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Choosing the Past: Agency and Ethnicity in Sidney Luska / Henry Harland's *As It Was Written*

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"White was a colored man," or so claims a Jewish pawnbroker in the late-nineteenth-century novel *As It Was Written: A Jewish Musician's Story* (1885), in which the colored man named White never actually appears (176). The pawnbroker even implies that White's name and address may be falsified. However, White is instrumental in enabling the highly complex plot to unfold plausibly. In a crucial extradiegetic event, White hocks the legacy of the novel's protagonist, Ernest Neuman. This legacy, a miniature portrait and an ornamented wooden box with a secret compartment containing a message from Neuman's dead father, is later recovered by Neuman and his gentile friend Merivale through a circuitous series of apparently fortuitous occurrences. The message contains a gruesome curse forbidding Neuman to marry and commanding him to murder his father's former best friend in retribution for having defiled Neuman's late mother. This leads Neuman to discover the horrifying truth about his fiancée's murder, which has occurred earlier in the narrative.

White's offstage yet instrumental anonymity in this novel is comparable to his creator's position in both traditional and revisionist accounts of American literary history. Henry Harland wrote *As It Was Written* under the Jewish pseudonym of Sidney Luska. He would write several other novels under this pseudonym before moving to England and joining fin-de-siècle bohemian culture as founding editor of *The Yellow Book*. He spent the final years of his short life living off the royalties of his highly popular

novel, *The Cardinal's Snuffbox*, which, like all his later novels, substitutes European aristocracy for American Jewry. By this time he had become crankily anti-Semitic, and before his death he converted to Roman Catholicism.

Clearly Harland was never quite comfortable with who he was; standard biographical sources on him all conflict. *Who's Who 1899* has his birthplace as St. Petersburg, Russia; the *Dictionary of National Biography* claims he was born in New York City; *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* has him born in Russia to American parents; and Louis Harap, in his study of *The Image of the Jew in American Literature*, says Harland was born in Norwich, Connecticut (455). Harland once claimed he was the illegitimate son of Emperor Franz Josef; he also tried to attain an English baronetcy by tracing his lineage to the Harlands of Sprague Hall. One must agree with Leslie Fiedler's appraisal:

Henry Harland was above all else an inveterate poseur, a liar who lied for his soul's sake, and the ordinary biographical sources are likely to contain whatever fabrication suited his view of himself at the moment he was asked for information.

(24)

Though he concedes that Harland's life was "a success story in the end: from Rags to Riches, from Ethical Culture on the East Side to Roman Catholicism on the Riviera," Fiedler affirms that Harland's origins were "to his everlasting regret, more prosaic than he could tolerate."

Judging by the pattern of Harland's lies, we can see that "prosaic" here means without heritage, aristocratic or ethnic, and it is the great irony of Harland's career that this need for a past would make him something of a forgotten father of American ethnic literature. This literary historical joke is not lost on Fiedler, who feels that "there is an appropriate irony in the fact that the first Jewish-American novelist was not a Jew at all, or that, more precisely, he was a creation of his own fiction, an imaginary Jew" (24). Yet Fiedler maintains "a vestigial doubt . . . that Luska/Harland may, after all, have been a Jew pretending to be a Gentile pretending to be a Jew." Is Fiedler really relishing this "best joke of all," a final subterfuge to sabotage all attempts at fixing authorial identity, or is he masking a secret hope that, after all, the author of the first Jewish-American novel really was an American Jew?

Fiedler's ambivalent appraisal registers a contradiction at the very heart of the modern concept of ethnicity that is foregrounded by figures such as Luska/Harland. On the one hand, ethnic transvestism would seem to confirm the permeable boundaries and social constructedness of American ethnic identity. Thus Fiedler can celebrate Harland's charade as a paradigmatic expression of the American Dream. On the other hand, some sort of palpable descent relation seems necessary if the ethnic category is to have any viability at all. Thus Fiedler concludes his discussion with a doubt (or a hope) that Harland really was a Jew. Ethnic transvestism would seem to render Werner Sollors' dramatic conflict between "consent and descent" as a logical contradiction at the very core of American ethnic identity.¹

Significantly, Harland never appears in what is possibly the most prominent recent discussion of ethnic literary transvestism in the United States,

Henry Louis Gates's 1991 article, "Authenticity, or the Lesson of Little Tree." Claiming that "our literary judgements . . . remain hostage to the ideology of authenticity," Gates accuses us of identifying authorial legitimacy with biological identity in our struggles over the literary canon (1). In a move reminiscent of Sollors, Gates prods his readers to acknowledge the "distasteful truth . . . [that], like it or not, all writers are 'cultural impersonators'"; in fact, "even real people . . . are never quite real" (28).

