The Prophetic Chronotope and the Sexual Revolution in Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein's The Mysteries of New Orleans

Timothy Walker

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of the prophetic chronotope as a form of alternate, circular time in Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein’s gothic romance, *The Mysteries of New Orleans*. As the novel’s temporal structure seemingly contains the professed slave revolution through a manipulation of a linear prophetic sequence into circular time, Reizenstein simultaneously portrays a sexual revolution within the closed temporal system; however, as he localizes the sexual revolution in the “real time” of the reader through the inclusion of extra-textual artifacts, the novel’s closed system of alternate, circular time sustains a fissure, loosing all revolutionary potential, slave and sexual, into the reader’s temporality. Reizenstein compares sexual slavery, social restrictions on sexual expression, to chattel slavery, but recognizes it as endemic form of bondage affecting every race; therefore, Reizenstein uses chattel slavery as a ubiquitous circumstance in the U.S. South to identify other covert forms of slavery. In the end, the slave and sexual revolutions become the same conflict, and the restoration of beauty becomes its primary aim.

INDEX WORDS: Southern studies, New Orleans, sexual revolution, slave revolution, prophetic chronotope, alternate time, circular time, Reizenstein, Baron Ludwig, Mysteries
THE PROPHETIC CHRONOTOPE AND THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION IN BARON
LUDWIG VON REIZENSTEIN’S THE MYSTERIES OF NEW ORLEANS

by

TIMOTHY WALKER

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THE PROPHETIC CHRONOTOPE AND THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION IN BARON LUDWIG VON REIZENSTEIN’S *THE MYSTERIES OF NEW ORLEANS*

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DEDICATION

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1
1 INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1853, a yellow fever epidemic ravaged the city of New Orleans, claiming nearly 8,000 lives. The memory of this catastrophic event lingered in the minds of New Orleanians in January 1854 when Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, a German expatriate living in New Orleans during the summer of the horrific outbreak, began publishing The Mysteries of New Orleans (Die Geheimnisse von New Orleans), which alludes to the carnage of the epidemic as a backdrop for the story. The novel was originally serialized in the German-language newspaper Louisiana Staatszeitung and after the final installment in March 1855, all the books were released in a single volume. However, upon its publication, the author regretted having written the novel, calling it a “sin of youth” and had many of the copies destroyed because of “its portrayal of openly named or thinly disguised residents of New Orleans” and “the scandalous nature of the goings-on” (“Introduction” xxiii). As a result, the novel was nearly lost. The few surviving manuscripts languished in a German archive in New Orleans until they were discovered by Steven Rowan and translated into English in 2002.

During the time of its publication, Mysteries was immensely popular, ousting a serialized Alexander Dumas novel from the front pages of the periodical. Its astounding success among the German readership in New Orleans perhaps can be attributed to novel’s scandalous and sensational plotlines, but its harrowing prophetic pronouncement heralding the appearance of black messiah and a subsequent slave revolution across the U.S. South suggests otherwise. For German readers, it is likely that Mysteries’ allure was rooted in the novel’s prophetic call that spoke to, in a seemingly abolitionist tone, the booming slave market in New Orleans and the ubiquitous institution of chattel slavery in the U.S. South. The novel entered into a particularly charged political landscape as northern abolitionists galvanized supporters and applied pressure
to the slave-dependent South in the years leading up to the Civil War. Many Germans who fled to the U.S. following the 1848 Revolution in Germany seeking political asylum and economic stability would have quickly recognized in the region the tumultuous conditions that prefigured revolution. Indeed, the memory of revolution would have been especially present in the minds of those who settled in the South via New Orleans at the time of Mysteries’ publication. This sense of impending conflict coupled with the recent yellow fever epidemic, which left New Orleans’ infrastructure in a weakened state, explains “the [German] community’s heightened concern that a revolution might break out in the American South” (Klotz 233). Therefore, the prophecy at the heart of Mysteries bore grave significance for German readers as they witnessed the growing volatility of political and social circumstances and braced themselves for an imminent revolution, whose nature and outcome was uncertain.

In the novel’s first book, Hiram, the ancient and mysterious Freemason harbinger, prophesies the birth of a black messiah who will punish the U.S. South for the sin of slavery and set the enslaved free. Initially, Hiram tells Emil and Lucy, “For it is yours to shatter the chains and free the South from its shame” (Reizenstein 80), a prophecy that sharpens when Hiram reveals, “[A] Caucasian and an Ethiopian shall bathe in the source of the Red River. They shall walk across the mesa and fall lovingly into each other’s arms. They shall then conceive a son, who shall be the liberator of the black race” (Reizenstein 416). The fulfillment of such a prophecy would set a revolution in motion that would virtually signal the apocalyptic end to the political and social conditions that governed southern life. The novel’s main plot lines trace the lives of several German expatriates of nobility who have fallen into financial ruin and have immigrated to New Orleans in hopes of recovering losses and restoring their wealth. Through a series of unfortunate circumstances and complex storylines, many of the main characters
eventually succumb to yellow fever or are brutally murdered. However, the meandering and convoluted plots that constitute the bulk of the novel are all contextualized in light of Hiram’s initial prophetic pronouncement, and though they anxiously anticipate the fulfillment of the prophecy, it never fully comes to pass.

In *Mysteries*, I argue that Reizenstein manages time rather than forecasts it through prophecy by reorganizing a linear prophetic sequence (pronouncement, constitution, and fulfillment) and appropriating the permutation as a form of time for the novel. Western conceptions of the prophetic sequence generally function as a linear model of time beginning with a prophetic pronouncement and ending with the fulfillment of that pronouncement. Because *Mysteries* exhibits features of a prophetic chronotope and the moment of prophetic fulfillment exists as a fixed point in the future, Reizenstein manipulates the linearity of the prophetic sequence by placing the moment of partial fulfillment of the prophecy (the appearance of the black messiah) in the novel’s prologue, making the novel’s beginning also its end. Essentially, each time the readers finish the novel, they are drawn back to the prologue and looped through the narrative again, and the possibility of a slave revolution is continually deferred. This temporal construction creates an alternate, circular time that contains an impending slave revolution in the novel’s form. Simultaneously, the novel privileges a sexual revolution through the portrayal of the characters’ sexually transgressive relationships. Eventually, the sexual revolution renders the closed system of alternate, circular time unstable and threatens to undermine the containment effort latent in the novel’s form. In other words, as the novel’s form attempts to contain the prophesied slave revolution while portraying the sexual one, the structural integrity of the circular temporality sustains a fissure, and the alternate, circular time of the novel
begins to merge with the reality of the nineteenth-century reader, making the novel’s imagined slave and sexual revolutions, and their outcomes, conceivable in “real time.”

1.1 Significance of *Mysteries*

Given a recent interest by scholars in immigrant and German presences and participation in the Civil War, both in southern and northern states, *Mysteries* offers an important literary vantage point from which to understand German discourses on the Civil War in the U.S. South and aid recovery of hitherto muted historical narratives. In the introduction to their illuminating collection of German letters from the U.S. North and South during the Civil War, Walter Kampfhoefner and Wolfgang Helbich note the significance of their archival research by observing, “The ethnic component of the Civil War has largely faded from public memory, and it has been largely neglected by scholars” (xi). Andrea Mehrländer echoes this absence of scholarship and offers an explanation in the opening of her book on Germans in Charleston, Richmond, and New Orleans during the Civil War: “The lack of research on the immigration of foreigners, especially Germans, to the American South can be attributed to the hypothesis advanced by George B. Tindall, that the South is the ‘biggest single WASP nest this side of the Atlantic’” (13). Similarly, in her book that explores the significance of Native, Black, and German peoples in the U.S. South during the Civil War, Anne Bailey posits that “the collective historical memory excludes what does not fit into the accepted stereotype. As a result, it was not unusual for various ethnic groups to be overlooked in the writings of postwar historians, and eventually twentieth century historians ignored their presence” (xiii). In the U.S. South, Lost Cause politics, bent on preserving a purely white, exceptional history for the region, muted German as well as French, Spanish, and Creole presences in the Confederacy during the Civil War, erasing immigrant involvement in the conflict in order to create a homogenized image of
the past. On a national scale, the German presence in the Civil War was expunged from the national memory in the early and mid-twentieth-century partly due to the aggressive anti-German sentiments proliferated during WWI and WWII (Bailey 3).

In light of the development of scholarship on ethnic minorities in the Civil War, *Mysteries* represents an invaluable and timely literary artifact for this burgeoning branch of Civil War research. Reizenstein’s novel is not only a landmark discovery for Southern Studies scholars because it complicates monolithic conceptions of southernness, but also for historians whose research seeks to recover German political, social, and cultural experiences of the U.S. South leading up to the Civil War. *Mysteries* stands as a unique piece of literature, being a novel of and about the U.S. South, written by a German immigrant in his native language from within the region. The novel’s overtly abolitionist leanings starkly contrast the pro-slavery attitudes proliferated across the antebellum U.S. South. Mehrländer includes Reizenstein in a list of prominent German southern intellectuals associated with the 1848 Revolution in Germany (24), and Kompoefner and Helbich argue that many of these so-called “48ers” saw the abolitionist movement as an extension of the democratic ideology espoused by that revolution (xiii). Interestingly, many of these “48ers” criticized the institution of slavery from afar, residing mostly in free northern and mid-western states, while Reizenstein critiqued the persistence of slavery from the heart of the U.S. South, in one of its largest slave markets, New Orleans. Therefore, Reizenstein’s novel represents a rare abolitionist perspective from within the U.S. South, likely overlooked because the author was an outsider looking in, writing in a language unknown to many in the region.
1.2 The German Community in Reizenstein’s New Orleans

While the German immigrant populations of the U.S. North and Midwest have been well documented in historical scholarship, the details concerning this population in the U.S. South remain nebulous. Perhaps this lack of attention, in addition to historical prejudice, can also be attributed to the disproportionate numbers that resided in the respective regions. In the U.S. North and Mid-West, German immigrants created rural farming communities and gathered in densely populated urban spaces, but in the U.S. South, home to merely 70,000 German immigrants in 1860, the settlements were sparse and not as highly concentrated as their northern and mid-western counterparts (Mehränder 17). However, among this nearly negligible population, around forty thousand German immigrants lived across Texas and in New Orleans (Kampoefner and Helbich 15). Though Texas was home to many of these Germans, they mostly gathered in smaller farming communities; however, New Orleans was the most densely populated community of Germans in the U.S. South. Mehränder explains, “The fact is that the Germans, due to their numbers, constituted a visible part of the population. In 1850, the 11,425 Germans already compromised almost 10% of the total population of New Orleans” (48). And by 1861 at the advent of the Civil War, the German population swelled across Louisiana to 24,614, of which 19,752, or 80%, lived in New Orleans (Mehrländer 48). Because New Orleans was an important port city, “[t]he geographic location of the city was almost the sole reason for increased settlement by Germans there, since Louisiana at the time offered few economic prospects” (Mehrländer 48). The German immigrants in New Orleans constituted such a significant number of the overall German population in the U.S. South and represented the only densely urban community there, making the city the veritable epicenter for German thought and discourse on Civil War politics in the region. Therefore, the investigation of *Mysteries* and its
influence on the German readership in New Orleans becomes vital to understanding the German perspective of the Civil War, namely the issue of slavery, in the U.S. South.

