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"Per si muove—it was a mass of moonstone": Fluidity, Dynamic Relations, and the Commodification of Storytelling in Harriet Prescott Spofford's Arctic Writings

Verena Laschinger

In "The Story of the Iceberg," a poem from the collection *In Titian's Garden and Other Poems* (1897), American author Harriet Prescott Spofford employs a covert speaker to tell the story of an iceberg's long journey "down to equatorial seas" in eighteen quatrains (60). The poem's protagonist is the eponymous iceberg. Personified and endowed with affects, he initially appears "weary" of the "dark months of winter night" and full of longing "for other worlds and flight" (58). As "he" yearns for someone to admire "his mighty mould" and bring out what he thinks is best in him, his "light and color" (58), the iceberg's restlessness appears motivated by vanity and ambition. When in early spring "a band of sunbeams" warms the Arctic regions, the iceberg eventually breaks loose from "the mother glacier" and launches to get ever further south (58). Craving the spectral effects that make his "moonstone gleam" (58), the floating iceberg crashes "his way through sinking ships" like "some vast fleet in majesty" (59). Running rampant he is, however, unaware of how the sun unleashes its destructive power onto him, precisely by making him shine. Too late the iceberg realizes that all this sparkling in "jewelled splendor" comes at a cost (59), and only when he is "dissolving in a fervent heat" (60) is he full of remorse and does he long to see his "dim, dark home once more" (61). The poem ends, however, laconically stating the iceberg's obliteration:

And, but a hulk of crumbling ice,
Within the deep he found his grave,
Stranded upon a hidden key,
And washed to nothing by a wave. (61)

As the iceberg's southbound drift is not explained by natural laws but attributed to the "ghost of glory" that lures the vain protagonist into a death trap, the poem assumes the function of a morality tale (60). Given how the adventurous icecalf and his mother glacier are gendered, "The Story of the Iceberg" could rightly be read as a "feminist critique of the gendered hubris of the conventional exploration narrative," to borrow a claim that literary scholar Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock makes about another Arctic text that Spofford published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in October 1868. In his compelling first analysis of "The Moonstone Mass," Weinstock finds that the exploration tale "sets up a binary opposition between masculine and feminine worlds and privileges the latter, associated with home, family, and heterosexuality, over the former, correlated with capitalistic imperialism and conquest" (12).

Clearly, "The Story of the Iceberg" riffs on Spofford's earlier, "unjustly neglected short story" (Weinstock 4).¹ Yet it does so in ways that exceed a commonality of theme. The narrative poem not only resonates with the short story, which it intertextually references and complements, but by switching genre and focalization, "The Story of the Iceberg" also retroactively shifts the reader's perception of "The Moonstone Mass." The poem, I claim, introduces fluidity as a topic as well as a promising mode of analysis for the short story. As a consequence the rigidity of presumed binaries (e.g. gender) is dissolved in favor of a "form of relational thinking," a conceptual framework introduced by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (Felski 748). Seen through the lens of fluidity foregrounded by Spofford's Arctic poem, her story renders a network of actors (human and other), who are connected and continuously influence one another. Hence, "The Moonstone Mass" demands an analysis that acknowledges this relationality as facilitating the protagonist's discovery of the Northwest Passage alongside the metaphorical pathways, which the geographical trope symbolizes in the text. Ultimately, it is my claim that "The Moonstone Mass" fictionally renders an (imaginary) geographical journey to describe the complexities and challenges of personal, generational and societal transfers from the culturally conspicuous perspective of the nineteenth-century American storyteller transitioning from the era of Romanticism to Realism.

1. Forging a Fluid Voice

Exclusively set in an aquatic environment, "The Story of the Iceberg" assumes the diegetic world as a "fluid space," which according to Annemarie Mol and John Law contains "no well-defined objects or entities" (qtd. in Ingold 153). Instead, it speaks of "substances which flow, mix and mutate, sometimes congealing into more or less ephemeral forms that can nevertheless dissolve or re-form without breach of continuity (153). In such a fluid space dynamic relations (e.g. between sun and iceberg, or iceberg and ship) occur, as a result of which the actors—as I want to call all entities in the text with a nod to Latour—interact, e.g. by feeling, moving, melting, or sinking. Their relating and interacting is potentially endless and open in all directions. Any form that any actor assumes at any point in the process is temporary. Consequently, neither the iceberg's initial form as a gigantic mass of frozen water nor its fluid form at the end of the poem are permanent. Even if it is "washed to nothing" as the poem states, with "the wave," "the grave," and the "crumbling ice" all being identical in their chemical essence, the iceberg is in fact not gone. Once it is dissolved, it will eventually

assume other forms as vapor, rain, or again ice. Despite the suggestion of finality and stasis at the poem's end, mobility and fluidity prevail.

The larger discourse of Arctic exploration entangled with the diegesis of "The Story of the Iceberg" is similarly fluid. As sociologist Michel de Certeau explains in "Writing the Sea," the conspicuous fluidity of Jules Verne's writings, for instance, results from a process of constant cross-insemination between science and fiction. From there "earlier texts relating yet earlier voyages" emerge, some of which are "now appearing in the form of documents that are traversed, now appearing in the form of lands and seas that are navigated" (139-40). "The Story of the Iceberg" relates to "fictions inscribed upon fictions of travel" such as "The Moonstone Mass," which is itself a spin-off from the accumulated histories of early travelers and Arctic explorers. Consequently, both of Spofford's Arctic travel texts are products of "library navigation" (138), and themselves productive of a fluid discursive environment. They emerge from "a path of flow," as Tim Ingold calls it with recourse to Mol and Law (153), and constitute such "a path of flow," connecting and influencing other texts and discourses.