The category of the literary allows Gates to make the logical leap from Little Tree to literally everyone. The figure of the writer provides him with the mediating mechanism whereby he can generalize from an extremely small social group — American writers who masquerade as members of ethnic communities — to the entire human population of "real people." By such a logic, literary impersonation is liberatory:

[O]ur histories, individual and collective, do affect what we wish to write and what we are able to write. But that relation is never one of fixed determinism. No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world.

(30)

For Gates, writing literally enables us to wrest a realm of freedom from a realm of necessity. If you make the effort, you can, through writing, be anyone you want to be.

Gates's rhetoric in this piece references a lengthy tradition in American cultural and political thought that envisions writing and print in liberatory terms. From the Enlightenment ideal of democratic access to a public sphere of print, to the drama of literacy and liberation in the nineteenth-century African-American slave narrative, to the centrality of higher education and literary vocation in twentieth-century narratives of immigrant mobility, mastering written language and getting into print have remained both avenues to and signs of the achievement of America's many political promises. And although Gates himself has been a key player in recent efforts to complicate and challenge these literary-political equations — which are so much more frequently honored in the breach than in the observance — his investments as an academic scholar and public intellectual reveal their continuing appeal.²

As It Was Written, as its title implies, constructs a relation between literature and liberation that runs completely counter to the tradition that Gates's article references, and I offer it as documenting the historical repressed of his claims. This novel, written by a compulsive cultural impersonator, nevertheless represents writing and creative endeavor as the conduit through which "our histories" exert a tyrannical power over the present. If Harland's choice of an ethnic pseudonym seems to support Gates's claims for authorial freedom, the role of artistic production in *As It Was Written* contradicts these claims. In its persistent staging of creative automatism, psychic possession, and prophetic fiat, the novel refigures authorial agency as a form of enslavement and thus reveals some of the historical necessities that haunt the ideology of literary freedom under American capitalism.

On the surface, then, *As It Was Written* exhibits a contradictory relation between text and context: the novel's plot figures ethnic identity in terms of unalterable descent relations, whereas its authorship reveals ethnic identity as a matter of choice. In the following analysis, I will identify correspondences between the novel's structure and its marketplace that render this contradiction historically intelligible. These correspondences reveal that it is not a coincidence that the ethnic American narrative emerges in the same era as what publisher Henry Holt famously called "the commercialization of literature." The dilemmas of agency, subjectivity, and identity staged within the narrative of *As It Was Written* closely mirror contemporary anxieties about the fate of reading and writing in the emergent mass marketplace. These correspondences between the drama of identity as it is represented in the ethnic narrative and the drama of author/audience relations forming the historical context of that narrative reveal more broadly that ethnicity as a literary formation in America must be understood in dialectical relation to the conditions of the print marketplace at the time of its emergence.

Mediums and Melodramas

The formidable complexity of this novel's plot requires some initial exposition. *As It Was Written* is narrated by its protagonist, Ernest Neuman, a German-Jewish musician living in New York City. At the opening of the novel, Neuman falls in love with and becomes engaged to Veronica Pathzuol, a Jewish singer. Before they can be married, Veronika is brutally murdered and Neuman is charged with the crime. Since no motive can be determined, Neuman is acquitted, after which he gives up his musical career and becomes a waiter. He then meets a young gentile named Daniel Merivale, with whom he discovers the written legacy from Neuman's father that explains Veronika's murder. Neuman's father writes that his entire family line is under a curse forcing each husband to murder his unfaithful wife, and that Neuman's own mother had been unfaithful with Veronika's father. In the end, Neuman discovers that he did himself murder his fiancée while under psychic possession by the ghost of his father.