Benedict Anderson posits that the development of two literary forms in the eighteenth century was integral in shaping conceptions of nationhood and communal simultaneity: the newspaper and the novel (24-25). Anderson argues that these literary forms allowed readers for the first time to imagine their fellow countrymen without ever having met them, thus sharpening national boundaries and identities (26). *Mysteries* fits squarely into Anderson’s theory of nationhood, being first a serialized story published in a newspaper that was later bound into a single volume as a novel; however, rather than allowing readers to conceive themselves as within and as a part of the German nation, the novel establishes the German presence in New Orleans, distinguishing a community of expatriates outside their national boundaries. In the case of *Mysteries*, Anderson’s theory works at a micro-level by developing a smaller national community within the context of the larger U.S. Mehländer explains that the “German language newspapers of the Civil War were the most important vehicle of the ethnic German self-representation within the Confederacy and cannot be rated highly enough in their significance” (11). The initial appearance of *Mysteries* in one of New Orleans German-language newspapers, *Louisiana Staatszeitung*, suggests that the novel would have played an important role in strengthening conceptions of German nationalism and identity in New Orleans, especially since many of the main characters are first generation German immigrants in the city. In other words, *Mysteries* is a novel for and about Germans living in the U.S. South, specifically in New Orleans. Considering the novel’s target audience helps to illuminate the prophecy and what it could have meant for the German community in New Orleans. As the German community read, and effectively imagined the distinct members of the community reading and imagining, the novel
cultivates a collective imagination concerning the prophecy Reizenstein lays out in the novel and orients a whole group of people toward a certain revolutionary future. Whether or not the specific details of the novel’s prophecy come to pass matters less than the possibility of imminent revolution emerging in the German collective consciousness in New Orleans, bracing it for the fallout.

1.3 Literature Review

Because of the recent revival of the novel, scant scholarship on it exists; however, Rowan’s heavily annotated translation includes an illuminating introduction, which includes biographical information on the author, the novel’s publication history, and a brief discussion of the social, cultural, and political climate in which the novel was published. In addition to his introduction, Rowan’s essay “The Gothic and the American-Exotic: Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *Die Geheimnisse von New-Orleans,*” contributes to burgeoning scholarship on Mysteries by speculating on the possible inspiration behind Reizenstein’s mystical Mesa, a supernatural environ from which Hiram the prophet originates. Rowan postulates that Reizenstein probably drew on Randolph B. Marcy’s 1852 expedition report that described his exploration of the Red River (Rowan 300). The report was published with lithographs depicting various aspects of the landscape and local flora. It is likely that Reizenstein drew inspiration from this report while he was writing Mysteries because he situates the source of the Red River on the Mesa and includes a Marcy-like character in the novel. Though Rowan’s writings on Mysteries represents the first scholarship on the novel, his efforts are largely historical and do not make an argument for how the text functions as a whole.

Apart from the foundational work that Steven Rowan has done with Mysteries, Patricia Herminghouse, a German Studies scholar with an interest in German-American authors, is the
first to engage the text in terms of its significance as a novel of the U.S. South. In her essay, “The German Secrets of New Orleans,” she highlights the fact that little is known about German immigrants in the U.S. South during the nineteenth century though their presence is undeniable: “All told, immigrants constituted a visible presence in antebellum New Orleans inhabiting several ethnic enclaves within a city whose established population maintained high levels of social stratification” (4). She is particularly interested in what texts such as Mysteries may reveal about the lived German experience in the U.S. South during the mid-nineteenth century. She also suggests that exploring these texts may work to dispel stereotypes of the “good German” of the Midwest and offer a more textured and rich understanding of German experience in the U.S., especially in the South.

Both Rowan and Herminghouse have done invaluable work and laid a foundation for further scholarship and criticism concerning Mysteries. However, Sarah Klotz’s article, “Black, White, and Yellow Fever: Contagious Race in The Mysteries of New Orleans,” is the first to engage the text critically. She demonstrates the connections between race, revolution, and the yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans in the 1850s. Because yellow fever threatened to upset the social order, many white New Orleanians feared that a weakened social structure would engender a slave revolt. Klotz argues that Reizenstein attempts to contain an imminent revolution and to preserve southern whiteness through “lesbian reincarnation” and “contagious pregnancy between sisters.” She further posits that “[as] New Orleans falls under the shades of sin and death, European female characters become the only hope for white survival” (236).

Though Klotz’s argument is a keen attempt to understand the relationship between revolution and containment, it completely neglects the temporal/prophetic structure that constitutes the novel. Rather than the plots based on lesbian relationships, I argue the
containment effort exists as a latent chronotopic feature in the novel’s form, which allows Reizenstein to manipulate the prophetic sequence into alternate, circular time. The novel’s prologue begins with the partial fulfillment of Hiram’s prophecy, the appearance of the black messiah, but the complete prophecy is never allowed the possibility of fruition because the novel’s end is also its beginning. The manipulation of the linear prophetic vector creates an alternate, circular time that coincides with, but departs from the “real time” of the nineteenth-century readership. The possibilities of the slave revolution, and, therefore, its consequences, become bound in a temporal framework that renders it impossible in conjunction with a linear model of time that imagines the future as moving forward on a linear trajectory. However, apart from the slave revolution, Reizenstein also imagines a sexual one within the alternate, circular temporality of the novel. A close reading of the text reorients the novel’s primary revolution from the question of slavery to a sexual context, and chattel slavery becomes a cipher through which to identify other discrete forms of slavery, namely moral restrictions on sexual expression. However, because Reizenstein begins to locate the sexual revolution in “real time,” a fissure in the novel’s alternate, circular temporality develops, threatening to collapse the system of containment latent in the novel’s form, loosing the revolutionary potential into the present of the nineteenth-century readers. In this reading, the lesbian plotlines, as I will show, actually begin to engender revolutionary potential, rather than contain it.

2 THE PROPHETIC TRADITION, MODE, AND CHRONOTOPE IN MYSTERIES

Though Hiram and his ominous prophetic pronouncement disappear for large portions of the plot, the revelation of the prophecy to Emil and Lucy in the upper room at the Atchafalya Bank in the novel’s first book underpins the narrative’s overall temporal trajectory and structure, so that all the subsequent events are contextualized in the stipulations of the initial
pronouncement. In other words, the disparate and sometimes seemingly uncorrelated plotlines of
the novel anticipate a moment of convergence where the prophecy comes to fruition.
Interestingly, Hiram’s prophecy is only partially fulfilled in the novel’s prologue; therefore,
identifying Reizenstein’s particular prophetic strategy, namely how he employs prophecy in the
novel and to what end, becomes central to understanding the revolutions he imagines. When
investigating texts based on or involving prophecy, Ian Balfour makes a distinction between
genre and mode: “It is usually more appropriate to speak of ‘the prophetic’ rather than of
prophecy, if the latter is a genre and the former a mode that can intersect with any number of
genres from the ode to the epic, in either poetry or prose” (1). In the case of Mysteries,
Reizenstein appropriates the prophetic as a narrative mode and novelistic form, and not strictly in
a generic sense. That is, the novel does not lay claim to the future of the South, but a future, and
the prophetic allows the author, as well as his readership, to speculate about that future.

In Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster characterizes prophecy similarly to Balfour,
opening his chapter concerning the topic, saying, “With prophecy in the narrow sense of
foretelling the future, we have no concern…” (125). He continues by stating,

Prophecy—in our sense—is a tone of voice. It may imply any of the faiths that
have haunted humanity—Christianity, Buddhism, dualism, Satanism, or the mere
raising of human love and hatred to such power that their normal receptacles no
longer contain them: but what particular view of the universe is recommended—
with that we are not directly concerned. (125-126)

Forster considers prophecy qualitatively, as a tone, having less to do with actual future telling,
and more to do with “the novelist’s state of mind” (126). Reizentein clearly operates within the
prophetic mode, and his novel certainly contains an overtly prophetic quality, but what he means
to portray for his readers is not a vision of a definite future. His novel speculates on the end of slavery, but the details of the dissolution of the institution in the U.S. South remain obscure for Reizenstein; therefore, the prophetic in Mysteries projects a distinct future through fiction analogous to one the author indistinctly senses as imminent. In other words, the prophecy in Mysteries represents Reizenstein’s appraisal of his historical moment in the U.S. South, born not out of sibylline foresight, but from an assessment of the political, social, and cultural circumstances in which he lived. In Mysteries, Reizenstein uses fictional events to alert his readers to a forthcoming revolution, whose specifics are unknown to the author, and, thus, the prophecy and revolution that the novel imagines work symbolically, heralding an impending conflict outside Reizenstein’s scope of knowledge, but nonetheless vaguely discernable on the horizon.

