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VERBAL AND VISUAL ART OF THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE IN THE DISCOURSE OF POPULAR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*The interconnectedness of different art forms became especially vivid during the American Renaissance of the nineteenth century – a time of dynamic interaction between literature, painting, and democratic culture. Writers and painters drew inspiration from shared ideals of freedom, equality, and active civic participation, creating works that reflected the aspirations, contradictions, and spiritual quests of a young American nation. Walt Whitman, celebrating the democratic spirit in *Leaves of Grass*, invited readers to feel a profound unity with their fellow citizens and with nature. Herman Melville, in his deeply philosophical narratives, explored moral dilemmas, freedom of choice, and the limits of human experience. Their literary visions resonated with the canvases of Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School, who immortalized the grandeur of American landscapes as symbols of the nation's spiritual strength. John Quidor, known for his historical and literary scenes, combined humor, drama, and national myths to create visual images that amplified the power of verbal storytelling. This close interaction between verbal and visual art contributed to shaping national consciousness by offering citizens shared symbols and narratives. It demonstrated that literature and painting could not only mirror democratic ideals but also actively sustain public dialogue, deepening a collective sense of unity and America's evolving place in a changing world.*

Keywords: American Renaissance Democratic Culture Visual Arts Literature.

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ВЕРБАЛЬНЕ ТА ВІЗУАЛЬНЕ МИСТЕЦТВО АМЕРИКАНСЬКОГО РЕНЕСАНСУ В ДИСКУРСІ ПОПУЛЯРНОЇ ДЕМОКРАТИЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ ХІХ СТОЛІТТЯ

Взаємопов'язаність різних видів мистецтва особливо яскраво проявилася в епоху Американського Ренесансу ХІХ століття – часу динамічної взаємодії літератури, живопису та демократичної культури. Письменники й художники черпали натхнення зі спільних ідеалів свободи, рівності та активної громадянської участі, створюючи твори, що відображали прагнення, суперечності й духовні пошуки молодого американської нації. Волт Вітмен, оспівуючи демократичний дух у «Листях трави», закликав читачів відчувати єдність зі співвітчизниками та природою. Герман Мелвілл, у своїх глибоких філософських оповідях, досліджував моральні дилеми, свободу вибору та межі людського досвіду. Їхні літературні бачення перегукувалися з полотнами Томаса Коула, засновника школи річки Гудзон, який увіковічнив велич американських пейзажів як символ духовної сили нації. Джон Квідор, відомий історичними й літературними сценами, поєднував гумор, драму та національні міфи, створюючи візуальні образи, які посилювали вплив словесних історій. Ця тісна взаємодія вербального й візуального мистецтва сприяла формуванню національної свідомості, пропонуючи громадянам спільні символи та оповіді. Вона показала, що література та живопис можуть не лише віддзеркалювати демократичні ідеали, а й активно підтримувати суспільний діалог. Завдяки поєднанню слова й зображення Американський Ренесанс утвердив нове культурне бачення, яке допомогло нації осмислити власний шлях розвитку, поглибити відчуття єдності та визначити місце Америки у світі, відкритому до змін і нових можливостей.

Ключові слова: Американський Ренесанс, демократична культура, візуальні мистецтва, література.

Formulation of the problem in general terms and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. In academic studies devoted to the literature and visual arts of the United States of the nineteenth century, two closely related theoretical concepts have long coexisted, both characterizing the phenomenon of that era's dynamic cultural development. One is the literary "Renaissance," presented in the seminal study by Professor F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941). The other one is the "Renaissance" of national painting, sculpture, and architecture, described in Howard Mumford Jones's books *The Renaissance and American Origins* (1945) and *O Strange New World: American Culture, The Formative Years* (1964).

The creators of both "Renaissance" concepts sought to portray the works of nineteenth-century North American classics as part of a global humanistic project that extended far beyond their natural discursive environment. Emphasizing American orientation toward artistic and aesthetic models of the Old World's Renaissance-era, Matthiessen and Jones effectively denied any significant genetic connections between leading American masters and the traditions of the popular democratic culture of their time.

Of no small importance for theoretically substantiating such an idea, the concept of a "Renaissance" of visual arts in Professor Jones's works was focused on the history of American architecture from the 1840s to the 1890s. Journalists, critics, and art historians of that period often used the phrase "Italian Renaissance" when describing the characteristic external features of the best-known architectural forms of the era – forms that would later be generalized and presented in Jones's research under the title "Renaissance" of American visual art. It is important to note, however, that long before the advent of the so-called "Italian Renaissance" on the North American soil, the development of nineteenth-century democratic architecture, painting, and sculpture had witnessed multiple "revivals" or "renaissances" – each based on distinct forms and styles of Oriental and European art (Handlin, 1985, p. 54).

