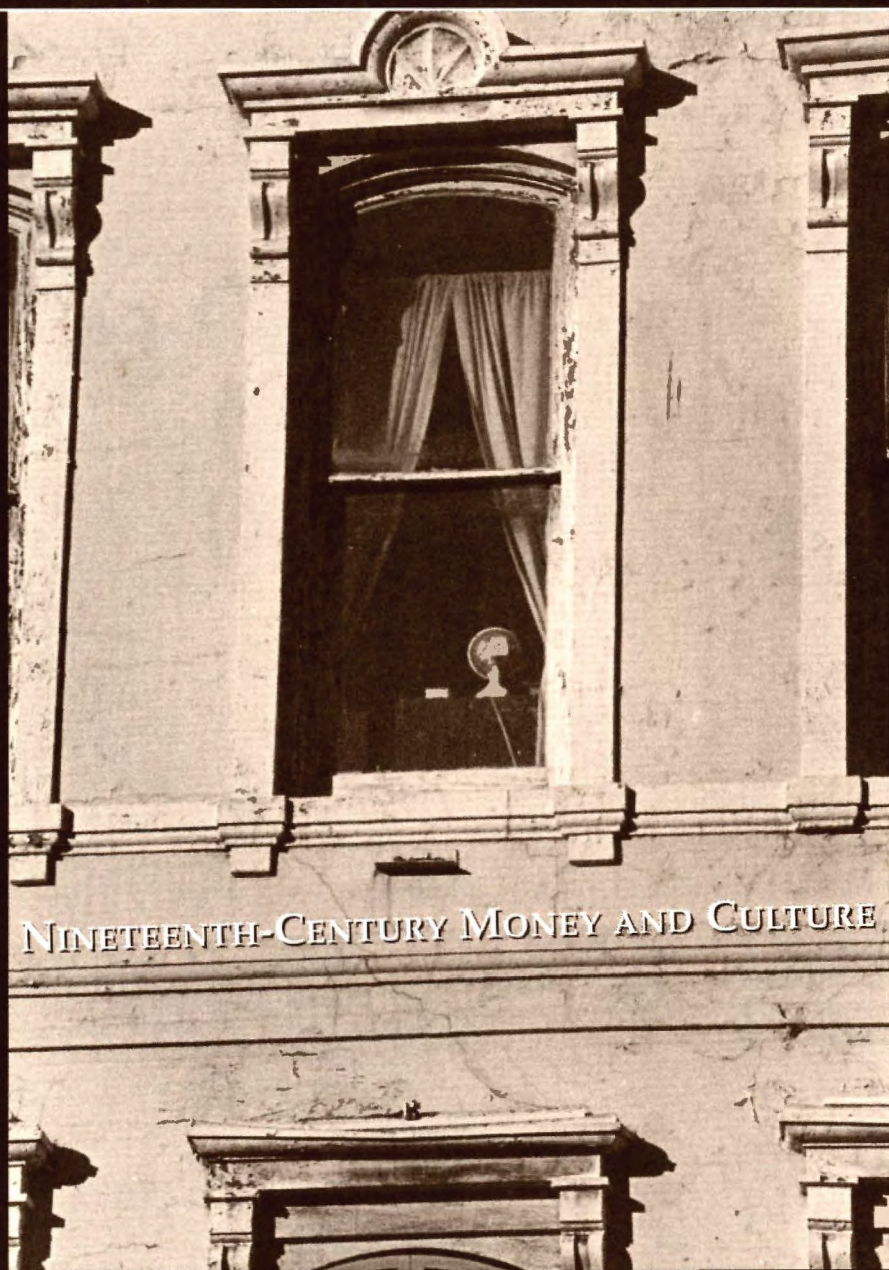


# New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 2



NINETEENTH-CENTURY MONEY AND CULTURE

Plus Poems by

Gallo • Signorelli-Pappas • Barrett • Callimachi

And a new story by Sheila Mulligan Webb

\$6



# New Orleans Review

Volume 24, Number 2

Summer 1998



Front Cover: Canal Street Series, #6.

Back Cover: Canal Street Series, #3.

Both by Jesse Morgan.

*New Orleans Review* is published quarterly by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States. Copyright © 1998 by Loyola University.

*New Orleans Review* accepts submissions of poetry, short fiction, essays, interviews and black and white art work or photography. Translations are also welcome but must be accompanied by the work in its original language. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Although reasonable care is taken, *NOR* assumes no responsibility for the loss of unsolicited material. Send submissions and individual subscriptions to:

*New Orleans Review*, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.

E-mail address: [noreview@beta.loyno.edu](mailto:noreview@beta.loyno.edu)

[http://www.magamall.com/magazine/88011/New\\_Orleans\\_Review.htm](http://www.magamall.com/magazine/88011/New_Orleans_Review.htm)

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Subscription rates:	Individuals:	\$18.00
	Institutions:	\$21.00
	Foreign:	\$32.00
	Back Issues:	\$ 9.00 each

Contents listed in the *PMLA Bibliography* and the *Index of American Periodical Verse*.

*New Orleans Review* is distributed to booksellers by:

Ingram Periodicals- 1226 Heil Quaker Blvd., LaVergne, TN 37086-7000

1-800-627-6247

DeBoer- 113 East Centre St., Nutley, NJ 07110

1-800-667-9300

Loyola University New Orleans is a charter member of the Association of Jesuit University Presses (AJUP).