Because Reizenstein predicates Mysteries upon the fulfillment of a prophecy, he necessitates that his readers engage and imagine their own futures. The prophecy in Mysteries would have been especially harrowing for his New Orleanian readership because the novel coincides with and alludes to contemporaneous happenings, namely the yellow fever epidemic that ravaged the city in the summer of 1853. When Reizenstein began publishing Mysteries in 1854, nearly half of the German community had been affected by the epidemic (Mehrländer 48). By situating the prophecy in recent history, Reizenstein imbues the yellow fever outbreak with new meaning, recasting the catastrophe as a direct result of the persistence of slavery in New Orleans and throughout the southern states. In this way, Reizenstein, as author, positions himself as a prophet, claiming to have an arcane knowledge about the events of the recent past, bolstering the novel’s prophetic claim with authenticity for the near future. Reizenstein’s rewriting (or revelation) of recent events in New Orleans and Hiram’s prophetic pronouncement
create an alternate historical trajectory, potentially transforming how his German readership understood the past and how they could imagine the future. Writing an alternate history, Reizenstein simultaneously constructs a new temporality, of which he is the sole arbiter, making his prophetic pronouncement plausible within the conditions of that constructed time. So then, the prophetic permeates the entire narrative even though Hiram, who appears intermittently to remind the characters and the readers about the prophecy, is largely absent from the plot.

Apart from engaging prophecy as a literary mode, Reizenstein also draws on a biblical prophetic tradition, imbuing Hiram’s pronouncement with another layer of prophetic quality. As prophecy exists as a schema of time, it also functions as a rhetorical device of forewarning, announcing consequential impending doom or conflict. Stephen Behrendt argues that the “biblical prophet’s mission is, like Jeremiah’s, predicated upon some perceived falling away by the community, who typically do not take kindly to having their errors either exposed or chastised” (256). Reizenstein possesses a similar objective because the novel can be read as an indictment against the German community of New Orleans, who had, even when it did not participate in the institution, regarded the injustice of slavery apathetically, when the slave trade had been virtually abolished on moral grounds across Western Europe by the time he wrote in the 1850s. Thus, Reizenstein utilizes prophecy to imagine a severe punishment for the city of New Orleans, and the U.S. South at large, in the form of the yellow fever epidemic, which is a chief component of Hiram’s initial prognostication. As Reizenstein writes and publishes *Mysteries* from the veritable center of slave trade in the U.S. South, New Orleans, he aligns himself with the biblical prophetic tradition that preceded him by delivering a scathingly counter-cultural message. Balfour explains, “Prophecy is, from its very beginnings, a marginal phenomenon. If the rhetoric of Judaic prophecy is characteristically paradoxical, it is partly
because the prophetic message often runs literally *para doxa*—that is, counter to the dominant belief” (2). Criticizing slavery from within the U.S. South, a region whose economic viability depended on the institution, Reizenstein sets himself in direct opposition to the *status quo*. By doing so, he joins the myriad prophetic voices, biblical and otherwise, that sought to expose and rectify injustice in their respective times and communities.

Additionally, given *Mysteries’* prophetic underpinnings, and the specifics of its prophecy, which heralds the birth of a messiah figure that will incite a slave revolution in the U.S. South and emancipate the enslaved, Hiram’s pronouncement would have resonated strongly with many German-Americans as an allusion to the Christian biblical model of prophecy that interpreted Old Testament passages as foretelling the birth of Christ, and subsequent salvation of humanity. Harkening back to this prophetic model situates Reizenstein squarely in an established Christian biblical prophetic tradition. By the mid-nineteenth century, Christianity had dominated Western Europe as the primarily recognized and practiced religion for centuries, and by the time *Mysteries* was written, one might conjecture that most, if not all, Europeans would have been at least remotely familiar with the prophecy of Christ. When Hiram confronts Emil after his return from the mystical Mesa, he declares, “The Caucasian has impregnated the Ethiopian at the source of the Red River, and the messiah will rise…” (Reizenstein 465). The fact that Hiram refers to Emil and Lucy’s child as the messiah (a Hebrew word literally meaning “the anointed” and used to refer to Christ in the Gospel of John) further strengthens the correlation between the two prophecies.

Christian readers would have located prophecies of Christ scattered across the Old Testament, and perhaps most notably concentrated in the book of Isaiah, which was written during a period of particular political tumult for the Israelite nation when many Israelites of the

\[1\] See *King James Version*, John 1:41 and John 4:45
southern kingdom of Judah were living as exiles in Babylon. Isaiah’s prophecy of the messiah emerged as a message of hope, foretelling the restoration of the nation and the return of the Israelites to their homeland. Isaiah prophesizes a child who would be born to become a political leader upon whose shoulders the government would rest and a messiah who “[would] set up an ensign for the nations, and [would] assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (King James Version, Isa. 9.6; Isa. 11.12). Later in the fifty-third chapter, Christian readers would have recognized Isaiah’s description of the prophesied messiah as referring to Christ, who would bear the punishment for iniquity, delivering humanity from the consequences of its transgressions (Isa. 53). For Christian readers, this specific prophecy is clearly fulfilled in the Gospels with the death of Christ and the redemption of humanity. In the New Testament, in the book of Romans, Paul affirms Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ’s sacrificial death in terms of bondage and freedom: “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21).

Considering these passages, denoting the idea of Christ as a prophesied messiah who gathers exiles and brings freedom to those in bondage, it would not have been surprising if Reizenstein’s German readership drew a stark connection between Hiram’s prophecy of the redemption of the literally enslaved in the U.S. South and the biblical prophecy of Christ foretelling the emancipation of those metaphorically enslaved by sin. In Mysteries, Reizenstein employs the biblical prophecy of Christ as a model for the prophecy set forth in the novel. The Christian understanding of the Old Testament messianic prophecies as a prophetic sequence fulfilled in the New Testament through the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ, as well
as the language, context, and teleological design surrounding this biblical interpretation, bolster the narrative with a veritable biblical ethos, garnering moral legitimacy for the abolitionist sentiments Reizenstein seeks to engender among the reading German constituent in New Orleans. Although, the details of the two prophecies differ (that is, Reizenstein’s messiah is not born by immaculate conception or prophesied to die for the emancipation of those in bondage), the fulfillment of both resounds with the same anthem: freedom for the enslaved. Likewise, Hiram’s foretelling of a messiah figure that will deliver the enslaved of the U.S. South from bondage might have also conjured other biblical parallels for a Christocentric German readership, namely the account of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in the book of Exodus. Even though the story of Moses as deliverer is not predicated upon a prophecy like Christ’s, it nonetheless advocates for the redemption of the enslaved. Despite the fact that Reizenstein makes no direct allusions to the story of Moses, German-Christian readers might have still registered similarities. The accounts of Christ and Moses, therefore, serve to morally contextualize slavery as a social evil and establish a biblical precedent for Reizenstein’s criticism of the institution in the novel, as well as for the slave revolution he imagines.

As Reizenstein incorporates features of an established biblical prophetic tradition in Mysteries, he does so in conjunction with a more contemporaneous literary movement: Romanticism. The novel’s title is modeled after the urban mysteries genre, which first emerged in 1842 with the serial publication of French novelist Eugène Sue’s Mysteries of Paris. The genre of novels “dealt with existing cities, well known to its readership but portrayed it as a sinister place where events are steered by forces beyond the control of ordinary mortals” (Rowan xxvi). After the influx of German immigrants to the U.S., following the failed Revolutions of 1848-49, German authors coopted the genre to write novels about the cities where they settled.
Ostensibly, Reizenstein’s novel joins the legacy of such works as *The Mysteries of Philadelphia* (1850) and *Cincinnati, or Mysteries of the West* (1854-1855)\(^2\) in terms of form and content; however, Rowan argues that the novel “can be epitomized as an extension of the *Mysteries* genre into a territory that had hitherto been left utterly unexplored” (xxviii). Though the title of Reizenstein’s novel directly connects it with the urban mysteries genre, its features and tone markedly depart the generic conventions of its namesake and rather emulate a “Gothic horror novel in the tradition of E. T. A. Hoffman and the Romantics” (Rowan 299). Additionally, the fact that *Mysteries*’ narrative form is predicated on a prophecy suggests that Reizenstein drew more heavily from a Romantic tradition rather than the urban mysteries genre. Although the prophetic was not ubiquitous among European Romantic writers, it had a strong presence in the work of some of the most canonical writers such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Novalis (Balfour 19). Ian Balfour explains that in “post-Biblical and postclassical life, the prophetic tends to emerge, as does the apocalyptic, at times of great social and political turbulence” (2). It seems therefore likely that Reizenstein would have drawn on Romantic tradition for the prophetic in his novel, given the work’s design to imagine a revolution that would rid the U.S. South of slavery. By the time Reizenstein began writing *Mysteries* in 1854, the literary Romantic movement had already been strongly associated with a number of cultural and political revolutions across Europe, namely the French Revolution, and perhaps he envisioned the novel’s imagined slave revolution as an continuation of the revolutions that had already occurred earlier that century. Therefore, the Romantic prophetic tradition becomes a way for Reizenstein to imbue his novel with revolutionary potential and contextualize the slave revolution in a series of recent European revolutions familiar to his German-American readership.

\(^2\) Respectively, in German, *Die Geheimnisse von Philadelphia* and *Cincinnati, oder Geheimnisse des Westens*. 
In *Mysteries*, the prophetic, in addition to authorial mode and tradition, also materializes generically as a chronotope, which Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as the inherent relationship between time and space as it is portrayed in literature. He posits that the varying configurations of the space-time in literature, especially the novel, are what constitute genre; as a result, time “as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” (Bakhtin 84). Consequently, I argue that Reizenstein’s *Mysteries* exhibits features of a specific prophetic chronotope, which includes an articulation of the German collective voice in New Orleans; the blurring of the fictitious time of the novel with the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader to create the sense of a shared future between the characters and the readers; a dynamic historical narrative that recasts events of the recent past in order to bolster a specific vision of the near future; and a narrative that draws on eschatology to imagine the end of the circumstances that govern southern life, as well as envision life past that end.