Thus, the “Italian Renaissance” remained only one of many stylistic directions willingly adapted by creators of the new democratic architecture.

The relevance of this topic lies in its ability to shed light on the interaction between literature and visual arts during the American Renaissance, a period that significantly shaped national identity and democratic values. Understanding this connection provides valuable insights for both literary and art studies, as well as for interdisciplinary approaches in cultural and historical research.

Analysis of recent research and publications shows that while this topic remains largely unexplored in Ukraine, there is a growing body of scholarly work on the interaction between literature and visual arts during the American Renaissance in the United States. Several scholars have significantly contributed to the study of the American Renaissance, particularly in examining the interplay between literature and visual arts. F.O. Matthiessen, in his seminal work *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), coined the term “American Renaissance” and analyzed the convergence of literary and artistic expression in nineteenth-century America. Similarly, the work of Howard Pyle, especially his illustrations and historical narratives, demonstrates the close relationship between visual storytelling and literary themes of the period. The paintings of John Quidor, such as *The Return of Rip Van Winkle*, exemplify the way folklore and literature were translated into visual art, reflecting the narrative richness of the era. More recent interdisciplinary approaches, such as David Summers’ *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003), emphasize the cultural and historical context in which visual and literary arts intersected. Additionally, Johanna Drucker’s studies, including *The Century of Artists’ Books* (1994), highlight the integration of textual and visual forms, offering insights into the ways artistic and literary expression can be mutually reinforcing. These studies collectively provide a foundation for understanding the dynamic interplay between verbal and visual forms during the American Renaissance and suggest directions for further research, especially in contexts where this interaction has been less studied, such as in Ukraine. Examining these studies provides a foundation for understanding existing approaches and highlights the need for similar interdisciplinary research in the Ukrainian academic context.

The purpose of this article is to examine the interplay between literature and visual arts during the American Renaissance of the nineteenth century. It aims to explore how writers and artists drew on shared democratic ideals to create works that reflected national identity, cultural values, and the human experience. Additionally, the article seeks to highlight the connections between verbal and visual storytelling, demonstrating how these forms of expression mutually reinforced each other. By analyzing both literary texts and visual artworks, the study intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic and cultural dynamics of the period. Finally, the article aims to identify gaps in existing research, particularly in Ukrainian scholarship, and to suggest directions for future interdisciplinary studies that integrate literature, visual arts, and cultural history.

Presentation of the main research material. For instance, at the beginning of the 1830s, American artists became enamored with the exotic attributes of ancient Egyptian culture. The architectural fashion of pharaohs, lotus flowers, and pyramidal edifices spread so widely that in 1834 the famous architect John Haviland received a large state commission to build the courthouse known as *The Hall of Justice* in New York (famously called “*The Tombs*” by local residents) in the “ancient Egyptian” style. Sensational “penny newspapers” went so far as to dub him “the most famous representative of our Egyptian Renaissance.” By the second half of the 1830s, American artists had become fascinated with the so-called “Greek Revival,” whose hallmarks are clearly evident in the façade design of the New York Customs House and the Astor Place Opera House, both of which took as their architectural prototypes the pagan temples of ancient Hellas.

A characteristic feature of nineteenth-century American architecture is the unhindered combination of stylistic features distanced from one another in both time and space. On a single street in a large American city, buildings in the “Egyptian,” “Gothic,” or “Greek Revival” styles could easily coexist side by side (Reynolds, 1995, p. 287). In “*The Song of the Exposition*” (1871), dedicated to American democratic art, Walt Whitman solemnly proclaimed:

“We build to ours to-day. / Mightier than Egypt’s tombs, / Fairer than Grecia’s, Roma’s temples...”

A few lines later, the poet again recalled the classical architecture of the Old World, which had gained an entirely new and distinctly American embodiment in the creative practice of his homeland’s leading artists:

“(This, this and these, America, shall be your pyramids and obelisks, / Your Alexandrian Pharos, gardens of Babylon, / Your temple at Olympia.)”