Published in the heyday of Arctic exploration in the United States, a period that extends "from 1850 to 1910" (Robinson 2), "The Moonstone Mass" takes its thematic cue from historical expeditions by Martin Frobisher (1576-78), James Cook, (1776), James Clark Ross (1800-1862), who was the first to reach the North Magnetic Pole in 1831, or Robert McClure (1807-1873) who is lauded as the first to partly traverse the Northwest Passage in 1851 and was saved after a journey over the ice by sledge.² Spofford borrows this feature when she sends her protagonist across the ice to find an escape route. While the author draws inspiration from actual expeditions, she also culls from Romantic tales that typically replay escapist fantasies and panoramic visions in heroic quest narratives that are set in vast, expansive layouts. "The Moonstone Mass" echoes Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), Jules Verne's *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1864)—whose eponymous hero resembles John Franklin, the leading figure of "the heroic age of Arctic exploration," which made the Northwest Passage "the Holy Grail of exploration" (Craciun 1-2)—and, as is obvious from the title, it also owes to Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* whose publication in 1868 preceded it by three months.

Like Spofford's Arctic poem, "The Moonstone Mass" relays a plot in which the protagonist's journey culminates in transformation. While "The Story of the Iceberg" takes note of the cost and loss that result from dynamic change, "The Moonstone Mass" explores its productive, profitable faculties. Fittingly, the autodiegetic narrator is the heir to a wealthy New England merchant family who, displaying some versatility in professional identity, embraces the role of the romancer to tell the lore of his adventure in the Arctic sea. In an extended monologue he narrates the following story: driven less by his "adventurous streak" than his irrational "fear of dying in poverty," he left his fiancée Eleanor, along with the comforts of his "old family estate" (90), to join an Arctic expedition in the hope to claim the reward promised by his uncle for the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Yet, after the first winter aboard the "Albatross" (92), his objective changed and he fully invested in the exploration: "curiosity and research absorbed every other faculty," he relays, to the point even that "Uncle Paul's donation ... was nothing to me. I had but one thought, one ambition, one desire in those days—the discovery of the clear seas and open passage" (93). When the ship gets "wedged in the ice" (95), he is ordered to "take a sledge with Glipnu and his

dogs, and see if there were any path to the westward" (95). However, the wind and the current carry the ice on which the search party travels to the North. Shortly after, all but one dog and the protagonist drown in the tumultuous sea. Latched on to a careening iceshelf, he is driven further off course way beyond the magnetic north pole where he discovers a mass of moonstone in a cavern of ice, but is carried away by the current before he gets a chance to snatch the gem. Later—and the time progression he reports is not really consistent with other facts he mentions such as the amount of supplies he still carries—whalers find him unconscious, afloat on an iceshelf in the North Pacific Sea. They hand him over to the crew of an armed Russian ship to take him home. Upon his return, he marries his fiancée and fashions an Arctic adventure tale in which he claims to have been traversing the Northwest Passage. Because his uncle does not believe his account, the narrator forfeits the prize money, which leaves him with Eleanor as "the treasure that I have" (101).

From the outset, the narrative operation in "The Moonstone Mass" features fluidity. For one the narrator's rhetorical procedure wavers between befuddling ornamental opulence and informative directness. As a "symbolic romance," Bendixen states, "The Moonstone Mass" is characterized by a "love of poetic language, of richly sensuous description, of striking phrases and extravagant images" (xi). When the narrating I, for example, exposes the narrated I's proclivity for financial "inconsistencies"—one of the "undesireable traits" he inherited from his forebears along with "a goodly share of pelf stored in stocks, and lands, and copper-bottomed clippers" (90), that came with other "gold and silver heir-looms" (91)—the euphemism "inconsistencies" is elaborated with so much verbal finesse it almost washes over the narrator's admission to having been "a niggard" (90).³ For only a brief moment, and likely to be missed by the inattentive reader, the admission intercepts his otherwise convoluted rhetoric and exposes his younger self's proclivity to retain his "amassed wealth" instead of spending it on a prospective wife and child (91).

Clippers, a contemporary reader of the story would know, had been produced by American shipbuilders since the 1840s specifically for the trade of tea between China and New York: "The maritime culmination of a Yankee obsession with speed, they were the fastest, most beautiful wooden sailing vessels the world had ever seen—long and lean, with sharp bows, raked masts and a great cumulus of sail" (Whipple 6). Furthermore, the use of copper on the hulls of merchant vessels was uncommon, which indicates to the reader the enormous wealth of the narrator's sea-trading family. Like many merchants on the East coast the narrator's family probably made its fortune with the Gold Rush of 1848, having realized "that there was a great deal of money to be made by shipping freight as well as people to California" (49). Clearly, the inconsistent personality of Spofford's narrator is confirmed precisely as the narrating I indulges in a rhetorical excess of verbose self-characterization. The procedure oscillates between obscurity and sudden revelations which occur "like a lance of piercing light shot up at the zenith" from an iceberg (97), alerting the reader that not all meaning is obvious at all times in this story and that the most substantial part floats underneath the surface.