Thus we see that, in *As It Was Written*, the artist is always in thrall to some agency beyond his control. Furthermore, the medium of artistic expression becomes a conduit through which this agency exercises its dominion. The novel is subtitled *A Jewish Musician's Story*, and the relationship of the musician to his music repeatedly figures for the relationship between the narrator and his narrative and between the individual and his past. Neuman meets his fiancée through music, when he hears her singing as he strolls the streets of New York City. She and her uncle invite him in, immediately recognize him as a Jewish musician like themselves, and demand that he play the violin for them. Already half in love with Veronika, Neuman nervously acquiesces:

I played as best I could. Rather, the music played itself. With a violin under my chin, I lapse into semi-consciousness, lose my identity. Another

spirit impels my arm, pouring itself out through the voice of my instrument. Not until silence is restored do I realize that I have been the performer. While the music is going on my personality is annihilated.

(9)

Music plays itself through the passive medium of Neuman's body. The almost awkwardly foregrounded shifts in predication grammatically signal this mediumistic relation's centrality to the narrative. The deceptively simple inversion of "I played" to "the music played itself" immediately gets complicated by the equivocations and qualifications of the passage that follows, in which pronouns, instruments, body parts, and spirits vie for position as subject and object of the ambiguous performance.

The many similar scenes of musical performance in the novel foreground the problem of agency relative to writing partly because of the functional differences between the musical score and the verbal narrative. Audiences at musical performances don't normally read the musical score; classical musicians usually don't compose the music they play. With writing, particularly with blood-and-thunder thrillers such as *As It Was Written*, these relations seem less obliquely mediated: we read the same words the author wrote and there is no "performer" wedged in between. On the other hand, music, in its apparent transcendence of linguistic difference and in its immediate communication at the moment of performance, can figure as the "purer" medium. Thus Neuman makes the conventional claim that music is superior to words when it comes to representing love:

I am not accustomed to expressing such matters in words, but with my violin I should have no sort of difficulty. If I wanted to give utterance to my idea of Veronika, all I should have to do would be to take my violin and play this heavenly melody from Chopin's Impromptu in C-sharp minor.

(21)

The very choice of an "Impromptu" — a piece composed to sound improvised — indicates once again problems of agency and intention. And the actual score of the piece follows, illustrating both the disjunctions and the overlaps between literary and musical notation and expression in the novel.³

Harland's use of different media to foreground problems of authorial agency frames how the relation between inherited and acquired experience constitutes ethnic identity in *As It Was Written*. Directly after printing the musical score in order to compensate for his inability to describe his betrothed in words, Neuman describes her anyway:

A mystery that would neither be defined nor penetrated nor ignored, brooded over her, as the perfume broods over the rose. I doubt whether an American woman can be like this unless she is older and has had certain experiences of her own. Veronika had not had sufficient experience of her own to account for what I have described; but she was a Jewess, and all the experience of the Jewish race, all the martyrdom of the scattered hosts, were hers by inheritance.

(23-4)

The convenient paradox of maintaining innocence through the generational transmission of “certain experiences” parallels the drama of creative agency in this text; the sources of Veronika’s sexuality are as attenuated as the agency behind Neuman’s musicianship. Both characters are “possessed.”

Thus it is not surprising that they become obsessed with the agency behind their betrothal:

“I do believe God’s hand was in it! I do believe it was all pre-ordained in heaven. I believe our Guardian Angel prompted me to speak and you to answer. It can’t be that we, who were made for each other, were left to find out by a mere perilous chance — it isn’t credible.”

(36)

Here the ambiguities of aesthetic agency and ethnic identity in the novel are framed in the broadest cosmological terms: “God’s hand” versus “perilous chance.” However, Neuman’s faith in his love’s preordination gets put to the test by Veronika’s unexpected murder, the memory of which dictates the thematic anxieties and formal peculiarities of the novel. Chapter two ends with the following paragraph: “While writing the above I had almost forgotten. Now I remember. I must stop for a space to get used to remembering again that she is dead” (30). And chapter three provocatively opens:

Yes, she is dead. That is the truth. If truth is good, as men proclaim it to be, then goodness is intrinsically cruel. That Veronika is dead is the truth which lies like a hot coal upon my consciousness, and goads me along as I tell this tale. And the manner of her death and the speediness of it — I must tell all.