Perhaps the most evident feature of the prophetic chronotope, as it manifests in *Mysteries*, is the absence of a clear protagonist. The various plotlines meander throughout the novel (and between chapters), but do not ever privilege or underscore any one character’s experience. Many of Bakhtin’s discussions of chronotopic forms in the novel revolve around the relationship of the protagonist to the space and time being portrayed in the work, for he writes, “The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (Bahktin 85). But the prophetic, though it bears implications for individual protagonists in literature as well, is often oriented toward the collective community from which the prophecy originates. Stephen Behrendt registers this tendency of the prophetic to concern the collective:

> Yet the radical prophet most often finds his or her work has the effect not of strengthening social, intellectual, and cultural ties with the audience, but rather of
disrupting them. The artist wants to engage the audience in an act of community and mutual improvement that both validates and purifies their joint heritage. (255)

Therefore, in *Mysteries*, the role of the protagonist is displaced from the individual to the collective, becoming metonymical and representative. The individual characters of the novel are only aspects of an enlarged protagonist, the city of New Orleans itself, and perhaps more specifically, the German-speaking community there. By resisting developing the narrative around a single protagonist, Reizenstein more effectively speaks to the German collective in New Orleans by locating it at the center of *Mysteries* chronotope. The time that “takes on flesh,” emerges as a collective space-time consciousness. In other words, for the mid-nineteenth-century German community in New Orleans, it is not *his* or *her* time in the novel (that is, time isolated and removed from the reader by the distance of fiction, third person, individual time), but emphatically *our* time.

This sense of collective time develops most evidently as Reizenstein frequently addresses his “esteemed lady readership” directly. The readers are moved through the novel from a first person plural perspective—“When we look in on Claudine, we find her sealing a letter” or “Let’s see what Orleana is doing” (Reizenstein 33, 138). This direct address fosters a sense of participation among the readership, and begins to blur the distinction between the “real time” and the fictional time of the novel. In this time, the narrative voice becomes an omniscient guide through the simultaneous happenings of the city of New Orleans, and though the readers only receive episodic glimpses into the lives of the characters, a sense of the concurrent nature of the city begins to coalesce for them, reifying the collective imagination through the simultaneous portrayal of the different characters’ lives. Additionally, it should not be overlooked that the novel did not originally appear as a complete volume, but as serialized installments in a German-
language newspaper. This publishing method, popular in the nineteenth century, may have further fortified a sense of the collective imagination (and *our time*) because the German subscribers would have both anticipated and experienced each installment of *Mysteries* as a unified community.

Reizenstein also creates a sense of collective time by integrating contemporaneous events into the narrative. After alluding to a *tar mask*, a particularly severe form of punishment used against clubmen of the Hamburg Mill, Reizenstein reminds his readers in a footnote that it “should be recalled that a tar mask was found in the possession of the infamous schoolmaster Dyson when he was arrested last summer (1853). Its purpose was never explained” (Reizenstein 297). Additionally, Reizenstein includes excerpts from English, German, and French speaking newspapers about the burning of the Hamburg Mill in order to imbue the event with authenticity (citing multiple sources), and situate the event in the recent past. Both these instances serve to solidify the sense of collective time—*our time*—for the nineteenth-century readership. By drawing on events of the recent past to legitimize the authenticity of the novel, Reizenstein charges the readership’s present with the prophetic potential of the novel, and his vision orients the German collective in New Orleans toward the cataclysm at hand. Consequently, the chronotope of the novel begins to merge with the space-time of the reader and opens the “real future” with revolutionary possibility.

In recognizing other features that mark the prophetic chronotope as distinct among other chronotopic forms, establishing what it is not by juxtaposing it against other types of chronotopes described in Bakhtin’s discussion becomes particularly illuminating. Bakhtin’s appraisal of what he calls adventure-time, which characterizes the chronotope of early Greek Romances, directly opposes the prophetic chronotope. In adventure-time, nothing changes, and
the plot takes place within a temporal hiatus (Bakhtin 91). That is, “all the action in the Greek Romance, all the events and adventures that fill it constitute time sequences that are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational” (Bakhtin 91). The Greek Romance plot usually moves toward the matrimonial union of the hero and the heroine, but the events of the plot only work to briefly interrupt this marriage and do not ultimately influence circumstances nor engender any noticeable change in the characters’ lives. This adventure-time is also predominantly governed by chance, so that all the driving action is controlled by a sequence of events strung together by numerous “suddenlys” and “at just that moments” (Bakhtin 94-95).

By contrast, the novel organized around a prophetic chronotope does not depend upon chance to progress the plot. In the prophetic chronotope, time does not unfold, but is fulfilled, and the plot is the product of an explicit design, moving toward a moment of prophetic fulfillment. For the readers learn that Hiram,

the mysterious old man holds the threads of destiny in his hands, and he is weaving them all into a gigantic shroud, in keeping with his unfathomable will. He has precisely followed the lives of all the persons known to [the readers], and now he compels them all onto the magically lit stage of his enchanted kingdom. (Reizenstein 469)

We see then that the lives of all the characters are being controlled by a force outside of themselves, but the prophecy, rather than being issued as a function of chance, drives all the plotlines and necessitates a dynamic, changing narrative as the various characters move toward a moment of convergence with the prophetic fulfillment. The prophetic chronotope, therefore, requires that the space-time configuration (and the characters that occupy it) in the beginning of
the novel undergo some sort of transformation by the end. The essence of prophetic time is change, the present becoming future, and while adventure-time is static and stable, prophetic time is necessarily dynamic and volatile.

Bakhtin does briefly mention prophecy as a function of chance, as one of the mechanisms used to drive adventure-time, but this type of prophecy manifests more incidentally than consequentially, because adventure time ultimately “neither leaves traces in the world nor in human beings” (Bakhtin 106). In this way, the prophetic chronotope is antithetical to the adventure-time of Greek Romance, because it is, first and foremost, concerned with the progression of history into the future; therefore, the prophetic chronotope, in order to be considered as such, must contain implications (whether these be imagined or real) for the future as a historical moment not yet come to pass. The space-time that Reizenstein creates in Mysteries is profoundly historical, because it is rooted in a historical present, alluding to the recent yellow fever epidemic and prominent figures in German-speaking community in New Orleans, thus, instigating grave implications for the future of the U.S. South and the city of New Orleans.

The prophetic chronotope, as portrayed in Mysteries, is more closely related to Bakhtin’s discussion of eschatology. In this form, the future is emptied out and “perceived as the end of everything that exists, as the end of all being (in its past and present forms)” (Bakhtin 148). The eschatological chronotope ushers in the future via oblivion of the present and past and the destruction of the values that constituted those realities:

In this respect it makes no difference at all whether the end is perceived as catastrophe and destruction pure and simple, as a new chaos, as a Twilight of the Gods, as the advent of God’s Kingdom—it matters only that the end effect everything that exists, and that the end be more or less close at hand. Eschatology
always sees the segment of future separating the present from the end as lacking value; this separating segment of time loses its significance and interest, it is merely an unnecessary continuation of an indefinitely prolonged present. (Bakhtin 148)

In *Mysteries*, Reizenstein clearly heralds the end of an epoch for the U.S. South as he integrates eschatological features into the prophetic chronotope he constructs. When Hiram discloses his plan to release the spore of *Mantis religiosa* upon the city of New Orleans, he tells Emil and Lucy, “Not only does this plant contain that analgesic property, but it also contains the germ of destruction—a dreadful plague,” alluding to the yellow fever epidemic soon to ravage the city (Reizenstein 66). The plague signals the impending slave revolution that will be carried out by Emil and Lucy’s son, who, rather pointedly, shares a name with the renowned Haitian revolutionary, Toussiant Louverture. The prophecy of Hiram imagines the end of slavery in the U.S. South (and therefore, the end of the social, political, and economic forces that govern southern life); however, while the eschatological chorontope, in the strictest sense, imagines the future as literally the “end of time,” the prophetic has potential to imagine a future after apocalyptic destruction (that is, eschatological chorontopes can be prophetic, but the prophetic is not necessarily eschatological, even when it portrays the end of a time).

The prophetic chronotope has the ability to usher in a new time, and, therefore, functions as a mediator between the thresholds of different epochs. In a speech to Emil and Lucy, Hiram conveys this possibility:

I am leaving you today and if you survive the trial by fire and keep your beauty from harm by using the wealth I leave you, I shall reappear and lead you into a place where you will become immortal unto all generations. For know this: there
are chains to be broken here—and only beauty has the right to break them and to place itself at the head of a movement, long desired by me, whose time has at last come. The motivation for cleansing our soil against a portion of mankind should not be self-seeking, vanity, or mere profit. You shall be the representatives of a breaking dawn! (Reizenstein 67).

The breaking dawn that Hiram so emphatically pronounces points to a time past the imminent destruction of the U.S. South, a future of a newly configured space-time, where slavery does not exist. Hiram alerts the reader that the time has come round at last for chains of slavery to be broken, and the very soil to be cleansed of “a portion of mankind.” The makings of an altered chronotope are embedded in this passage, calling the reader to envision the abolition of slavery in the near future. This vision of a forthcoming space-time is the essence of the prophetic chronotope, which draws the space-time of the past, through the crucible of the present, so that it emerges as an altered space-time in the future. For Reizenstein, the prophetic becomes a way to articulate the imminence of a newly configured space-time, and it functions more than just a prediction of the future, but as a “call orientated toward a present that is not present” (Balfour 18).