Like in many other stories by Spofford, a gem serves as a metaphor for the narrator's "idiosyncratic voice and rhetorical procedure" in "The Moonstone Mass" (Beam 132).⁴ The eponymous moonstone which is also known as the "Traveler's stone" for the protection it affords ("Moonstone Meanings" n.p.), fits the narrator who is an unlikely survivor, protected, it seems, by mysterious forces. According to his own words, the

discovery of a mass of moonstone, which allegedly "holds the power of mystery" ("Moonstone Meanings" n.p.), revitalizes him in the liminal moment when he is about to die in the Arctic's dire straits. Propelled by greed, a powerful trait running in his family, he is able to tap into his physical and mental resources and finds both the strength that is needed to survive and his voice as a storyteller: "I should have a jewel in that mass of moonstone the size of which the world never saw," he says and decides right away: "I must have this thing" (99).

The voice by way of which he is able to talk of his near-death experience in the Arctic—which typically "had come to represent the limit of both empire and human experience" in romantic American sea fiction and exploration narratives (Hill 3)—is as massive and abundant as the mass of moonstone whose sight, he claims, has saved his life. The rhetorical procedure mimicks the gemstone's adularescence, an optical phenomenon in which light is scattered in many directions and which gives the moonstone its idiosyncratic "glowing appearance" (Gia n.p.), as it billows across the surface of the gem. I will continue to elaborate in the following how and to which effect both the narrative process and the plot of "The Moonstone Mass" reflect the symbolic fluidity of the adularescent moonstone whose "most captivating aspect" is "its appearance of motion" as the misty light seems to roll across the gem's surface as you change the viewing angle" (Gia n.p.).

"The Moonstone Mass" announces the streamlining of storytelling into creative capital under the influence of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.⁵ Both the narrator's voice and rhetorical procedure function as harbingers of the age of Realism, in which yarn will be spun on a spinning jenny to make revenue from the commodity product. On the level of plot "The Moonstone Mass" portrays "the evolution of the 'short story,'" which, to phrase it with Walter Benjamin, will have "removed itself from oral tradition" (93), as a tumultuous process that upsets the conventional order of things, a dangerous journey that upends time and space. On the level of discourse the transition is elaborated in terms of a contradictory simultaneity of the narrator's claim on orality on the one hand and the written text's stylized literariness on the other.

On the one hand, the tale is fashioned as the oral report of the sole survivor of an exploration trip. As a "seaman," the narrator thus aligns with a "tribe of storytellers," whom Benjamin deems "archaic representatives" of an "art" that was "coming to an end" (84-85). Even in written form, Benjamin states in "The Storyteller" of 1936, it lets the reader feel he/she shared "the company of the storyteller" as if he/she was "listening to a story" (100, emphasis mine). In "The Moonstone Mass," the narrator intimates such communality and invites indulgence in his storytelling by way of the confessional tone with which he relates the story to the reader. He forges an immediate bond, likely to make a deal with his audience, in which the latter are to accept the story's fair degree of inconsistency in exchange for relishing its amplitude.

On the other hand, the written version of his report entitled "The Moonstone Mass" foregrounds its literary quality, which I suggest connects with the narrator's outright self-identification as merchant. Watering down his identity as a storyteller in Benjamin's sense, "The Moonstone Mass" drafts instead the modern storyteller as a dealer of written marvels who profits from textual production in an economic sense. In Spofford's text, such profit takes the form of the moonstone. While the massive gem remains out of reach for the autodiegetic narrator, who still adheres to the stylistic conventions of the romance, he nevertheless *realizes* "the pure essence of the thing"

(Benjamin 100). While aiming at such "essence" is anathema to the storyteller in Benjamin's sense, it is paramount to an up-coming generation of narrators, writers of novels and short stories.

When Spofford lets her narrator take to the pen—assuming that the implied author is identical with the storyteller—in a gesture that is typical for actual naval explorers who made it home, "The Moonstone Mass" explicates fictionally what Craciun calls the "seismic shift in the relationship of exploration to publication located at the turn of the nineteenth century" (6). Because nineteenth-century Arctic explorers were commonly also "published authors of books" (8), Craciun contends, "the modern figure of the explorer" became "conspicuous across cultural spheres" (7). Stories that celebrated their accomplishments transcended geographical borders and made their authors famous across the Atlantic, where readers were hardly bothered by the fact that "much of heroic imagining rests upon falsehood and part truths, a web of idealized narratives and romanticisms" (Huw n.p./position 373).

Yet, Spofford's fictional explorer is granted no such generous, gullible audience neither intra- nor extradiegetically. Unlike his historical models, he fails to achieve the status of maritime hero. No one believes his claim to have traveled the famed Northwest Passage. The whalers who rescue him in the Pacific, he states, "would never believe a word of my story" (101). Instead, "they considered me a mere idle maniac" (101). The officers aboard the "Russian man-of-war," he continues, "afforded me more polite but quite as decided skepticism" (101). Of his immediate family his Uncle Paul outright mocks him and his wife Eleanor who allegedly "never doubted a word of my narration," is, in fact, not "willing to hear another word about it" (101). Clearly, his story fails as testimony of the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Yet, while it deems the narrator unreliable and thus situates him on the storyteller end of the narratological spectrum, it nevertheless evidences his entrepreneurial instincts. His tale is as much the written testimony of the great discovery that narrating *can* be a business, that the mass of moonstone exists, as of the desire to make it one. All he needs to do is sit and wait for the trailblazing news to sink in, while all he *can* do is sit and wait for a more effectual narrator to accomplish the task.