Such stylistic eclecticism, characteristic of the period’s democratic architecture, was also vividly manifested in the works of leading American painters. In 1840, at the request of the federal architect Ithiel Town (1784–1844), the painter Thomas Cole (1801–1848), founder of the famous Hudson River School of painting, created the work titled “*The Architect’s Dream*”. Contemporary critics of the time claimed that the canvas presented “*the aesthetic philosophy of national art in concentrated form.*”

In the foreground stands the central figure – a North American architect surrounded by all sorts of sketches and drawings of ancient architectural monuments. He contentedly contemplates the monumental structures he has built: nearby looms a grand Protestant cathedral in the style of America’s early 1840s Gothic Revival; beside it stands an ancient Greek temple and a majestic Roman palace; and behind the antique buildings rises a giant pyramid of the Egyptian pharaohs, apparently taller than any modern skyscraper.

Robert Mills, a celebrated contemporary of Cole’s, who earned professional acclaim as early as the 1840s and completed his best-known projects in the early 1880s, frequently drew his compatriots’ attention to what he believed was the paramount principle of distinctly American art: “*Study the popular tastes and demands that arise in your own country; create a classical foundation for your art here and now. Do not look to the Old World for models to imitate!*” (Howat, 1970, p. 45).

Given Mills’s authoritative status as one of the classic figures of American visual arts between the 1840s and the 1880s, his well-known assertion about the necessity of studying “popular tastes” deserves special attention from modern scholars. The theoretical guidelines and artistic practices of Mills and other nineteenth-century artists cannot be interpreted adequately within the traditional paradigm that considers the visual forms of the “American Renaissance” as exclusively highbrow and Eurocentric in orientation. New possibilities for understanding the complex, multifaceted evolution of the visual arts in the United States emerge when we

examine its associations with other spheres of spiritual activity that together shaped the shared discursive environment of national democratic culture of the US.

There are many examples that attest to the fruitful creative communication between American writers and artists of the nineteenth century. For instance, the best paintings of John Quidor were commissioned by the writer Washington Irving to illustrate his short stories. The witty drawings of popular caricaturist Christopher Pearse Cranch helped popularize Ralph Waldo Emerson's complex philosophical ideas in New York's "penny newspapers." Overall, most representatives of the literary "American Renaissance" justifiably considered themselves admirers and connoisseurs of the national visual arts. Walt Whitman, who was personally acquainted with many prominent painters of New England, in his poem "My Picture-Gallery" (1850) likened his own creative consciousness to an art gallery:

*"In a little house keep I pictures suspended, it is not a fix'd house,
It is round, it is only a few inches from one side to the other;
Yet behold, it has room for all the shows of the world, all memories.
Here the tableaux of life, and here the groupings of death;
Here, do you know this? this is Cicerone himself,
With finger rais'd he points to the prodigal pictures."*

It is telling that Herman Melville, in letters to Nathaniel Hawthorne, used the phrase "*kindred spirits*" to describe their creative kinship, without additional explanation. Note that "Kindred Spirits" is also the title of one of the most famous paintings by the popular artist Asher Durand, first exhibited at the New York Gallery of the Fine Arts at the end of 1849—just a few months before the two writers first met at a literary picnic in the Berkshire Mountains.

In Durand's painting "Kindred Spirits", we see a picturesque mountain landscape. At its center, on a large rock, stand two men conversing. Their faces are difficult to discern, but by the artist's design these are two old friends: the poet William Cullen Bryant and the painter Thomas Cole, author of the renowned series "The Course of Empire" — dedicated to the history of American democracy. Durand seems to ask the viewer: whence comes that astonishing artistic power we encounter in the works of the young republic's brilliant masters? Could it be that fascination with poetry helps a painter develop the ability to perceive the hidden beauty of the surrounding world and choose profoundly meaningful subject matter? Or, could we say that a master of letters who honors visual arts improves his skill at poetic visualization and thus gains the capacity to create genuinely "visual" verses?

Hawthorne well understood what Melville meant when he referred to Durand's famous painting in his letters. It was not merely that certain circumstances of the writers' fateful meeting (two artists encountering each other atop a mountain peak) happened to coincide strikingly with details from the popular painting. More importantly, both writers perceived an unbreakable kinship between their literary creativity and other varieties and forms of national culture, whose most powerful driving force was democracy.