3 CONSTRUCTIONS OF TIME

For readers of Mysteries, there are least four temporal schemes at work. Reizenstein constructs the narrative itself using circular and alternate temporalities that both seemingly contain revolutionary potential through the rearranging of the linear prophetic model and remove the extraordinary characters and events of the novel from the reality of the reader. Additionally, the quotidian “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader (our time) also emerges as an extra-textual temporal scheme that intersects with the fictitious temporal frameworks of the novel.
Lastly, the time of sexual revolution, located within and without the novel and in which the secret acts of sexual insurrection occur, threatens to collapse the other three schemes into a single temporality, making both the slave and sexual revolutions imaginable in the nineteenth-century reader’s present.

Because time in *Mysteries* is primarily characterized by the prophetic chronotope that anticipates the birth of a black messiah figure, Reizenstein utilizes a progressive, linear model of prophecy that corresponds to the Christian biblical concept of prophecy that conceptualized Christ as the messiah who would redeem humanity from its sins. This progressive, linear model is constructed sequentially as the pronouncement (past), the constitution (progressive present), and the fulfillment (future). After the utterance of the prophetic pronouncement, the events that constitute the fulfillment and the moment of fruition exist as fixed temporal points. The details of the prophecy, the constitution, are revealed gradually with the passage of time, but the end, the moment of fulfillment is already known to the reader. Therefore, the prophetic chronotope generates momentum as the various plotlines rush toward the fulfillment with anxious anticipation, forming a prophetic vector, in which space is mass and time is direction. A distinguishing feature of the prophetic chronotope, as time that already is, but has not yet been revealed, is the ability to potentially reroute the vector of the prophetic chronotope. Changing its direction does not necessarily mean altering its speed or its ultimate trajectory in time. Because the moment of prophetic fulfillment exists as a fixed temporal point, the linear prophetic sequence exhibits a certain flexibility in its unfolding. Reizenstein recognizes this particular feature of the prophetic chronotope, and, working with a linear prophetic model, he bends the moment of partial prophetic fulfillment (the appearance of the black messiah) back over the constitutive segment, situating the moment of partial fulfillment in the novel’s prologue therefore
making the novel’s sequential end, also its beginning.

Rerouting the novel’s linear prophetic vector (or reorganizing the linear prophetic sequence) creates circular time and disrupts the linear sequence of prophecy that envisions the continuation of the prophecy (i.e. the slave revolution) into the future along a progressive, linear trajectory. As Reizenstein constructs this circular time, he integrates it into the novel as a temporal structure. This means that each time the readers finish the novel, they are looped through the narrative again because where the novel ends, it also begins. This maneuver has profound implications for the novel’s revolutions because the circular time that Reizenstein creates could potentially deny the possible futures of the novel’s imagined revolutions in an endless cycle of thwarted fulfillment, thus contradicting the work’s abolitionist efforts. The circular time could also function as a form of temporal containment, indicating a design to keep the revolutionary potential of the novel trapped within a circular temporality, which also seems to oppose the novel’s apparent aims. Seemingly, as the novel opposes southern status quo politics fighting to preserve slavery, it espouses an abolitionist sentiment bent on ridding the region of the institution. However, the conflict between the novel as a counter-cultural literary artifact in the U.S. South and southern antebellum culture at large is accentuated by a more acute conflict between the novel’s content and form, which reproduces rather than seeks to resolve the more apparent tensions between the novel and contemporaneous southern socio-cultural conventions.

In conjunction with circular time, Reizenstein also constructs alternate time. He begins the novel by assuring the reader in the “Memoranda” that the novel is “based on a true event that would be hard for anyone in this generation of our city to be aware of unless he happened by accident upon a transcription of Lakanal’s ‘Narrative of Ursuline Novice in New Orleans’.”
(Reizenstein 1). In doing so, he alerts the readers that the story that they are about to read is in fact true, but probably unknown, because it discloses esoteric knowledge and clandestine happenings of the city; therefore, from the beginning he separates the events of the novel from the readers, differentiating between overt and covert experiences of New Orleans. Consequently, this delineation of the invisible and visible serves to stratify temporalities between the experiences of the German reading community and those of the novel—a distinction that, despite Reizenstein’s assurances of the validity of the narrative, creates a distance between the lives of the readers and the lives of the characters portrayed in the novel. As a result, two disparate temporal trajectories emerge: the quotidian, the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader (our time), and the extraordinary, the imagined, alternate time of the novel. The nineteenth-century readers were able to maintain a certain distance from the extraordinary experiences the novel portrays because those experiences remained obscured in their “real time.” The novel, however, becomes an access point that begins to render the extraordinary experiences of New Orleans as visible and the disparate temporalities begin to collide.

This sense of alternate time develops further as Reizenstein includes various Doppelgänger episodes in the novel. These encounters serve to signal to the reader the possibility of simultaneous, yet disparate temporal experiences and perhaps begin to collapse the quotidian time of the reader and the extraordinary time of the novel into a single temporality by portraying the intersection of the two temporalities. For example, Lajos, the novel’s pernicious Hungarian villain, encounters a woman whom he believes to be his wife Frida while he in St. Louis. Though this woman appears to be identical to Frida, she is not the same one the reader has met earlier in the novel. Upon approaching the Doppelgänger Frida, Lajos becomes quickly aware that she does not recognize him (Reizenstein 337). She is terrified by his aggressive interrogation, and
she faints in his presence. Lajos then attempts to confirm the identity of the woman before him by locating a distinctive birthmark his wife has. He becomes quickly baffled because he does not find the birthmark, which the reader knows he overlooks in the frenzy of the moment, but he does notice on a nearby table an album that contains photographs of he and Frida and letters bearing his signature (Reizenstein 337). This further confounds Lajos, who cannot reconcile the woman he believes to be his wife with the evidence of the letters in the album. In utter confusion, he exclaims inwardly, “It was Frida, it had to be Frida!” (Reizenstein 337). This episode is particularly jarring because the reader is privy to the fact that the woman Lajos confronts is not the Frida from earlier in the novel. Karl, Frida’s cousin, confirms this discrepancy when he sends a letter from St. Louis to the original Frida in New Orleans. Furthermore, as Lajos is leaving the hotel, he overhears two young women, apparently acquaintances of the woman he assumed to be his wife: “Our dear Frida appears still to be sleeping, we will surprise her in bed” (Reizenstein 339). He is then stunned to hear them speak his name: “It is silly of her […] since she knows Lajos is returning at eleven” (Reizenstein 339). This episode between Lajos and the Doppelgänger Frida remains unexplained for the reader until the end of the Fourth Book in an encounter between Lajos and Gabor, one of the clubmen from the Hamburg Mill. After Gabor threatens blackmail for the murders of Merlina and Sulla, Lajos strangles him. In Gabor’s wallet, Lajos finds a letter from the Doppelgänger Frida confirming that she did in fact recognize Lajos in St. Louis. Reizenstein includes the letter in a footnote. The Doppelgänger Frida writes:

I am presently too distressed and depressed. I will tell you only so much for now, that a Doppelgänger of my Lajos, a true devil in human form, attacked me in the most terrible way. I cannot tell you how I am suffering when I imagine the evil
results that can come from the visit of this Doppelgänger. I tremble at the mere thought, and it makes me as cold as if I were touching a corpse. (Reizenstein 406)

The existence of the Doppelgängers of Frida and Lajos is further validated by an encounter Jenny recounts to Albert, in which she had been taking a walk alone in the forest while their damaged carriage was being repaired. Jenny knows that her sister Frida stayed behind with the rest of the party, but through a clearing in the trees, Jenny beholds the semblances of Frida and Lajos walking arm-in-arm (Reizenstein 371). She’s tempted to dismiss the experience as a hallucination, but then she clearly hears the two lovers speak the names of Frida and Lajos, and she stands astounded as they disappear into the cover of the trees (Reizenstein 371). Likewise, Albert expresses astonishment at Jenny’s story and, and she replies, “To this day, I have no idea my friend. Frida could not explain this episode either” (Reizenstein 371). Rowan explains that the novel “displays fringe episodes suggesting that all the protagonists have Doppelgängers pursuing alternate lines of story development, reflecting the tentative nature of visible reality, even if it simply may be a sign of the author’s shaky grasp on reality (“Introduction” xxx). The existence of these Doppelgänger figures in the novel contributes to the sense of alternate time, suggesting to the reader the possibility of simultaneous, yet disparate, realities within the same New Orleans, complicating concepts of homogenous temporal experiences. Furthermore, the Doppelgänger episodes begin to blur the distinction between the quotidian “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader and extraordinary time of the novel by portraying the intersection of these two temporalities. In doing so, the quotidian begins to merge with the extraordinary, collapsing the sense of temporal duplicity into a single temporality and perhaps producing a sensation of temporal vertigo among readers.
Reizenstein conflates these two temporal constructions of the novel in order to create alternate, circular time, a time that both coincides with, but departs from the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader. However, the time that Reizenstein constructs is an inherently unstable one: as he attempts to portray and sustain alternate time, he simultaneously threatens to undermine the alternate temporal construction by portraying Doppelgänger characters, who both affirm and threaten the sense of alternate time. In other words, the portrayal of the Doppelgänger characters begins to signal the convergence of the quotidian and extraordinary temporalities of nineteenth-century New Orleans, rendering the invisible world visible in “real time.” Because the circular and alternate temporal structures are inextricably bound together in the novel’s form, the unstable alternate time begins to threaten the stability of the closed system of circular time created through the prophetic chronotope as well. Reizenstein’s insistence throughout the novel of integrating extra-textual materials, such as letters and newspaper excerpts, to bolster the novel’s authenticity also begins to work in contradiction to the novel’s temporal structures, and therefore, the novel’s form. These extra-textual artifacts enter into the novel from the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader. The inclusion of these materials simultaneously fortifies the authenticity of the novel, while weakening the sense of alternate time. The revolutionary potential that is seemingly confined within an alternate, circular temporal form therefore begins to transgress the confines of the novel, permeating the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader.