Consequently, addressing the reader directly at the end of his extended monologue, he relinquishes control over his story: "You can take it for what it is worth" (101). Having put the word out to the public and fixed the message in print is what matters: "if I had not told the thing to you it might come to pass that I should forget altogether the existence of my mass of moonstone" (101). To himself the enormity of his discovery is indisputable, and his determination to see it come to fruition solid as a rock as his final declamation attests: "—it was a mass of moonstone! With these eyes I saw it, with these hands I touched it, with this heart I longed for it, with this will I mean to have it yet!" (101). As he vows to bring the massive market potential of stories to fruition, the nameless narrator of "The Moonstone Mass" represents the generic American writer invested in making her craft a lucrative business in the future.

2. Literary Alchemy

Diffacted by the iceberg's sparkle in Spofford's poem, I have argued so far, "The Moonstone Mass" appears as a text *about* fluidity whose narrative charge is simultaneously oral and literary. As a story about transformation it can be conceptually

framed by Latour's actor-network theory (ANT). In this context the protagonist's shifting priorities from prize-winning to exploring are not just another symptom of his inconsistent personality, but symptomatic of the performative, processual dynamism of the actor-network in which he exists roughly one year into the exploration trip. At this point in the narrative the actor-network consists of him, the sea, ship, crew members, homosociality, etc. Granted activity by the others, each of these actors temporarily assumes a specific character ("Clarifications" 373). Later the strong Arctic currents, the floating iceshelf, and most importantly the glowing moonstone are similarly employed as actors to produce his transformation from haplessly passive protagonist to productive narrator.

While it lends itself to an ANT reading today, "The Moonstone Mass" certainly uses conceptual registers and vocabulary that were popular with readers at the time of the text's publication. The narrative echoes a fascination with alchemy that is typical of other American Romantic writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Like Fuller who, according to literary scholar Jeffrey Steele, frequently "resort[s] to the language of alchemy ... to construct a heterodox vocabulary of spiritual change" (62), Spofford links the "image vision of emotional and spiritual rebirth to a quest for a precious gem, a glowing ruby or 'carbuncle'" (62). And like Fuller, whose womb-images are meant to evoke feminine aspects of spiritual transformation (63), Spofford sets her character's transformative experience in a "cavern" (99), in which he appears helplessly subjected to the forces of nature. This scene is succeeded by another that is rendered in stereotypically heroic terms: "now indeed I was battling with those elemental agencies in the dreadful fight I had desired—one man against the might of matter" (100). Significantly, the dramatic and highly dynamic episode in which the narrated I discovers the moonstone, and which clearly is the high point of Spofford's exploration narrative, is fluid also in its attribution of gendered descriptions.

The longer episode that describes the explorer's psychological transformation into storyteller is structured into four stages. Nineteenth-century readers of Fuller, Hawthorne, and Emerson would most likely have understood that they corresponded with the four phases of the chemical transformation described by alchemists as "Melanosis," "Leukosis," "Xanthosis," and "Iosis." Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung later decoded their symbolical meaning as stages in the process of individuation" (*Alchemie* 316). Jung, who "found that alchemy mirrored the complexities of the process of creation of the self" (*Encountering* 2), describes the initial alchemical stage as "Chaos" which unconditionally leads to death (*Alchemie* 318). In the corresponding scene in Spofford's text, the protagonist is already in a state of crisis as he becomes aware that the Arctic is a dynamic, fluid, chaotic environment: "the ice traveled, too; the whole field, carried by some northward-bearing current, was afloat" (96). From the experience of mobility follows the experience of the ice as actor working its dynamic force on the protagonist who responds with physiological chaos and emotional turmoil:

At this moment my blood seemed to sing and bubble in my veins; I grew giddy with a sort of delirious and inexplicable ecstasy; with another moment unutterable horror seized me; I was plunged and weighed down with a black and suffocating load, while evil things seemed to flap their wings in my face, to breathe in my mouth, to draw my soul out of my body and carry it careering through the frozen realm of that murky heaven, to restore it with a shock of agony. (96-97)

The episode effects the protagonist's disintegration, a cataclysmic collapse, the dissolution of the narrator's former self who concedes: "I was no longer myself" (96).

Of the second stage, "Leukosis," also referred to as "sublimatio" (Edinger 120), "alchemical texts speak of the soul now becoming conscious of itself by becoming aware of its own light nature—the reflected light, symbolised by the moon" (Hamilton n.p.). Spofford renders this stage as a luminous spectacle. Transfixed by the "magnetic quality" of the iceblock on which the narrated I floats and with which he effectively merges, he observes how "a lance of piercing light shot up the zenith" eventually "dissolving in a thousand colors that spread every where over the low field, flashing, flickering, creeping, reflecting, gathering again in one long serpentine line of glory" (97). As sensually excessive as the experience is (it is lethal for the dogs that accompany him), the protagonist now seems to have an inkling of "the light that is pure, creative intelligence" (Hamilton n.p.) in him. Aware of this light, the narrated I is alchemically whitened and purified.