The creative biography of Thomas Cole, a pioneer of American Romantic painting, exemplifies the particular way in which the first generation of U.S. artistic classics perceived popular democratic culture. Cole's American contemporaries saw in his canvases a brilliant realization of Emerson's well-known call to "*ignore the refined European muses*" and turn to the "*popular style*" of national art, close to and understood by ordinary citizens of the young democratic republic. Emerson himself considered "*the popular language*" as the only true foundation of his style, which reflected the "*magnificent chaos*" of a democratic nation's worldview—one that recognized no authority over itself.

One of Cole's best examples of "popular" works is "The Titan's Goblet" (1833). The painting shows a stone chalice filled with water. It is so enormous that several sailboats fit easily inside. Some modern critics regard this work as a sort of harbinger of European surrealism. Yet given the nearly one-hundred-year gap between "The Titan's Goblet" and the earliest appearances of improbably large objects on the canvases of surrealism's founders, it seems unlikely that the painting arose from any special prophetic insight into the artistic trends of a distant European future. However, recognizing Cole's inseparable connection to American popular art of the 1830s and 1840s brings us closer to uncovering the true sources of his striking artistic exaggerations.

As Alexis de Tocqueville noted, the unbridled democratic fervor of the young American nation produced a persistent demand for extraordinary phenomena and things in virtually every sphere of cultural life. A long-lasting taste for so-called "gigantism" resulted in the creation of colossal panoramic paintings (several kilometers in length) by such popular artists as the Hannington Brothers and John Benward; as well as the adventure novels of Eugene Batchelder, Cornelius Mathews, and Herman Melville, devoted to the largest sea and land monsters in the world; and P. T. Barnum's grotesque stage shows featuring a four-year-old "child-giant" weighing over two hundred pounds, an African elephant proclaimed "the world's biggest animal," and the circus performer Calvin Edson—dubbed a "giant living skeleton" because of his towering height and emaciated physique.

Among Cole's works completed in the late 1830s, there are several paintings and sketches that reflect the American public's insatiable fascination with the extraordinary and the grotesquely exaggerated. In addition to "The Titan's Goblet", these include his unfinished canvas "Giant's Castle", the "Destruction" segment from the series "The Course of Empire", and "Prometheus Bound", which shows the mythical Titan towering over ancient forest trees.

It is especially revealing to trace the reactions of various literary circles to Cole's best-known 1830s series, "The Course of Empire", which deals with the present and near future of American nationhood. The first paintings depict a beautiful ancient city inhabited by happy, prosperous democratic citizens. Yet in the final panel, "Destruction", we see a gargantuan Roman metropolis consumed by a terrible fire, from which a crowd of thousands struggles in vain to escape. Rich and poor, aristocrats and ordinary townsfolk brutally kill one another for the last safe outcroppings that rise above a boundless sea of flames.

According to James Fenimore Cooper, "Destruction" epitomized the artist's worst fears of America's inevitable self-annihilation at the hands of a savage democratic majority. Meanwhile, popular writers from the radical-democratic camp emphasized the painting's patriotic spirit and its merciless social critique, characteristic of sensational literature and "penny newspapers." They believed Cole took extraordinary pride in and respect for the ideals of America's past, which he repeatedly mythologized on his canvases. However, he also felt deep disappointment at the failure to realize the sacred ideals of freedom and democratic equality. Radical democrats blamed corrupt politicians and rapacious millionaires as the "internal enemies" of the country, but in Destruction they saw the tragic foreshadowing of a future national apocalypse for which all Americans, without exception, would bear responsibility.

Only a few years separate “The Course of Empire” from George Lippard’s sensational bestseller *The Quaker City* (1843). Unlike the writers of the 1830s, who drew on the motifs and imagery of popular sensational literature as a powerful weapon against the hidden crimes of a corrupt elite, Lippard made no attempt to sort American society into “friends” and “enemies” of democracy. His characters—wealthy and poor, sinful and virtuous, respectable gentlemen and social outcasts—collectively convey the overall sense of tragic insolubility that pervades the novel. Amid the chaos of inhuman cruelty and wild amorality engulfing everyone, Lippard’s readers can glimpse not the faintest glimmer of hope for a brighter future.

In one of the final chapters of *The Quaker City*, the author depicts the terrifying end of democratic society in a scene strikingly reminiscent of Cole’s apocalyptic “Destruction”. An ancient city is consumed by fire. The ground becomes a seething ocean of flame in which buildings and people alike are swallowed up. A giant tidal wave of debris rises sky-high—on its crest clings a tiny group of survivors battling one another for a chance to remain alive a few seconds longer.

