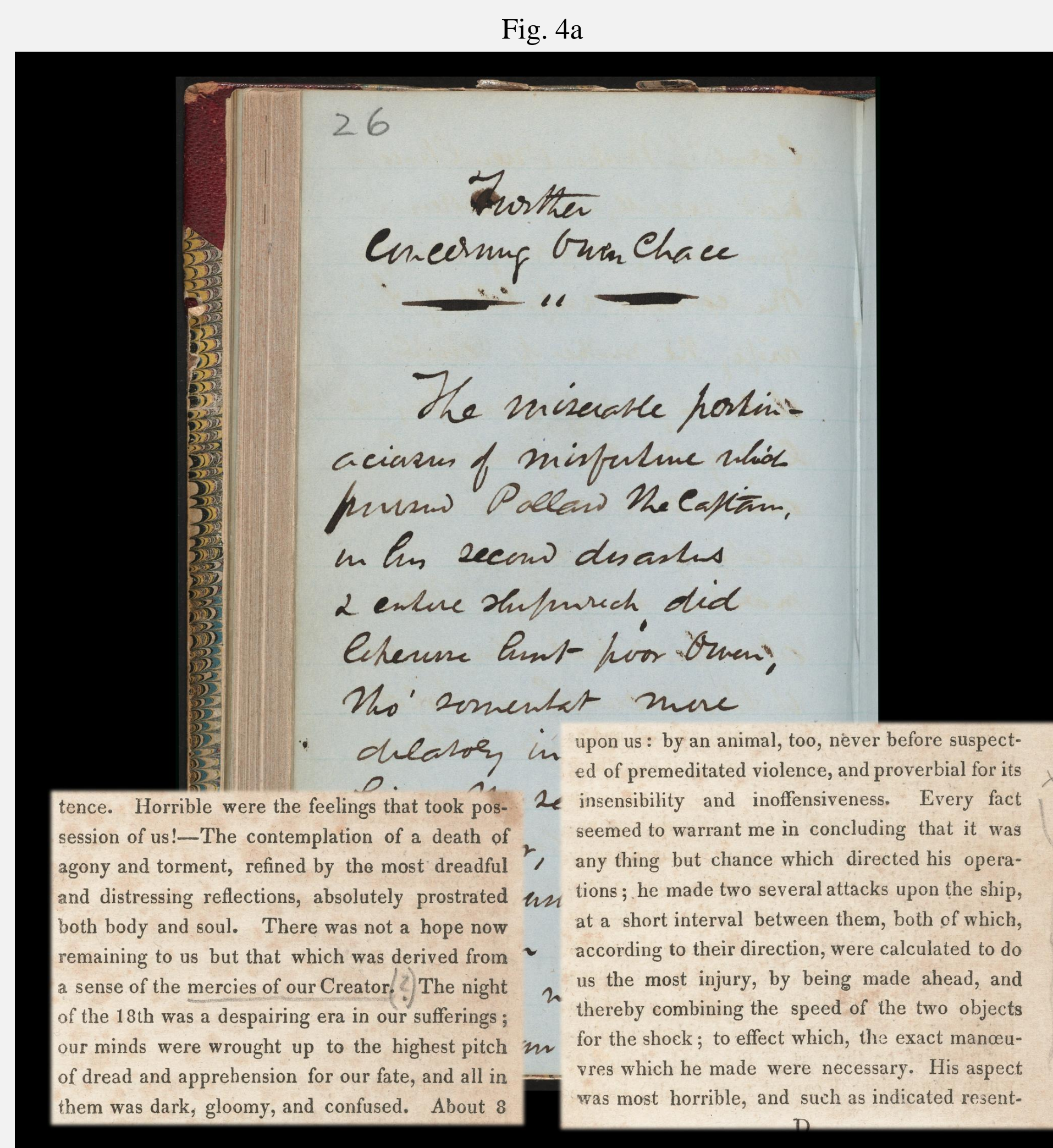


Fig. 4b

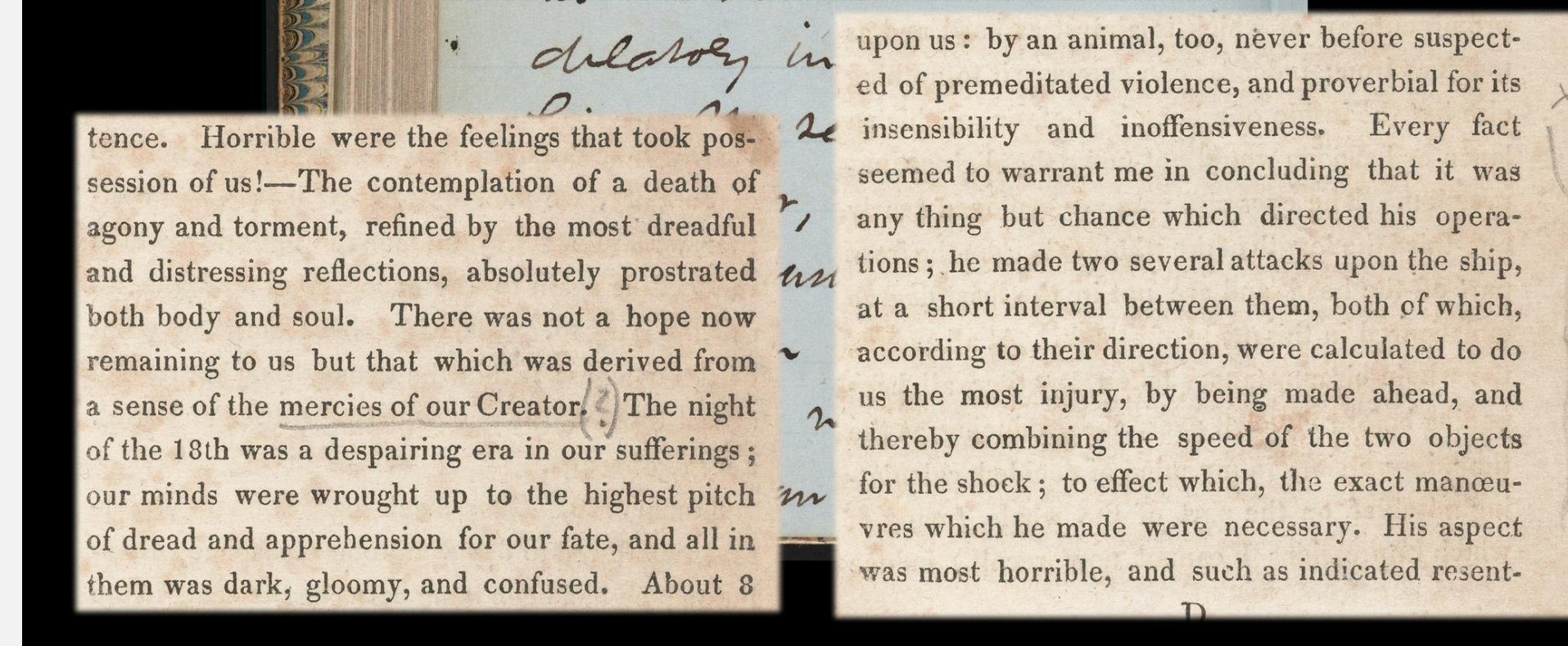


Fig. 4c

"Mercies of our Creator"

Melville marked the phrase shown in fig. 4b with an underline and a parenthetical question mark, thus demonstrating skepticism toward the sufferers' optimism in the face of such undeniable evidence of evil. This sentiment is echoed later in one of Melville's annotations in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Conduct of Life": "He still bethinks himself of his optimism—he must make that good somehow against the eternal hell itself." Melville here objects to Emerson's attempt to trivialize the very real evidence of evil, wondering how optimism can stand up to such a force. Similarly, he questions Chase's own optimistic statement amid such dire circumstances.