The third stage, "Xanthosis," which is only intermediary according to Jung (318), is exemplified by Spofford in such a way that her protagonist tries to gain more control over the situation perforce of reason. He brings to mind vernacular knowledge about the "magnetic quality" of the ice "which," he says, "held me so that I changed my position upon it with difficulty" (97). He frantically tries to explain what is happening to him. But his attempt to come up with a scientific explanation for the phenomena he experiences (likely the effects of a geomagnetic storm) fails as does his "watch" which "had long since ceased to beat" and "his pocket-compass" which "had become entirely useless" (97).⁶ The scene exemplifies that "inner knowing is not arrived at by study, reflection, or deep thought; it is to be experienced as a direct revelation" (Hamilton n.p.). The revelation is about to happen in the next stage, "Iosis," the fourth and final stage of the alchemical transformation process.

Pinned down to the iceblock on which he cowers while being swirled around in circles, the protagonist makes the central, astonishing discovery: a mass of moonstone sitting on top of "a bare jag of rocks rising in the center of this solid whirlpool, and carrying on its summit something which held a light" (98). Shaking off the fright of his earlier nightmarish hallucinations, of what he perceived were "two great eyes like glowing coals" (97), "the stare of those dead and icy eyes" (98), "a figure" (98), he experiences a "direct revelation" (Hamilton n.p.): "It was no figure at all," "nothing deceptive" but "a thing so real, so genuine, my breath became suspended; my heart ceased to beat; my brain, that had been a lump of ice, seemed to move in its skull" (98). With his head cleared the protagonist realizes that what he had witnessed earlier was not a phantasmagoria, hellish fantasy, no supernatural experience, no mystery but the optical phenomenon of adularescence, the schiller of a mass of moonstone:

There it rested, limpid with its milky pearl, casting out flakes of flame and azure, of red and leafgreen light, and holding yet a sparkle of silver in the reflections and refractions of its inner axis—the splendid Turk's-eye of the lapidaries, the cousin of the water-opal and the girasole, the precious essence of the feldspar. Could I break it, I would find clusters of great hemitrope crystals. (99)

In terms of the alchemical symbolism that is employed in the story, the schiller represents the sparkling of the protagonist's pure spirit. Exhilarated by finding "this treasure of a kingdom" (99) in the Arctic cavern, his survival instincts kick in, and he is certain about his future: "I would return! I would take this treasure with me! I would not be defrauded!" (99). The alchemic "transmutation of pain into insight" (99) is

completed. The protagonist does indeed survive his Arctic adventure trip and returns to New England as a new man, clear-sighted and awakened to the full capacities of storytelling as a business, even though he fails to get hold of the moonstone.

The climactic scene closes with the currents getting ever stronger and carrying him away from the moonstone through a passageway to the Northwest: "Slowly it receded—slowly, and less slowly" (99). His spiralling first around a magnetic rock and then away from the moonstone mass in a vortex of whirling water, reminds us of *rupes nigra* (the black rock), one of several myths that Spofford manufactures into "The Moonstone Mass."⁷ The *rupes nigra*, mentioned in "Gerardus Mercator's map of the northern polar regions, published posthumously in 1595," is "a mountain as tall as the clouds, surrounded by an enormous ocean whirlpool" located at the Magnetic North Pole or at the North Pole itself (Tallack n.p.). In a 1577 letter Mercator describes the magnetic stone as follows:

In the midst of the four countries is a Whirl-pool, into which there empty these four indrawing Seas which divide the North. And the water rushes round and descends into the Earth just as if one were pouring it through a filter funnel. It is four degrees wide on every side of the Pole, that is to say eight degrees altogether. Except that right under the Pole there lies a bare Rock in the midst of the Sea. Its circumference is almost 33 French miles, and it is all of magnetic Stone. (Mercator qtd. in Taylor 57)

More significantly, though, the whirls by which Spofford crafts her protagonist's experience of the moonstone's schiller as terrifying, surreal and brimming with psychedelic imagery strongly resemble the opium-induced imagery of Collins's *The Moonstone*, one of the intertexts of the story:

Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me through a series of frightful dreams. At one time, I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness, and glared and grinned at me. (Collins 397)

The scene quoted above in which Ezra Jennings describes "his terrible opium dreams" in *The Moonstone* "derived from Collins's own experiences" (Kemp x). Spofford references Collins's "novel about an experiment with opium written under the influence of opium" (x) already in the title of her story, but the question is: to which effect? How is the ending of the transformation scene in "The Moonstone Mass" to be interpreted? As conclusive to the drug-induced reverie of an insane narrator who barely made it home from a failed exploration trip? Or as indicative of an incomplete transformation which would therefore make "The Moonstone Mass" a story about failure? I argue much to the contrary.

As the reintegration of new consciousness is a process that is never fully completed, the prizeless gem cannot be seized, just as historically the alchemical process never fully reached its intended goal (Jung, *Alchemie* 316). Despite failing to materially take hold of the moonstone the protagonist as a narrator remains, paradoxically enough, both enlightened by its schiller and drawn to its magnetic pull. Being the alpha and omega of his new life, the moonstone is both the source of his enthralling, captivating, schillering voice and the lucrative target of a new narrative genre and convention. Consequently, the voice of the individuated narrator assumes a literary quality that corresponds with the moonstone's schiller. It is as simultaneously solid and evanescent as his narrative is inconsistent yet cogent. To phrase it in Latour's terms, the moonstone's schiller functions as an actor that gives the protagonist the character of

the storyteller who himself reciprocates as actor by affording value to the mass of moonstone.