The Quaker City became a sort of repository for the major epistemological paradoxes likewise manifested in other areas of 1840s popular democratic culture. It would take another decade after its publication before Hawthorne and Melville produced the large prose works that surpassed Lippard’s bestseller in their penetrating exploration of the unsolvable coexistence of good and evil in the world and in the human soul. Yet before those works of the American Renaissance could emerge in literature, their path was paved by the extraordinary paintings of the popular artist Thomas Cole.

In addition to the sensational revelations of popular writers and artists, the mass democratic audience of the early 1800s was enthralled by tales of the exotic lives and remarkable adventures of the “redskins”. Artistic portrayals of Native Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century are usually associated with James Fenimore Cooper’s adventure novels. The incredible exploits of Natty Bumppo and his Indigenous companions are often seen as the only prominent examples of “Indian themes” in Romantic-era American literature. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha” was, by his contemporaries’ assessment, a refined “imitation” of European classics—too “cultivated” to capture the true nature of the continent’s real “savages.”

Yet at least a year and a half before Cooper published *The Pioneers* (1823)—the novel in which “Leatherstocking” Natty Bumppo first appears—author John Neal had already found success on the book market with *Logan* and *Seventy-Six*, both devoted to the most brutal clashes of the late-eighteenth-century Indian Wars. Slightly later than Cooper, William Gilmore Simms turned to Native American history. His bestseller *The Yemassee* (1835) went through more than thirty reprints before the Civil War. Among Simms’s well-known “Indian” works are the novels *Vasconselos* (1853), *The Cassique of Kiawah* (1859), and the story collection *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845). Critics of the 1850s believed Simms wrote about the way of life and customs of Native Americans with more depth and empathy than Cooper had achieved in the famous Leatherstocking Tales.

The wave of enthusiasm for Indigenous culture sparked by popular literature in the 1820s–1840s also attracted the attention of many American painters. Various images of Indians feature in works by a number of period artists, but George Catlin was the recognized creator of the era’s most famous paintings dedicated to the continent’s native peoples. According to the artist himself, in his youth he was shocked by President Andrew Jackson’s decision to hasten the forced relocation of the “redskins” remaining in New England to the country’s inhospitable western territories. In 1829, Catlin abandoned all other pursuits to embark on a long creative expedition into tribal lands so he could see with his own eyes the “appearance and customs” of the last Indians of New England.

Upon his return to New York in 1837, Catlin established his “Indian Gallery,” where he displayed more than four hundred of his paintings—portraits of warriors and chiefs, ceremonial rites, ritual contests, hunting scenes, and sketches of Indian settlements. During every showing, the artist would read excerpts from his journals describing his memories of each piece presented at the exhibition.

Catlin’s attempts to turn his “Indian Gallery” into a profitable business—akin to P.T. Barnum’s popular museum & curiosity show—ultimately damaged his artistic reputation. Twentieth-century critics labeled him an “*emblematic embodiment of exploiting indigenous peoples*” and “*a money-grubbing ignoramus with no respect for the lives and customs of those he used for personal enrichment*” (Gurney and Heyman, 2002, pp. 20–21). Indeed, Catlin considered himself a creator of popular graphic artworks with significant commercial potential. Yet it would be unfair to view him simply as an unprincipled opportunist. Catlin’s portraits do not depict Native Americans as bloodthirsty brutes or intellectually backward people; rather, their faces radiate courage, natural wisdom, and noble composure. Every detail of their ritual clothing, adornments, and weaponry is rendered with almost photographic precision. Like William Gilmore Simms in his adventure novels and short stories, Catlin, in a “popular format,” sympathetically and meticulously documented an original Indigenous culture threatened with total eradication.

The life and career of John Quidor, the nineteenth century’s most democratic American painter, remain comparatively understudied, even though during his time this remarkable artist spearheaded one of the principal trends in the popular visual arts of the United States. A native of New York, Quidor spent most of his life in working-class neighborhoods of his home city and knew all the facets of its democratic street culture no less intimately than Whitman or Melville, both of whom celebrated America’s largest metropolis in their finest works. At age twenty, Quidor saved enough to open a small painting studio in a high-crime district. Nearly every day he witnessed—and sometimes was drawn into—violent street brawls between Irish immigrants and local rowdies from volunteer fire brigades who called themselves “bh’oys” (from the word “boys”). By the early 1840s, these “bh’oys,” famed city democrats with “big fists,” had become the most active creators and participants in the raucous and aggressive popular culture of America’s urban working class, which was rapidly emerging in major cities across the nation.