(31)

Thus the entire novel has a compulsive confessional structure that lends dramatic force to the eventual discovery of Neuman’s enthrallment to his past.

When Neuman is arrested and indicted as Veronika’s murderer, he goes through the motions of his trial “as passively as an automaton” (52). His automatism hasn’t affected his memory, however, since “stolid, indifferent, and inattentive as I was, every detail of the trial is stamped upon my memory in indelible hues. Here is the story of it” (58). Ceding his agency this time to the law, Neuman himself becomes the conduit through which the trial comes to us. Thus the trial again stages his thralldom, which ironically vindicates him in the end since the prosecution is unable to establish a motive for the crime. His lawyer, Epstein, confirms that “his defense must necessarily be of a passive, not of an active, kind” (74).

After his acquittal, Neuman takes on his mother’s maiden name of “Lexow” and starts another life as a waiter in a German wine-shop. It is at this shop two years later that Merivale, a chain-smoking aesthete clearly based on Harland himself, enters Neuman’s life. And it is Merivale who, upon meeting Neuman, preaches the novel’s assimilationist creed:

“There is no American people — or rather there are twenty peoples — the Irish, the German, the Jewish, the English, and the Negro elements — all existing independently at the same time, and each as truly American as any of the others. Good! But in the future, after emigration has ceased, these elements will begin to amalgamate. A single people of homogenous blood will be the consequence. . . . [I]t is the Jewish element which will leaven the whole lump — color the whole mixture. The English element alone is, so to speak, one portion of pure water; the German element, one portion of eau sucrée; now add the Jewish — it is a dose of strong red wine. It will give fire and flavor to the decoction. The future Americans, thanks to the Jew in them, will have passions, enthusiasms. They will paint great pictures, compose great music, write great poems . . .”

(105-6)

Thus Harland anticipates Zangwill’s “melting pot” with his own alimentary metaphor, juxtaposing figurative bread and wine with literal works of great art. Merivale’s prophecy raises the stakes of the plot, as Neuman’s own aesthetic vocation takes on national significance.

Merivale’s peculiar metaphor also registers a link between aesthetics and intoxication, as the “strong wine” of Jewish blood translates into American pictures, music, and poems. His erotically charged relationship to Neuman confirms this association. When Merivale doesn’t show up at the shop, Neuman feels “like an opium eater deprived of his daily portion”; when Merivale does arrive, “he consumed cigarette after cigarette and read his paper through to the very advertisements on the last page” (108). Chemical dependency and erotic infatuation rhetorically inform the friendship, and when Merivale persuades Neuman to play the violin for the first time since before Veronika’s death, he acts as both seducer and pusher. Neuman resists, but then feels “an irresistible temptation to continue.” Once again he loses “possession” of himself, claiming, “I had no power to restrain the motion of my arm and lay the violin aside” (120). He then performs maniacally, listening “to the music precisely as though it had been played by another person” (121). Deeply moved by the performance, Merivale promptly insists that Neuman move in as his private secretary, since his own unfortunate combination of “scrivener’s palsy and gout” prevents him from writing down his poetry. Thus Neuman again cedes his creative agency, this time as Merivale’s amanuensis.

In fact, Merivale completely dictates the events that follow. He tells the wine-shop proprietor that Neuman won’t be returning to work. He then maneuvers a position for him as soloist in a prestigious orchestra and badgers him into taking it against his protestations. This brief career opportunity is shattered when Neuman sees Veronika’s uncle, Mr. Tikulski, in the orchestra and faints in the middle of his solo. It is Tikulski who directs Neuman to the pawnshop, where Merivale negotiates with the Jewish pawnbroker for the legacy, hocked many years ago by the colored man named White, that apparently will clear up the mysteries of Neuman’s past.

The episode of the legacy’s retrieval relates Neuman’s problems with agency to correlative ambiguities around the status of objects in the text. Tikulski

sends Neuman a “miniature painted on ivory, the likeness of a man,” but Neuman does not recognize the portrait, or understand why Tikulski, who found it at a pawnshop, would consider it his “family memento” (159). It is only when Merivale holds up the miniature next to a pocket mirror that Neuman realizes that, “as closely as it is possible for one human countenance to resemble another, the face of the picture resembled my reflection in the glass” (161). The return of the legacy stages the uncanniness of objects in the narrative; the profound resemblance between the portrait and the reflection legitimates Tikulski’s return of the lost object and inaugurates the return of Neuman’s repressed past. And this return will also clear up the mystery of the murder that inaugurated the entire narrative.