Pitching scientific facts against mystery and occultism in his account, the narrator wavers between competing epistemologies. He promotes a realistic perspective, takes a hardcash view on the matter at hand, yet in an old-fashioned mode of speech. As a natural resource waiting to be mined, the moonstone mass is symbolic of the massive exploits that are to be made from storytelling—when the time comes and people realize that a “jewel that could not be prized” has been discovered (99). The narrator is clearly better attuned than his old-fashioned uncle to recognizing the potential gains that are to be made. In the future—that much is indicated by the narrator’s generational dispute with “old Paul”—storytelling will develop into a profitable business, a new frontier so to speak. While he has no material proof to attest the existence of the moonstone, the veracity of his account, and the solidity of his business instinct, the narrator relies on the passing of time, on progress really, to work in his favor. In the meantime he records his memories as “The Moonstone Mass” and patiently, stubbornly awaits future recognition. Convinced of his groundbreaking discovery, the narrator even likens himself to Galileo Galilei: “My mass of moonshine, old Paul calls it. I let him have his say; he can not have that nor any thing else much longer; but when all is done I recall Galileo and I mutter to myself, ‘*Per si muove—it was a mass of moonstone!*’” (101).

Considering himself a new Galileo may be prophetic or megalomaniac of the narrator. Either way, his discovery certifies a new paradigm: “I was to learn,” the narrator states, “that death and stillness have no kingdom on this globe, and that even in the extremest bitterness of cold and ice perpetual interchange and motion is taking place” (92). Initially, he believed that the Arctic was static. Under the roving eye of the inexperienced Arctic traveler “extended the sheets of unbroken ice; sometimes a huge glacier hung pendulous from the precipice; once we saw, by the starlight, a white, foaming, rushing river arrested and transformed to ice in its flight down that steep” (95). In this scene, the icy fluids momentarily appear arrested as they are aestheticized into a landscape image by the narrator’s gaze, before they break up and rearrange themselves in resumed motion. Of the rescue party, Glipnu, two of his dogs, “and the sledge went under,” the narrator tells us. He is now deserted in “the living terrors of this icy hell” (96). Championing an understanding of “the Arctic as a dynamic space, not an empty landscape or flat surface awaiting the entrance of history’s actors” (Craciun 12), Spofford lets the protagonist engage in dynamic relations. At the end of his exploration, the protagonist is molded and changed by the ice, the cold, the ship, the crew, Glipnu, the dogs, the moonstone, and every other actor in the network in which he is entangled. At the end of the story which, corresponding with “The Story of the Iceberg,” does not state the end of transformation, the protagonist is another man with an unremitting belief in his knack for storytelling. In a narrative procedure that masterfully employs gothic elements to build and release tension, to create the impression of utmost danger and terror and mystery, the narrator’s idiosyncratic voice and narrating describe the exploration voyage as a symbolical journey, as the narrated I’s rite of passage that facilitates his re-birth as a narrator.

Evoking at times an arctic sublime typical of much nineteenth-century literature and art, “The Moonstone Mass” coheres to the conventions of the time which often imbued the ice with metaphoric, spiritual meaning. “Ice and icescapes,” Adriana Craciun states in *Writing Arctic Disaster*, “not only disoriented and intrigued mariners, they dazzled writers, painters, and spectators. Their curious atmospheric, optical, and acoustic

effects inspired generations to imagine new natures" (9). Accordingly, Spofford's narrator recalls that "the air seemed full of a new power, a strange and invisible influence, as if a king of unknown terrors here held his awful state" (96). From this fluid environment emerges the narrating I whose retrospective self-narration allows him to assure himself, his family, and his readers that not all was lost in the failed endeavor to find the Northwest Passage. Using meiosis to fashion himself as an anti-hero, he wrests personal, psychological profit from the tale about his metamorphosis from "hard-cash descendant to romancer" (101).⁸ At the very least his story allows him to save face.

Yet, the narrator's experience in the Arctic further effects his emancipation both as a man and a businessman, which closes the narrative cycle. From the outset, capitalism appears as a chief actor in the story, propelling the plot and the main character into action in the person of "old Uncle Paul" (91). He is "intensely interested" in the subject of the Northwest passage "both scientifically [*sic*] and from a commercial point of view" (91), as he seeks to expand his trade business and reduce the time and cost of transportation. While the narrated I is frank about the appeal that money has for him, he is initially less daring than his uncle. Yet, once he is lured into the great wide open, he realizes storytelling could be turned into an entrepreneurial exploit, a moonstone mass he means to "break" and "to obtain" (99), not as material trophy token but a new business idea. This makes the narrating I the harbinger of a new generation and it is only a matter of time until the age of "old Uncle Paul" will be over (91).

3. Everywhere Icebergs Intervene

The *mass* of moonstone points to storytelling as a marketable commodity (a *mass* market product) as Spofford, trimming down the expanse of the Romantic adventure novel, channels the Arctic exploration narrative into the generic pathways of the short story. Given that Spofford herself had been churning out stories to support her family and herself for decades (Murillo n.p.), the author would certainly be the first to hope that the genre which was popular with American writers, publishers, and readers precisely for its benefits as quickly and easily commodifiable literary product, would generate great gains. Still, like her protagonist, Spofford wavered and struggled. The author "had difficulty joining the realistic movement" (Murillo n.p.), trying to find and navigate a passageway transitioning from Romanticism to Realism. This effected a series of generic spills in her *oeuvre*. In her analysis of Spofford's gothic tale "Her Story" literary scholar Rita Bode concedes that "the romantic and realistic exist simultaneously in the same story baffling the rigid categories for critical assessments" (143). Bode echoes Spofford's biographer Elizabeth K. Halbeisen who writes that "the struggle between the romanticists and the realists being fought on a battle ground of the seventies and eighties, and Harriet Prescott Spofford having already given evidence of the pull in both directions, her stories bear excellent witness to the war" (124). "The Moonstone Mass," Halbeisen continues, is "a romantic adventure into unknown land made real by verisimilitude of detail" (127). While it "owes a debt to Poe's tales of symbolic journeys and some of the masterpieces of British romantic poetry" (Bendixen xxix), the text caters to the readers' increasing appetite for realistic stories as it embraces capitalism as a literary subject, literally promoting the commodification of storytelling as ingenious idea, "a thing so real" (Spofford, "The Moonstone Mass" 98).