Quidor remained close friends for many years with one of the “bh’oys” leaders—John Brower, a formidable street fighter and a talented self-taught sculptor who despised elite foreign culture and idolized popular American performers. Through this friendship, Quidor gained a steady source of income: for many years, he painted the “bh’oys’” fire engines and created custom stage sets for New York’s leading popular playwrights. In those days, most of the city’s theaters staged nightly productions featuring the adventures of “bh’oys,” who quickly became mainstays of popular urban art.

George Foster, a prominent radical democrat and sensationalist writer, called the “bh’oys” “*the most intriguing figures of modern democratic society*” and urged all American artists to devote greater attention to these popular images. Writers of urban humorous tales were the first to heed Foster’s call. Throughout the 1840s, their short stories offered multifaceted representations of “bh’oys” that reflected both the democratic public’s love of sensational exoticism and the vigorous creative energy of a young American nation. At the same time, these tales portrayed the environment of savage brutality, crushing poverty, and revolutionary protest

against social injustice characteristic of such neighborhoods. The so-called “dark” humorous tales, as contemporary journalists labeled them, were accompanied by whimsical caricatures and frightening illustrations that underscored the threatening chaos of big-city life. Typical depictions included grotesque human figures with the heads of repulsive insects or demonic creatures, distorted faces featuring oversized ears and noses, or fusions of living beings with household objects or elements of urban architecture.

Among the several hundred paintings, reproductions, posters, set designs, and other works Quidor produced over his long life (he died in 1881), only about thirty of his drawings have survived. The majority were commissioned by Washington Irving’s publishers as illustrations for his short stories. In Quidor’s artistic interpretation, Irving’s well-known comic characters are transformed into grotesque monstrosities fit for the most terrifying nightmares, and the surrounding world becomes strangely fantastical.

In the famous illustration “Ichabod Crane Flying from the Headless Horseman” (1828), the scene is a moonlit forest glade where Ichabod Crane stands frozen in mid-flight. Readers of Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” know that the poor schoolteacher is running from what he believes to be a headless ghost, but is actually the prankster Brom Bones. Yet nothing on Quidor’s canvas resembles the familiar story of a headless ghoul chasing a terrified man. Instead, we see two nightmarish, otherworldly creatures in a sort of eerie nocturnal race through the woods.

In another painting, “The Return of Rip Van Winkle”, which depicts the moment Rip reappears in his hometown, we see something resembling a ceremonial gathering of hideous beings. There is not a single appealing face in sight. Even the children have disfigured features. One gets the impression that the artist compiled a “collection” of facial fragments from various people, thoroughly mixed them up, and then distributed them to his figures completely at random, like some deranged plastic surgeon.

Quidor’s grotesque images fully convey the savage energy of democratic chaos characteristic of America’s popular urban culture. By juxtaposing wholly incompatible images in startling ways, his bizarre illustrations for “dark” popular humorous tales and the “city mysteries” novels – ubiquitous in the New England book market by the late 1830s – caught the attention of European modernist painters, who considered them early harbingers of modern abstraction. On the title page of Lippard’s bestseller *The Quaker City*, for instance, the main character–leader of a “bh’oys” street gang–appears ape-like, drifting down a river in a coffin-turned-boat. It is worth recalling that in *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville also uses a coffin-boat to rescue his narrator Ishmael, a figure who in many respects embodies the traits of New York’s fictional “bh’oys.” Such parallels are no coincidence. Lippard, the sensational bestselling author; Melville, the Romantic-era classic; and Quidor, the painter, all operated within a shared discursive space of national popular culture—one that captured the hopes and anxieties of ordinary people making their way through the tumult of democracy in the great American city.

Conclusions and prospects for further research in this field. The fundamental aesthetic and artistic equivalence of literary trends and pictorial phenomena, set against the backdrop of the era’s democratic foundations in American society, demonstrates that the works of the nineteenth-century U.S. classics arose not in spite of the popular democratic culture of their day but because of its presence in the country’s intellectual milieu. As though in Cole’s famous *Titan’s Goblet*, powerful forces of democratic ferment surged within this national discursive space, acting as a catalyst for significant transformations in all spheres of social, political, and cultural life. Investigating the development of both verbal and visual art thus emerges as a fully justified and promising scholarly direction—one that opens up new perspectives for analytical understanding of the productive interaction among the heterogeneous forms of national art during the American Renaissance.

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