WHAT SLAVERY? WHAT REVOLUTION?: CONFLICTS OF FORM AND CONTENT

*Mysteries*’ initial prophetic pronouncement in the First Book along with Hiram’s intermittent reminders about the narrative progression toward a slave revolution speak to the
novel’s abolitionist overtones. On the surface, it is only invested in imagining the end of chattel slavery in the U.S. South. However, a closer examination of the text reveals a tension between professed and actualized revolutions in the novel. This contradiction perhaps undermines the novel’s exclusive abolitionist leanings, dislocating the slave revolution from the center of the narrative and expanding the context and meaning of slavery into other socio-cultural enclaves, namely accepted sexual ethics and conventions.

For a novel whose apparent aim is imagining a slave revolution in the U.S. South, enslaved protagonists are surprisingly absent from the narrative, and it stands in stark contrast to other slave revolution works such as Delany’s Blake or Douglass’ The Heroic Slave. In Mysteries, all the enslaved characters remain completely detached from the slave revolution in the larger plot arch. The lack of enslaved characters as active agents serves to temper the impetus of the revolution as the narrative action mainly coalesces around the plots of white upper-middle class and aristocratic German-Americans. In this context, the storylines of the enslaved characters function as a backdrop against which the reader can identify and contrast other forms of slavery and oppression.

As discussed earlier, the novel, in general, resists revolving around any one character’s experience, but primarily traces the storylines of various European expatriates in New Orleans. In fact, the only enslaved character who makes multiple appearances in the novel is Tiberius, a mischievous, young domestic servant in the house of Frida and Jenny. However, his character does not seem to hold any significance for the overall plot but rather occupies a merely functional role: he delivers messages, carries out chores, runs errands, and, perhaps most significantly, assists Lajos after his arson of the Hamburg Mill.
In addition to Tiberius, Elma and Pharis, two young girls who are enslaved in Madame Parasina Abigail Brulard’s brothel, also make brief appearances. Again these characters play only secondary roles in the plot, being most instrumental in revealing the atrocity and degradation of slavery to the reader. In fact, at the beginning of Chapter Seven of Book One, in which Elma and Pharis appear, Reizenstein includes a caveat, justifying to the readers the “garish” content that fills the following pages: “Even if we find beings to be degenerate beasts under [the] veil, it is still better that we see them in their full ugliness than hear their howling and gibbering and fearfully hide behind our nursemaid’s skirts” (48). In this same chapter, Reizenstein introduces the reader to Monsieur Dubreuil, who becomes one of the most deceptive and nefarious characters in the novel. He works for Madame Brulard as a disciplinarian, dealing out cruel, sadistic punishments to the girls who break the brothel rules. On such an occasion, Pharis is handed over to Monsieur Dubreuil because she could not produce her earnings from the evening’s work. Madame Brulard asks,

Monsieur Dubreuil […] do you want to take care of this cheat’s execution yourself? Go into this chamber with her; everything is ready: tongs, nails, hammers, brushes, and ropes—and if that doesn’t suffice, behind the tapestry of each chimney there is a universal tool comm il faut. (Reizenstein 53)

The implications of this passage are horrifying even though the reader is not given an explicit description of Pharis’ punishment. The worst is left to the readers’ imaginations. The situation becomes even more disturbing when the reader learns that Monsieur Dubreuil holds a post as a prominent clergyman in New Orleans, and he must ironically postpone Pharis’ punishment because he has a sermon to deliver on the sixth commandment: “Thou shalt not murder.” Through the character of Monsieur Dubreuil, Reizenstein rather pointedly exposes religious
hypocrisy and corruption in New Orleans. The unjust and cruel punishment Pharis endures becomes a means by which Reizenstein demonstrates the conflict between extant religious moral codes and slavery as a dehumanizing economic system of oppression. Even so, Elma and Pharis’ brief storylines mostly serve as a context in which to expose Monsieur Dubreuil’s sinister deeds and garner readers’ sympathies. Apart from these characters, there is mention of Betsy, an enslaved domestic servant in the house of Orleana and a group of enslaved domestic servants in the house of Scottish noblewoman Lady Evans-Stuart. The reader receives a partial account of the murders of Frida and Jenny through Tom and learns that Lady Evans-Stuart freed her slaves after the horrific incident, financing their passage to Liberia (Reizenstein 142, 496-498).

Furthermore, the novel imagines the birth of the black messiah, Toussiant Louverture, who will carry out the professed slave revolution; however, given the nature of the prophetic chronotope and Reizenstein’s construction of time in the novel, the complete fruition of the prophecy appears to be thwarted by the constraints of the alternate, circular time. The prologue rather enigmatically portrays Hiram traversing the streets of New Orleans with an anonymous child, whom he tells, “Have patience […] you will be given back to the world, and—” (Reizenstein 5). Perhaps not coincidentally, Hiram’s assurances are abruptly interrupted before he can convey what the child will do. The reader learns by the end of the novel that the child is the prophesied messiah, making the prologue a point of departure and arrival for the narrative progression, containing both the novel’s beginning and end, the partial fulfillment of the novel’s initial prophecy. Because of the circular nature of the novel’s chronotope, the prophesied messiah seems to be contained within the prologue moment. Each reading begins and ends with the appearance of the black messiah and the deferment of the slave revolution by inevitably moving the reader back into the novel’s First Book in which the reader first receives Hiram’s
prophecy. The appearance of the messiah in the prologue, as opposed to an epilogue, has a profound effect on how the novel’s imagined slave revolution resonates. As the novel’s form seemingly disavows the professed revolution, concepts of slavery and revolution take on expanded meanings in the text. The circular temporal form of the novel effectively marginalizes the professed slave revolution by making it a cipher through which other discrete forms of slavery and revolution can be located. In other words, the absence of the slave revolution allows for the visibility of other covert oppressions and revolutions in the text.

Expanding the purview of the novel’s imagined revolution into broader contexts helps compensate for the lack of active enslaved characters (i.e. revolutionaries), and the seemingly suppressed slave revolution by channeling generated revolutionary potential into other forms of enslavement envisioned in the text. Apart from the professed and prophesied slave revolution, Hiram also seems deeply invested in instigating a sexual revolution. After Emil returns to New Orleans from the mystical Mesa, where he and Lucy have conceived the prophesied messiah, he begins to bemoan his decision to abandon his wife Jenny and blames Hiram for coaxing him into adultery. Hiram reminds him that he had already been unfaithful to his wife before he was drawn “into the charmed circle of the *Mantis religiosa*”:

> I don’t blame you for that, dear, penitent, Emil, since my ideas, as you know, are not those of convenience or of an inherited false morality. When it is a matter of humanity as a whole, then one individual can go down to ruin, and a husband can separate from his wife or a child from his parents. Let the husband be unfaithful and the wife a whore, and you will see good fruits that grow out of this disorder, to the benefit of all mankind. Let all the bonds of family be broken, and you will see how man and woman gird the swords about their loins when the cry is heard:
‘Freedom and Equality for every race!’ Thousands are in our midst who would take up the holy struggle at any moment, if they were not bound by the ties of an ordinary family life. A desperado will begin this revolution, and only a desperado will bring it to a conclusion. Then beauty will raise itself to eternal glory, no more compelled to rub and waste its wild, untamed sensuality within the chains of slavery. (Reizenstein 463)

Here, Hiram seems to count Emil and Lucy’s adulterous relationship and the conception of the messiah as an integral and necessary part of the imagined slave revolution. In other words, Hiram’s vision of an emancipated U.S. South also includes sexual anarchy as an imperative: “Let the husband be unfaithful and the wife a whore, and you will see good fruits that grow out of this disorder.” In light of an imagined sexual revolution, Emil and Lucy’s relationship becomes one of the central revolutionary acts in the novel, not only because they produce the prophesied messiah, but also because Emil engages in miscegenation and abandons his marriage to Jenny in order pursue an affair with Lucy, actions that Hiram emphatically promotes. Indeed, in addition to begetting the messiah, Hiram sees the actions of Emil and Lucy as ushering in an era of sexual liberation outside the construct of the traditional family model, in which “wild, untamed sensuality” checks the societal restrictions of “convenience” or “inherited false morality.” The passage reveals that Hiram also imagines “all the bonds of family” as a form of slavery perpetuated by social conventions that regulate and police sexual practices, constructing concepts of moral and immoral, natural and perverse. Consequently, the novel foregrounds and privileges the sexual revolution as one that benefits “every race.”

In this context, the significance of the sexual revolution overrides the urgency of the slave revolution, suggesting that chattel slavery in the U.S. South points to a more endemic form
of oppression, social restrictions of sexual expression and practice. While the slave revolution brings about physical freedom through the abolition of slavery, the sexual revolution seeks to emancipate repressed sexual desires enslaved to stringent social codes. The desperado, who begins and finishes the revolution, seems surprisingly ambiguous here. On one hand, Hiram may be alluding to the messiah figure, but, in light of the overall context of the passage, it seems more likely that he is referring to Emil or Lucy as sexual revolutionaries, which again frames the primary revolution in terms of sexual slavery, rather than chattel slavery. However, whoever the desperado may be, in Hiram’s estimation, the restoration of beauty, which Reizenstein links with “wild, untamed sensuality,” seems to be the priority of the revolution.