Merivale and Neuman go to the pawnshop where Tikulski acquired the miniature portrait, and there discover the box with the hidden compartment to which I have alluded earlier. Neuman, an orphan, has been told of such a box by the rabbi who raised him, but he is at first unconvinced of the box’s authenticity, avowing that it could not be “the box” associated with his past since, as Merivale, who paid five dollars for it, apparently affirms, it “appears to have been designed as a cheapish jewel-case, now in the last stages of decrepitude” (181). But Merivale is only baiting Neuman; he promptly avers that he has seen “the very duplicate” of this box in France, and that it is “a specimen of cinque-cento” (182). Thus what at first appeared to be an arbitrary object of little value ends up being the box, and well worth five dollars. And this abrupt shift in exchange value inheres in the age of the object, its possession of a venerable European past.

Neuman’s own Old-World past is concealed in the box’s secret compartment, which Merivale also reveals. The compartment contains the note from Neuman’s father. Ernest Neuman, Sr. begins by ceding to God the power to insure that the letter is delivered, and confirms his Jewish faith through using the Hebrew abbreviation (") for the Deity’s name:

" has promised it. He will render this writing indelible, this paper indestructible. He will guide this to you, even as He guides the river to the sea, the star to the zenith. Blessed be the name of " forever.

(188)

The letter continues in an exalted Old Testament register of prophecy, prohibition, and punishment:

In the fourth generation back of me our ancestor was betrayed by the wife of his choice. So great was his hatred of her on this account, that he wished his seed, contaminated as it was by having taken root in her womb, to become extinct. Therefore he forbade his son to marry. And to this prohibition he attached a penalty. If, in defiance of his wish, his son should take unto himself a woman, then should he too taste the bitterness of infidelity within the household, then should he too be betrayed and dishonored by his wife. And this penalty he made to extend to the seventh and eighth generations. Whosoever of his progeny should enter into the wedded state should enter by the same step into the antechamber of hell.

(190-1)

The prophecy somewhat paradoxically depends upon the violation of the prohibition, since only the matrimony that is forbidden by the curse can carry the family into the “seventh and eighth generations” that include Neuman himself. The cross purposes of the father’s rhetoric generate a sort of accelerating hysteria, as he gradually moves from sententiousness to sensationalism:

Find my enemy out and put him to death. . . . Do not strike him down with one blow. Torture him to death, pluck his flesh from his bones shred by shred. . . . [V]isit the penalty of his sin upon his children and his children’s children. For has not " decreed that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generations. . . . [T]he race of Nicholas must be exterminated, obliterated from the face of the earth. . . . Empty his blood upon the sand as you would the blood of a swine. . . . And think . . . “At each thrust of my knife into our enemy’s flesh, the heart of my father leaps with satisfaction. At each scream that escapes from our enemy’s throat, the voice of my father waxes great with joy.”
(204-5)

The letter proceeds at such a frantic pace that the father even admonishes his son to “pause for a space and pray that the breath of God may make strong your heart” (203).

Neuman Sr. seals his grisly command with the threat that “[i]f you hesitate . . . my spirit will possess your body and do what must be done in spite of your hesitation” (207). Below the signature appears a postscript that the dying father wrote after rereading his letter: “I have omitted to mention his [Nicholas’] full name. His name is Nicholas Pathzuol” (208). Thus Neuman finally discovers that his fiancée was the daughter of his mother’s defiler, and the letter’s contrived withholding of this fact, along with its frenzied pace, replicates the employment of the entire narrative, which insistently both defers and hurries toward explaining the murder with which it opens.