Yet, Spofford's elaborating fluidity as a topic and compositional feature in her Arctic texts has not only biographical reasons. Aesthetically it attests to the transformation of American society after the Civil War, to the cultural and economic changes that were about to reshape American life and to the instabilities that these changes effected in terms of gender and class identities and relations, in short to a newly reassembling actor-network that allowed for new practices and identities. As the old order gets upset, a sense of the world going topsy-turvy plays out in terms of a conceptualization of dynamism not just in the symbolic episode that forms the climax of the text, but also in terms of the narrator's change in marital status and profession, his wavering between Romanticism and Realism. As we know today, Spofford's story turned out to be prophetic and the narrator's vision became reality before long. A few decades later, during the Gilded Age, storytelling was established as a "recognized trade," which prompted William Dean Howells to voice his indignation in "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business." In this 1902 essay, the great American realist criticizes the business that was made of "the sort of fiction which corresponds in literature to the circus and the variety theatre" (qtd. in Trachtenberg 194). Expanding on Howells' contempt for popular literature, cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg explains that it was, in fact, "story-paper fiction" that "represented one of the most ephemeral commodities of the era [...] hundreds of authors working anonymously in factory-like quarters in New York" (197). There, a writer of dime novels and other formulaic literary mass products "turns into a veritable machine," Edward Bok of the *Ladies' Home Journal* complained in 1892 (qtd. in Trachtenberg 197).

To conclude, in "The Moonstone Mass," which in the typical fashion of the short story is open-ended, all sorts of matters are unstable and in motion like in Spofford's poem "The Story of the Iceberg." Dynamism is foregrounded both on the level of form and style as well as content. By assembling tropes of both Romantic and Realistic writing, the short story actively forges dynamic relations between literary styles and eras. In terms of plot, dynamic relations are at work between man and himself, between the generations, genders, human and non-human actors as well as between material matter and text. Despite the fact that the ice is not yet personified as it will be in the later poem, "The Moonstone Mass"—and here I play on Latour's phrase in *The Pasteurization of France*—assumes and activates relations, for everywhere icebergs intervene (35).⁹ In "The Moonstone Mass" icebergs act and uncannily so. Compelled by invisible currents, the ice flows, careens, breaks, and reconfigures. The ice, like all other actors in the text, is in constant motion, assumes ever-surprising new forms, and is inseparable from the characters in the text, to whom it continually relates in complicated, interactive ways.

The Arctic in Spofford's writings is not conceptualized as a natural environment that is separate from humans who use it as a frozen, mute and static setting on which to act and enact the plot. Rather, it is an actor that factors in. Both in "The Story of an Iceberg" and "The Moonstone Mass," icebergs are enmeshed in a network of connections with objects, people, animals, from which the narrative poem and autofictional story emerge as effects of collective activity. Contesting the image of stasis connoted by the idea of a ship locked in ice, the narrator of "The Moonstone Mass" comes to appreciate that the polar region is instead defined by constant movement, which not only saves his life, but also generates his storytelling. And he is right to assume that as time progresses major changes are about to happen to writers, texts and discourses in post Civil War industrial America.

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NOTES

1. Unlike Spofford's better-known stories, "Circumstance" (1860) and "The Amber Gods" (1863), "The Moonstone Mass" has not often been anthologized; nor has it received much scholarly attention. Alfred Bendixen was first to include it in his 1989 collection of stories by Spofford. Next Jessica Amanda Salmonson reprinted it in *The Moonstone Mass, and Others* (2000). More recently "The Moonstone Mass" appeared in Peter Straub's thematic *American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps* (2009), and Mike Ashley's *The Dreaming Sex: Early Tales of Scientific Imagination by Women* (2011) (see Murillo for a comprehensive survey).
2. The Northwest Passage (earlier known as the Strait of Anian) connects the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean. According to Adriana Craciun it "appears on maps only after 1530 (inspired by John Cabot's 1508 voyage)" (14). Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen first successfully completed it in 1904 several decades after Spofford's protagonist claims discovery.
3. Spofford's use of the term "copper-bottomed," which also means reliable, as innuendo on the narrator's self-declared inconsistent character and mode of storytelling, is, of course, tongue-in-cheek.
4. In *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*, Dorri Beam highlights the importance of voice in Spofford's writings as "it moves, accrues, and takes substance to form some new entity" (132). In "Circumstance," the woman protagonist succeeds in keeping at bay a ferocious panther in a New England forest by singing to him for hours on end. Over the course of the long, frightening night in which she must—much like Scheherazade—keep the beast enthralled, or die, the protagonist's voice "has taken form and substance in music" (131). Ultimately, it is "the embodiment of a new self released by her break with social structures and her intimacy with the wilderness" (131). Investigating Spofford's employment of voice in "The Amber Gods," Beam ties in with Lisa Logan who argues that the short story "critiques the imperialist agenda of romanticism" (qtd. in Beam 139). According to Beam "The Amber Gods" "performs its resistance through voice and style" (139). The author engages an extended conceit to relay the narrator protagonist's rhetorical procedure who tells the story after she died—from her grave: "When she breaks the frame to include us, when she talks forever, when she describes her beauty in bewildering and hyperbolic terms, Yone's voice enacts the threats of highly wrought style. Like amber, her voice flows out of its containers, it captures us in its liquid embrace" (153). Breaking "the frame of conventional narrative by allowing the dead to speak" in "The Amber Gods," Spofford allegedly inspired Emily "Dickinson's experiments with 'dead' poetic voice" (140).