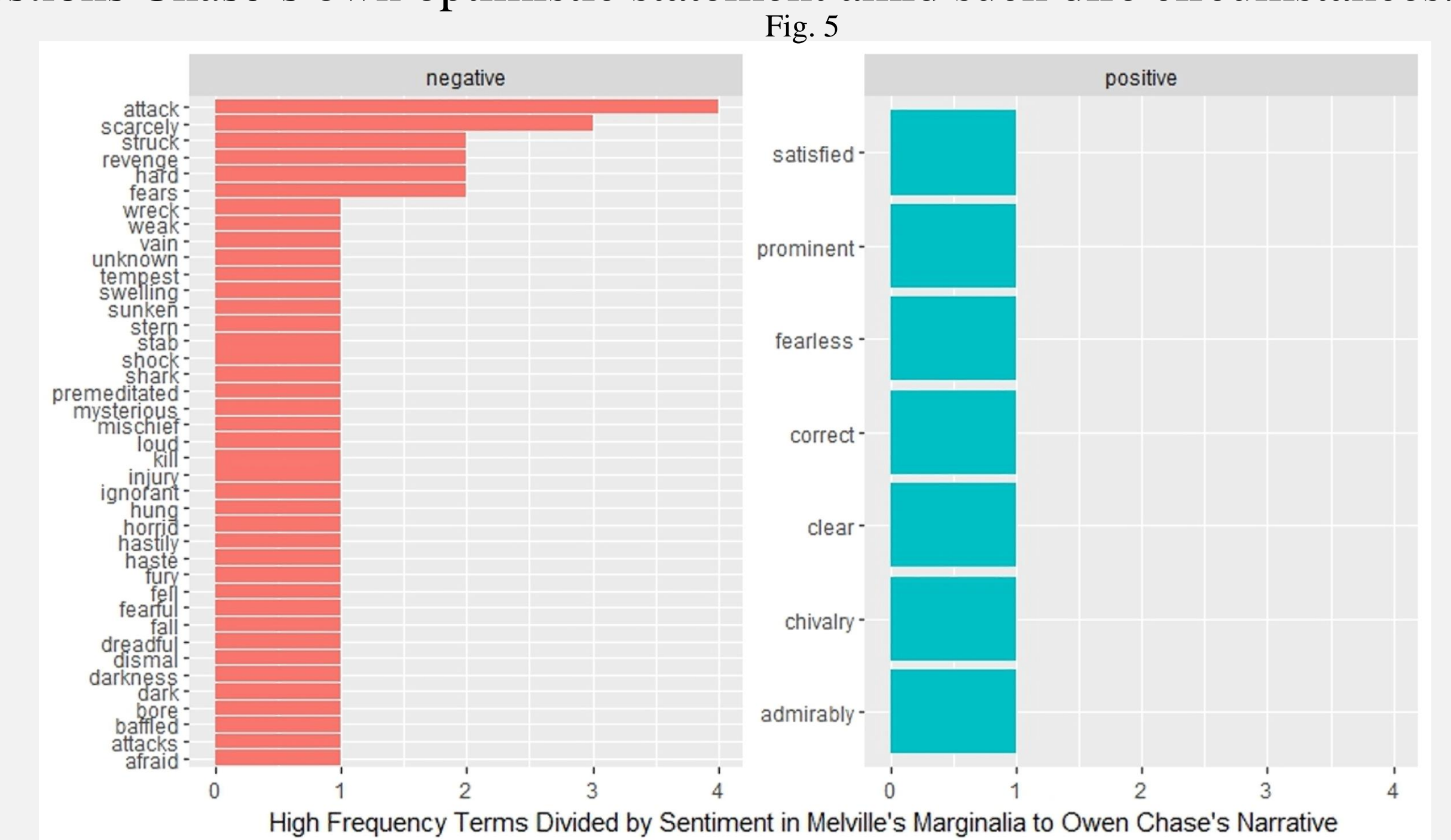


Fig. 5