Hiram’s preoccupation with beauty also seems rather puzzling in connection with his prophesied revolution. He, and therefore Reizenstein, never explicitly explain the correlation between beauty and revolution; however, from the outset, the concept of beauty emerges as an integral aspect of the imminent conflict. After Hiram has installed Emil and Lucy in the Atchafalya Bank, where they have passed several weeks under the influence of the analgesic and amnesic properties of the *Mantis religiosa*, he delivers a manuscript disclosing the interim period and offering details about their future together:

I will leave you with millions you will find in the lower chambers of the present residence. I give it to you *uneearned*, and without a drop of your own sweat, so that the concern, labor, and speculation needed to get it will not devour the beauty or the charm of your faces. *Only beauty, joined with the treasures of the earth, has the right to enter into the struggle for a higher idea and achieve it.*

(Reizenstein 79)
According to Hiram, the only worthy catalyst for the prophesied revolution is beauty. Furthermore, he seems adamant that beauty personified will ignite the revolution. That is, embodied beauty, not a poetic or abstract concept. Preserving Emil and Lucy’s “beauty” and the “charm of [their] faces” seems to be Hiram’s primary concern in the passage, and, indeed, we see from the earliest portrayals of Emil and Lucy, Reizenstein relishes descriptions of their extraordinary physical beauty. He describes Lucy as a woman of “striking beauty and surprising height” with “raven black hair [that] covers her shoulders with luxuriant fullness and slides down to her full breasts” and a “dazzling” white complexion (Reizenstein 11). Reizenstein compares Emil to Adonis, possessing beauty to stir jealousy in Apollo and the charms to seduce even Venus de Medici, explaining that if Lucy had seen Emil half-naked in the mirror, “she would have gone half-mad” with desire and lust (Reizenstein 18). Given Hiram’s requirement that the revolution be forged in the cause of unblemished physical beauty, Emil and Lucy become ideal revolutionaries. But, the connection between beauty and revolution still remains rather nebulous throughout the novel. Reizenstein attempts to reconcile this unclear relationship in a footnote by including an excerpt from a letter from Lankanl’s *Narrative of Ursuline Novice in New Orleans*, disclosing information about Hiram:

> His overpowering feeling for physical beauty, to which he attributes every imaginable prerogative, often compels him to statements that, should they be realized would undermine all morality and would obliterate the sacrament of marriage from the ground up. He is a bitter enemy of slavery, which he calls the angel of death to beauty. How he came to such a conclusion is not clear so far. Perhaps it is just an obsession with him. (Reizenstein 467)
In reference to the previous passage, the above begins to offer more cogent insight into Hiram’s ideology of beauty. In order to preserve Emil and Lucy’s youthful appearances, Hiram bestows a large fortune upon them, so that their lives will be free of labor and toil. Quite literally, slavery, an oppressive institution that implies the forced and strenuous labor of the enslaved, destroys physical beauty. Hiram hopes to relieve Emil and Lucy of the necessity of labor, the process retrograde to beauty, by allowing them to lead lives of leisure and luxury. Additionally, it is important to note that Hiram releases Emil from his obligations to his wife, Jenny, by promoting his adulterous relationship with Lucy. In the above passage, the writer of the letter seems to be a drawing parallel between Hiram’s estimation of the effects of the institutions of slavery and marriage on physical beauty, implying perhaps that the confines of marriage, rendering the partners enslaved to each other and societal norms, may also contribute to the degradation of physical beauty in a similar way as chattel slavery.

Instead of traditional marriage and family models, Hiram conceptualizes sexual and familial relationships in terms of elective affinities, an idea Reizenstein borrows from Goethe, in order to explain the attractions between people. After Emil discovers a mysterious

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3 Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*) was published in 1809 and alludes to a scientific theory that posits that certain chemical species tend to privilege pairings based on complimentary chemical components, insinuating that human attraction and desire are determined and can be explained on a molecular level. Goethe’s novel dramatizes this theory by portraying the complicated relationships between Charlotte and Eduard, a married couple, Ottilie, Charlotte’s niece, and the Captain, a childhood friend of Eduard’s, defying the social value of marriage vows over true love. Reizenstein perpetuates Goethe’s exploration of this
belt under Jenny’s pillow, Hiram reveals that Albert, the young architect, who becomes a fireman later in the novel, left the belt for Jenny and suggests that she and Albert were drawn together through elective affinities, implying that the same force brought Lucy and Emil together as well (Reizenstein 465). Hiram’s use of elective affinities violates constructed ideas of virtue and fidelity by justifying desire and attraction outside the socially sanctioned institution of marriage. Reizenstein also uses elective affinity to re-conceptualize familial relationships. In his brief history of lesbians, Reizenstein describes a particular lesbian woman who evoked the jealousy of Queen Elizabeth I because of her relationship with Sir Walter Raleigh. He reports that this woman’s portrait was displayed in the Cabinet of Beauties in Munich and “her surprising resemblance to Orleana can only be the result of elective affinity, for Lesbos ‘produces no children’” (148). The inclusion of the theory of elective affinities helps to solidify the novel’s imagined revolution in terms of sexual enslavement rather than exclusively chattel slavery because the theory defies and resists socially imposed systems bent on diminishing desire, regulating sexual expression, and defining family structures. Consequently, the revolutionaries become those characters who incite insurrection through sexually transgressive acts, privileging desire over convention, and not those who are physically enslaved under a chattel plantation system in the text.

In addition to Emil and Lucy’s affair, the relationship between Orleana and Claudine becomes another significant revolutionary act in the novel. In fact, Rowan notes that “Reizenstein’s celebration of same-sex relationships remains a landmark in the portrayal of homosexuality in American fiction” and that he does not “hesitate to see the love of Orleana and dilemma and utilizes the theory as a foundation and impetus for his imagined sexual revolution in Mysteries.
Claudine as a revolutionary act, a gentle revolt […]” (Rowan xxxi), situated in a chapter, entitled “Lesbian Love,” that becomes central to illuminating Reizenstein’s sexual revolution. After Claudine has separated from her husband Albert, who laments marriage as “the grave of love,” she seeks council and comfort from her friend and confidant Orleana, a wealthy and beautiful German creole woman, who attracts the attention of many male suitors in New Orleans. As Claudine recounts the details of her separation to Orleana, she reveals to the reader that the two had been previously romantically involved: “Orleana, if you only knew what I still felt for you when I stood at the altar with Albert and you handed me the bridal crown!” (Reizenstein 144). The two women then confess their love for each other: “[I]t could not have been a crime that I love you,” Claudine exclaims (Reizenstein 144). As the chapter progresses, the encounter between the two lovers quickly moves into an intense dialogue, in which they affirm their mutual love, and begin to undress each other: “Claudine, Claudine, how tightly you are corseted!” “Orlena, Orleana, how easily your clothes fall away!” (Reizenstein 149). Due to the successive, uninterrupted dialogue, the reader is strangely present in the scene, gazing voyeuristically at the sexually transgressive act, witnessing the revolution of Claudine engaging in a sexual relationship that is both adulterous and homoerotic with Orleana instead of with her husband, Albert. After this encounter, Reizenstein raves against forces that would seek to oppress or suppress such genuine love, clearly endorsing the love between Orleana and Claudine, perhaps anticipating his readers’ moralistic objections:

Wherever the law claps love in permanent manacles, where the Church proclaims sensual denial, where false modesty and inherited morality keeps us from giving nature its right, then we lie down at the warm breasts of Mother Nature, listening to her secrets and surveying with burning eyes the great mechanism in which
every gear moans the word Love [...] But lightning bolts flash from dark clouds whenever tyrannical law and usurped morality seek to compel the children of earth to smother their vitality and entomb their feelings. (Reizenstein 151)

Again, Reizenstein utilizes the language of bondage (e.g. “clap love in permanent manacles”) in order to correlate the restrictions of moral and conventional conceptions of love and marriage to slavery. Not only does Reizenstein challenge the moral institution of heterosexual marriage, but also he promotes, and portrays positively, the possibility of same-sex relationships, a notion that might have been shocking for his nineteenth-century readership. The chapter then concludes with a polemical passage portraying various oppressed people and groups crying “Revolution!” In it, Reizenstein criticizes forms of domination and oppression, such as the Church, chattel slavery, misogyny, and the inhumane treatment of animals; however, the passage culminates with “‘Revolution!’ The women of Lesbos would storm, if we were to rebuke their love” (Reizenstein 151), perhaps indicating the importance Reizenstein assigns to the unregulated flourishing of human desire and sexual expression. The passage also serves once more to frame the novel’s primary revolution in sexual terms, and while the slave revolution loses traction in the text due to the lack of active enslaved characters and the containment efforts of the alternate, circular time and the prophetic chronotope, the sexual revolution gains momentum as it is actualized within the novel. That is, the reader witnesses the sexual revolution, which becomes a covert movement, reified discretely in bedrooms and obscured chambers, quietly undermining social laws, rendering the invisible world visible to the collective imagination of the readers. The novel provides readers insight into this secret revolution, which lacks the riotous clamor of public upheaval because it occurs in the domestic, private sphere, by depicting non-traditional relationships and forms of sexual expression behind closed doors. These sexually revolutionary
acts offer readers alternate models for conceptualizing marriage, family, and intimacy and, perhaps more profoundly, begin to help readers imagine the vitality and possible reality of these models in a nineteenth-century milieu hostile to such modes of living.

Perhaps in an effort to convey the imminence of the sexual revolution and titillate his readers, at the end of the “Lesbian Love” chapter, Reizenstein promises his “esteemed lady readership” a rare glimpse of a lesbian settlement at the end of the Third Book, so that they would “be convinced that lesbian ladies are not as bad as most, and that they are as decent and well mannered as the rest of the world of women, after their fashion” (151-152). However, at the end of the Third Book, Reizenstein must disappoint his readers: instead of providing a description of the lesbian settlement, he includes a letter of plea from the Headquarters of the Lesbian Women. In the text, the letter functions as a note to the author, and Reizenstein indicates clearly that the correspondence should be understood as a supplementary, extra-textual document by labeling the letter with the heading Paralipomena. In it, the writer implores Reizenstein not to “fulfill the promise he makes in to his esteemed lady readership in the seventh chapter of the second volume, namely to publicize [their] assemblies and to reveal their intimate nature” because the writer fears “the danger of being attacked by raw intruders and a curious moral proletariat” (304). In lieu of Reizenstein’s depiction, the writer of the letter offers “to satisfy the public […] by touching several points while leaving the most dangerous matters out” (304). The writer reveals,

The assumption that we live in clubs of several members is true only insofar as we have several gatherings in isolated places lasting several nights. Otherwise we live in pairs keeping our households just as the majority of society live together as man and wife. In the eyes of the world, when one of us has chosen a life-
companion, we are just good friends, sisters, or simply persons who deeply
esteem each other’s qualities. (Reizenstein 304)

Here, Reizenstein authenticates what he has suggested earlier with the positive portrayal of
Orleana and Claudine by demystifying same-sex relationships with an account from an outside
source, a lesbian writer. The letter quells moral opposition by identifying same-sex relationships
with socially sanctioned heterosexual marriages between “man and wife,” suggesting that such
relationships are not socially disruptive or destructive, but productive and meaningful. In fact,
the letter works to illuminate the fact that these relationships are already extant in the city,
extending and expanding the sexually revolutionary act of Orleana and Claudine into the “real
time” of the nineteenth-century reader. Furthermore, the inclusion of a letter from “Lesbia”
locates the community of lesbian woman in the “real time” of the contemporaneous reader,
integrating this group of women into the collective imagination of the German readership in
nineteenth-century New Orleans; in fact, the writer of the letter indicates that “the majority of
[the women] are of German extraction,” solidifying the position of the lesbian woman in the
community on terms of shared national origins.