5. Other poems in the collection *In Titian's Garden* similarly connect the theme of transformation with the logic of productivity and profit. "The Making of the Pearl," for example, which immediately follows "The Story of the Iceberg," tells the story of a "little creature" (61), some shelled mollusk, whose carefree existence in tropical waters is made miserable when an irritating grain of sand gets trapped in its folds. In the attempt to alleviate the pain, we learn, the oyster eventually manages to metamorphosize the invasive element into a pearl that is harvested shortly after. Despite the fact that he gets "snatched [...] into death and doom," the mollusk's hard existence and heedless death are redeemed by the pearl's splendor: "On some queen's breast it heaves, it falls" (64), the speaker states. Since it contains the world in a grain of sand, "Sunshine and sea and moon are there, / The sorrow of a lifetime, too!" (64), the pearl's aesthetic surplus value trumps that of the mollusk's bare existence which gets exploited as a breeding ground. In "The Violin," too, the reader gets attuned to the feelings of a natural resource, a tree in this case, who as autodiegetic narrator relays his transformation into musical instrument. Like with the mollusk, the violence to which the tree gets subjected as raw material is traded off with his cultural value after he has been cut and crafted into an instrument: "I had never sung had I not died!" the violin/former tree states as speaker (16). Yet in the hands of a skillful musician, he rejoices in ecstasy: "I was singing—I who once was mute!" Having lamented his inability to speak throughout the first half of the poem, the violin is jubilant not only because he considers music an aesthetic uplift but because his being put to use as a means of musical production affords him a way of self-expression via cooperation. In contrast, "The Story of the Iceberg" refrains from any such sublimation, which also sets it apart from "The Moonstone Mass," where the narrator's failure as explorer is redeemed by his successful fashioning of a story that elevates his pains to the higher level of cultural work.

6. The solar storm of 1859 was widely covered in American newspapers at the time (for a list see <http://www.solarstorms.org/SS1859.html>). Chances are that Spofford found in some of these the inspiration to describe the auroral and magnetic phenomena in "The Moonstone Mass."

7. The narrator reiterates the Gulf Stream theory about "currents of water heated in the tropics and carried by the rotary motion of the planet to the Pole" (94), and "the existence of an immense space of clear water" (93). Here "The Moonstone Mass" quotes August Petermann's renegade idea of a navigable sea ("eisfreies und schiffbares Meer") which the German mapmaker had announced at the first German Geographer's Convention in Gotha in 1865 (7). He promoted it much in opposition to the widespread notion that the Arctic was covered by perennial ice and believed in "a green central Greenland fuelled by observations of floating timber in the waters near the big island" (Sverker 329).

8. Changes of profession, another instance of fluidity, abound in Spofford's work. In her detective story "Mr. Furbush" (1865), the protagonist is also surprisingly flexible in terms of occupation. The eponymous character resigns, "sickened of the business" as a detective, to open "one of the largest and most elegant photographing establishments in the city" (6). Going from police-employed detective to self-employed shop-owner, Furbush's professional trajectory continues in the sequel "In the Maguerriwock" (1868). Here Furbush resigns from his resignation to work more profitably as a self-employed private detective with "a case" that, "a client" assures him, "will really be worth [his] while" (97). Like "The Moonstone Mass," which tells the story of a

businessman turning explorer turning romancer, Spofford's detective stories explore the dynamism of the new capitalist system, concluding that it offers not only possibilities of individual transformation, professional change and promotion, and hence greater permeability between the social classes, but that it also demands a recalibration of social standards and relations which are rendered as inherently unstable.

9. "There are not only 'social' relations, relations between man and man. Society is not made up just of men, for everywhere microbes intervene and act" (Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* 35).

ABSTRACTS

The essay examines Harriet Prescott Spofford's short story "The Moonstone Mass" (1868) through the lens of fluidity foregrounded by her Arctic poem "The Story of the Iceberg" (1897). Rendering a network of actors (human and other), who are connected and continuously influence one another, "The Moonstone Mass" demands an analysis that acknowledges relationality as facilitating the protagonist's discovery of the Northwest Passage alongside other metaphorical pathways, which the geographical trope symbolizes in the text. I argue that "The Moonstone Mass" fictionally renders an (imaginary) geographical journey to describe the complexities and challenges of personal, generational and societal transfers from the culturally conspicuous perspective of the nineteenth-century American storyteller transitioning from the era of Romanticism to Realism.

INDEX

Keywords: Harriet Prescott Spofford, Arctic, iceberg, moonstone, fluidity, Bruno Latour, actor-network theory, storytelling, Romanticism to Realism, poem, short story

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