But Neuman still can’t quite figure it out. He admits to Merivale that “this strange combination of facts must have some awful meaning,” but this meaning continuously “escapes and eludes” him (215). According to Merivale, this is because “your problem has no solution, none because it is not a true problem, but merely a fortuitous arrangement of circumstances which chances to bear a superficial resemblance to one.” Thus Merivale succinctly states the philosophical problem posed by the novel. Is Neuman’s fate sealed from the beginning by the ineradicable force of an Old World, Old Testament prophecy, or has he just stumbled upon a random set of circumstances that maddeningly resemble predestination but are actually mutable and escapable? Is ethnicity determined by blood ties that cannot be severed or by contingent socio-historical conditions that can be changed or avoided? And finally, are narratives channeled through authors by mysterious supernatural agencies, or are they freely composed by autonomous artists?

The answer to the last question provides the answer to the first two, as Neuman finally puts the pieces together through automatic writing. He plays his violin for Merivale and once again enters into a trance-like state, perform-

ing an extended and emotionally overwrought piece that neither can identify. Neuman sits down to write out the score, gradually becoming “so much interested in what I was doing that my hand sped across the paper like a machine performing the regular function for which it was contrived” (240). He finds that his “hand was forging along faster than my thought could dictate, in apparent obedience to an independent will of its own” (241). When he finishes, the two men discover that “the last half dozen pages were covered with written words — blotted, scrawling, scarcely decipherable, but unmistakably written words” (243). The final chapter consists of these written words, which narrate how Neuman murdered his fiancée while in a trance, apparently possessed by the spirit of his father. With this recovered memory, the novel completes its detective-story circuit, revealing the event in the past whose concealment has pushed the narrative forward into the future.

Choosing the Past

Henry Harland decided to publish *As It Was Written* under the pseudonym of Sidney Luska in order to secure a market for his unusual creation. Harland wrote to his mentor, Wall Street banker and literary dilettante Edmund Clarence Stedman, that “with a Jewish name on the title page, the sale of the book would be vastly increased. I believe lots of Jews would buy it for that reason, if for no other — for the sake of seeing what New York can produce in the way of a truly Jewish story” (quoted in Beckson 28).⁴ Harland significantly neglects to consider the content of his narrative in this note. Rather, he formulates the pseudonym as a promotional device, correlatively situating New York’s Jewish population as an untapped reservoir of consumers.

And the promotion worked. *The Jewish Messenger* applauded the novel, affirming that “to Sidney Luska we owe a debt of gratitude for charming us with a powerful story, and at the same time contributing more powerfully than could sermons and editorials to the better appreciation of the genius of Judaism” (5). This “debt” translated into sales of 50,000 copies, a considerable success for a first novel at that time (Beckson 25). Luska was so successful that, when his true identity was discovered, Harland’s novels for a time continued to include the pseudonym in parentheses in order to boost sales.

However, if Harland managed to get away with his authorial impersonation with *As It Was Written* (although the reviewer for *The New York Times* admitted some suspicion), he was less successful in selling the originality of the novel itself. A number of reviewers felt that he had borrowed his style and ideas from Hugh Conway’s highly popular earlier novel, *Called Back*. *The Dial* was thus backhanded in its praise:

It is perhaps even more direct and forcible than “Called Back,” and the introduction of the impossible solution of its mystery is delayed until the very close, or until the reader’s interest is fully awakened by legitimate means. Then comes the strictly illegitimate explanation, and the reader is justly indignant at being made the victim of so miserable a trick — unless,

indeed, the general tone of what has gone before has led him to suspect something of the sort. It need not be said that this sort of stuff is underserving of the name of literature.

(182)

To deny a novel “the name of literature” is to relegate it to the realm of genre fiction and mass culture, and this reviewer’s account of his reading experience in fact mirrors other reports of *As It Was Written*’s frenzied pace, as well as its peculiarly contrived combination of mystery and predictability. The suspicion that Luska/Harland was imitating a prior pulp novel reinforces this cultural distinction, since genre fiction is assumed to consist in the quasi-mechanical repetition of formulaic tropes and plot devices.