The letter from the Headquarters of the Lesbian Woman becomes the most salient and
powerful juncture for the sexual revolution the novel envisions. Reizenstein puts the letter forth
in print as originating from an outside source, more specifically, from the collective lesbian
community in New Orleans, who, given the letter’s contents, has apparently followed the serial
publication of Mysteries in the Louisiana Staatszeitung because the letter expresses a clear
objection to the author’s promise to depict the secret goings-on of lesbian women. Additionally,
disclosing a specific location (Pensacola Landing, New Canal) and a contemporaneous date
(April 1854) the letter authenticates its contents by locating the writer (or community of writers)
in the space-time of the reader. The publication of the letter in the text begins to merge the novel’s chronotope with the “real” space-time of the nineteenth-century reader. As Reizenstein introduces extra-textual materials into the narrative (namely newspaper excerpts and letters), he continues to apply pressure to the closed system of circular time created by the manipulation of the linear prophetic sequence. Eventually, this pressure threatens to collapse the alternate time (as in, the fictional time of the novel) into the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader, imbuing the latter with revolutionary potential of the former. The inclusion of the letter from the lesbian community signals a cataclysmic breach in the novel’s alternate, circular temporality as Reizenstein localizes the source of this extra-textual artifact within contemporaneous New Orleans; therefore, the narrative’s circular, alternate time begins to coincide with the “real time” of the reader, and the nineteenth-century community of readers could begin to imagine the characters and happenings of the narrative, particularly the lesbian characters Orleana and Claudine and their relationship, as real people and moments located in the contemporaneous space-time. Consequently, the extraordinary space-time of the novel conflates with the quotidian space-time (our time) of the nineteenth-century reader, implying the sexual revolution to be well underway in the present.

As the letter breaches the closed system of alternate, circular time set in place by the novel’s prophetic chronotope, the text becomes porous and organic, not simply a fictional account of the city or mere speculation about the future. Instead, the revolutionary potential generated throughout the novel begins to flow freely between the space-time of the novel and the space-time of the reader, and perhaps, most harrowingly for the German-American readership in New Orleans, reveals that these are the same time. The existence of the secret sexual revolution heralds the arrival of the public slave revolution, though the details of abolition (i.e. the Civil
War and emancipation) remain obscure. The point being, Reizenstein anticipates, in a prophetic gesture, the end of institutional chattel slavery as a historical fact, soon to manifest in social, cultural, and political realities. However, Reizenstein uses chattel slavery, somewhat metaphorically in the novel, to identify other oppressive institutions that he views as forms of slavery, and, indeed, finds that, as reprehensible as chattel slavery may be, there are other covert slaveries ravaging human freedom and beauty as well. And in order to achieve true freedom, these other slaveries should not be overlooked. In this sense, the sexual and slave revolutions become one and the same, one necessitating the other; the struggle for physical freedom becomes the struggle for sexual freedom, and *Mysteries* helped the German-American readership begin to recognize the commonalities between the two and brace itself for the revolution at hand.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The revival of Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans* comes at an important juncture for Southern Studies as the field begins to take a transnational turn and seeks to disrupt monolithic conceptions of the region’s past in order to elucidate more comprehensive and inclusive histories, accounting for hitherto muted, yet vital, narratives that transgress state and national borders. Recovering such narratives that resist southern stereotypes and rigid codifications reorients Southern Studies, revealing the porous nature of the region and deconstructing homogenized experiences in favor of an amalgamation of disparate stories and identities, a nexus of narrative voices. From a transnational vantage point, *Mysteries* becomes a locus of understanding essential to uncovering immigrant, and more specifically German, experiences of the region. Indeed, the study of Reizenstein’s novel reveals that Germans participated in and contributed to U.S. national debates on slavery and helped to shape discourses that ultimately resulted in the abolition of the institution. *Mysteries* functions transnationally as it
applies a European abolitionist ideology to the U.S. dilemma of slavery, being written to and for a German ethnic minority in New Orleans. As the novel directly speaks to a community of German expatriates comprised of a complex network of regional and national identities (constructed as both German and American, influenced by southern socio-cultural, political, and economic structures, and tempered by various German regional backgrounds), it represents a multilectic process of competing ideologies and identities that shape and have shaped the U.S. South since the mid-nineteenth century, demystifying previously purported homogenized concepts of southernness in the collective U.S. regional and national memory.

As he addresses the most concentrated urban population of Germans in the U.S. South during the mid-nineteenth century, Reizenstein deliberately works to cultivate a sense of urgency in Mysteries by integrating contemporaneous newspaper excerpts and letters into the text, a gesture that effectively creates our time for his nineteenth-century readers. Reizenstein’s novel attempts to express the zeitgeist of the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. South, and not a fantastical or farfetched tale; therefore, he merges the quotidian time of his contemporaneous readership with the extraordinary time of the novel, so that his nineteenth-century readers perhaps began to imagine the events of novel as our present and future. Consequently, the novel’s prophetic chronotope begins to characterize the “real time” of the nineteenth-century readership and bear implications for its reality. On one hand, the novel’s construction of alternate, circular time and the manipulation of its linear prophetic sequence, seem to disavow the professed slave revolution through an implicit containment effort. On the other hand, the sexual revolution, which the novel seems to privilege, eventually begins to destabilize the text’s closed temporal system. The lack of active enslaved characters and the virtual absence of the prophesied messiah (save a brief appearance in the prologue) dislocate the slave revolution from the center of the narrative and
channel revolutionary potential into other forms of slavery and revolution. As Reizenstein portrays the sexual revolution within the novel and eventually locates that revolution in the contemporaneous space-time of the reader by including the letter from the Headquarters of Lesbian Women in the text, the novel’s closed temporal system sustains a fissure, and the revolutionary impetus generated throughout the novel explodes into the “real time” of the nineteenth-century reader, making both revolutions, slave and sexual, imaginable in the German collective consciousness in New Orleans.

The novel’s prophecy about the near future alerts the German-reading community in New Orleans to an imminent conflict over the institution of slavery. Mysteries helps the German community begin to imagine a revolution that would usher in the dissolution of chattel slavery in the U.S. South, but Reizenstein envisions other forms of slavery and oppression in the region as well. By the time Reizenstein writes Mysteries in the mid-1850s, the slave trade had already been made illegal across Western Europe; the abolition moment had come and gone there. Consequently, Reizenstein uses chattel slavery in the U.S. South to identify other covert, and, what he might have considered, endemic forms of human bondage, moral and societal restrictions on sexual expression. The novel’s prophecy then becomes a vision past the end of chattel slavery in the U.S. South, an end Reizenstein senses as inevitable and close at hand. Mysteries’ sexual revolution, in light of the novel’s imagined revolutions, then becomes the hyper-prophetic. As the novel espouses one revolution (against chattel slavery), it necessitates another (against the institution of marriage and social restrictions on sexual expression). Reizenstein delivers the prophecy of sexual revolution to the German community in New Orleans because they are perhaps one of the only groups who can conceive it, having already successfully traversed the revolutionary threshold of abolition in Europe. In the novel, chattel
slavery then becomes a contemporaneous U.S. circumstance that symbolizes and points to the existence of oppressive systems in other social enclaves. The portrayal of Lucy and Emil’s and Orleana and Claudine’s transgressive sexual relationships began to help readers imagine a newly configured social milieu of sexual freedom in the U.S. South and gave them insight into a secret sexual revolution already underway in New Orleans, covertly undermining social law before the advent of the Civil War and the abolition of chattel slavery.

Like the novel itself, Reizenstein’s understanding of slavery, and therefore revolution, complicate conceptions of regional and national borders. Though *Mysteries* was written for a specific audience at a certain time, the novel’s vision of freedom extends past the abolition of chattel slavery in the U.S. South and anticipates the persistence of other covert forms of slavery that plague human beauty and flourishing. In addition to embodied freedom, the novel calls for sexual freedom, a redemption that Reizenstein envisions as benefiting “every race.” The novel’s prophecy attempts to orient the nineteenth-century German-reading public of New Orleans toward the actualization of this future by inspiring its possibility in the imagination of the communal collective consciousness. By influencing the German-reading imagination through a fictional prophetic pronouncement, *Mysteries* initiates the process of revolutionary change in the reality of the nineteenth-century reader, suggesting that the construction of the prophetic chronotope in literature possesses the potential to galvanize a reading public toward change. As the novel exhibits the intricate relationships between prophecy and revolution, national belonging and expatriate identities, communal collective consciousness and fiction, and form and content, it also reveals the porous interaction between representations of reality in literature and reality itself and the symbiotic and dialogic nature between them. In this sense, prophecy emerges as an affective revolutionary strategy, transforming a readership’s imagination by
suggesting the plausibility of certain futures, focusing a formless future as a viable present, drawing the gaze toward the moment of prophetic fulfillment with anxious expectation.
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