Thus both the formulaic structure and the pseudonymous authorship of *As It Was Written* can be understood in terms of market exigencies. In fact, it is worth noting that *As It Was Written* appeared on the eve of a “revolution” in publishing that Henry Holt would dub “the commercialization of literature.” As publishing historians Charles Madison and John Tebbel both affirm, during the decades surrounding the turn of the century, the forces of corporate finance capital increasingly penetrated the genteel American publishing industry. This penetration would have two consequences that are pertinent to *As It Was Written*. On one hand, the promotion of authorial personality became closely integrated into the marketing of books. Public authorial readings and interviews became established institutions during these years, and a star system of American authors gradually emerged as part of the growing literary marketplace. As Daniel Borus affirms, “[b]ook advertising, literary gossip columns, publicity tours, and interviews all pointed toward the creation of a glamorous person, a person whose life had aspects that were admirable or capable of being envied” (118). Borus contends that such promotional strategies were designed to foster a species of “brand-name loyalty among readers” in the increasingly competitive American literary marketplace. Harland’s invention of a Jewish pseudonym as a sales ploy clearly coincides with this increasing concern for the advertisement value of authorial personality more generally.

On the other hand, custodians of culture became increasingly anxious about what Henry Dwight Sedgewick called “The Mob Spirit in Literature,” the tendency for readers to display a “haste to get at the plot, to assimilate experience, to devour the story, the irritation of suspense” (11). This was also the era when, as Lawrence Levine has shown, a cleavage emerged between highbrow and lowbrow literature and culture, and it is clear from the reviews that Harland’s novel was unanimously understood to appeal to lowbrow tastes. Its sensational subject matter and suspenseful structure both marked its appeal to this “mob spirit.”

Within the context of these emergent transformations in the structure of the American literary marketplace, *As It Was Written* stages the drama of ethnic identity as a dialectic between writerly agency and readerly thrall, and it is within the terms of this dialectic that ethnic transvestism as an authorial strategy in modern America becomes historically intelligible. As Gates affirms, such imposture does represent a species of freedom, but it is an authorial free-

dom that functions as an exception to the rule of readerly enslavement. Or, more broadly stated, the ability of the discrete individual to manufacture his own past is only possible insofar as the vast majority of persons are determined by theirs. Harland's transvestism would make no sense if there weren't a group of "real" Jews for him to imitate.

Thus if we choose to celebrate such impostures as critiques of the "ideology of authenticity," we fail to realize the intimate interdependence between the imposture and the ideology. And, in failing to recognize this interdependence, we also mask a deeper, and more symptomatic, ideology of individualism that undergirds such freedom. Ethnic transvestism, after all, is rare; most people find themselves in ascribed group identities. It is, of course, in the American tradition to promote the token success as a sign of the essential justness of the free-market society. However, as critics of this society, we recognize such successes as the exceptions that prove the rule. A similar recognition is necessary with Harland. His ability to choose his past only proves that most Americans are doomed to repeat theirs.

Notes

1. Sollors celebrates Harland — and ethnic transvestites generally — for "undercutting the image of a presumably stable relationship between in-group and out-group" (252). Nevertheless, ethnic transvestism gets only two pages in Sollors' encyclopedic study, which is, of course, primarily devoted to "authentic" members of American ethnic groups.

2. It would be impossible to summarize the fruitfully complex and occasionally contradictory relationship between poststructuralism and theories of race and ethnicity that I am thumbnailing here. Gates's considerable contribution includes *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self*, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, and his edited volume, "Race," *Writing and Difference*. I dwell on Gates here because I feel that his career conveniently illustrates the persistence of Enlightenment epistemologies and aspirations across two decades of poststructuralist scrutiny.

3. For a discussion of the role of music in the novel see Aronson, who claims that "the temptation to find in music a universal criterion for all sense impressions was particularly hard to resist whenever a writer's surrender to physical sensations became an end in itself" (11-12). Pierre Bourdieu reveals the class inflection of this "temptation": "Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of . . . the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art" (19). *As It Was Written* exploits this understanding of music as in some way universal and absolute, while simultaneously staging its repeated failure in practice.

4. Stedman was Henry Harland's mentor for much of his life. In fact, it was Stedman who came up with the title *As It Was Written*, after rejecting *From Generation to Generation* and *Mated and Fated*. His theories of creative genius clearly influenced Harland's own understanding of writing. In "Genius," for instance, Stedman claims that "genius lies in the doing of one thing, or many

things, through power resulting from the unconscious action of the free intellect, in a manner unattainable by the conscious effort of ordinary men" (24). It is fortuitous for my argument that Stedman was both a literary scholar and a successful Wall Street broker.

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