US ISSN 0028-6400

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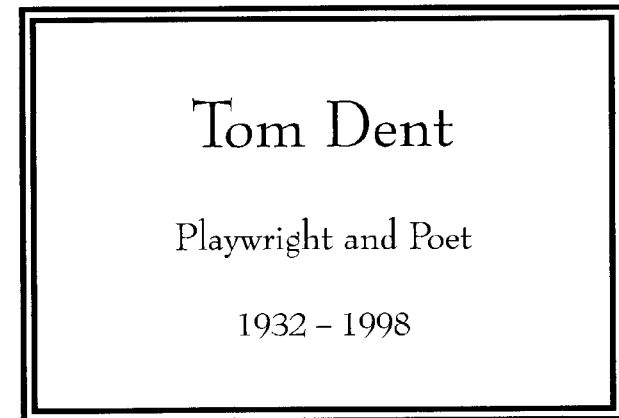
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THE CITY CARE FORGOT,  
OR,  
DUKE ALEXIS ALEXANDROVITCH ROMANOFF  
MEETS BUFFALO BILL, AFTER WHICH HE  
TRAVELS TO NEW ORLEANS FOR MARDI GRAS

He moped in Russia's expansive gloom,  
tossed weary pebbles in the Dnieper  
and dreamed of buffalo in America.  
Vodka was not his drink. He preferred  
the filigreed bouquet of French Chablis.

And Slavic women,  
how coarse.  
In America  
they were like canaries  
he'd heard sailors say.

So he booked passage for St. Louis  
and introduced himself to Buffalo Bill

who took him to Omaha  
where they joined Custer, Sheridan and a team  
of cowboys and founded "Camp Alexis."

He fell in love with  
Spotted Tail's daughter  
*If ever I cease to love...*  
and persuaded her  
to join him in Denver

Bill taught him how to shoot.  
The enraged beast nearly gorged him to death.

And that was that. He'd killed it.

What's next?

Topeka, Jefferson City, Louisville,  
Memphis, New Orleans (1877)

He fell in love with  
the divine Lydia Thompson  
who sang  
*If ever I cease to love*  
in "Bluebeard"

The Creoles adored her enough  
to name a baseball team after her.

The city was so excited about his Royal Highness  
it annulled the government to form  
The Krewe of Rex.

All night Alexis danced the quadrille  
with Lydia aboard the *James Howard*  
docked at Gravier Street Wharf.

The next night he attended *Il Trovatore*  
at the French Opera House  
and disappeared discreetly after the show.

On Mardi Gras Day they erected a throne  
across from City Hall on St. Charles St.

Louis Saloman, merchant, first King of Rex,  
draped in purple velvet and rhinestones,  
reared his horse to salute the Duke  
and Alexis bowed regally

*If ever I cease to love,*  
sang the first band,  
dropping their instruments,  
*If ever I cease to love*  
*May the Grand Duke*

*Ride a buffalo  
In a Texan rodeo*

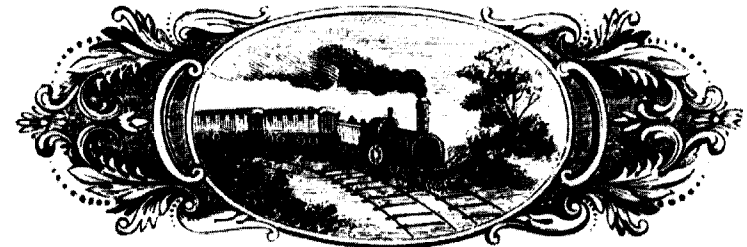
There followed a procession of the Ku Klux Klan, carriages full of smiling Chinese clothiers, Dan Rice's Famous Troupe of Trained Animals, caricatures of Lincoln and Grant, marching formations of Turks, Indians and Arabs, vans advertising Warner's Bitters, the Singer Sewing Machine, Mme. Tigau's Elixir for Ladies and Dr. Tichenor's Antiseptic

But Alexis had taken offense at the parody of Lydia's song and grew gloomy and dull, could not be persuaded to dance and refused "most of the invitations extended to him, failing to keep at least one appointment with Lydia Thompson and presenting his new little friend [an actress] with a bracelet of diamonds and pearls when at last he departed New Orleans forever." We can only presume

that the cold, windswept form wrapped in bearskins, trudging across endless steppes, gleaned in the Krewe a future without him, crazed anarchists, festering cells of saboteurs, wild democracy, insolent, wicked canaries, death.

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY MONEY AND CULTURE

SELECTED PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
THIRTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF  
INCS  
INTERDISCIPLINARY NINETEENTH-CENTURY STUDIES



Janice Carlisle  
Richard E. Johnson  
Michele Levy  
Guest Editors

## INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies (INCS) is an international scholarly association devoted to the exploration from a variety of disciplinary perspectives of important and controversial cultural issues. For the past thirteen years, the association has sponsored an annual meeting, inviting papers relevant to the announced conference theme. Meeting in New Orleans for the second time in recent years—1992 was the earlier occasion—the members of INCS in 1998 addressed the subject of “Nineteenth-Century Money and Culture.” Loyola University served as the host institution, and the program, like that of 1992, was developed by a local inter-university committee, chaired again this time by Richard E. Johnson (Department of English, Loyola University) and including on this occasion Janice Carlisle (English, Tulane University), Michele Levy and Sheri Hoem (English, Xavier University of Louisiana), and Joyce Zonana (English, University of New Orleans).

The meeting, held this year on April 17 and 18, began on Friday morning with a plenary forum of four distinguished scholars: Patrick Brantlinger, Professor of English and Cultural Studies at Indiana University; Ann Cvetkovich, Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin; Philip E. Mirowski, Carl E. Koch Professor of Economics at the University of Notre Dame; and Richard F. Teichgraber III, Professor of History and Director, Murphy Institute for Political Economy at Tulane University. The keynote address, “The Anxiety of Affluence: Specularity in Political Economy and *Hard Times*,” was delivered the next day by Mary Poovey, Professor of English at New York University. Adding to and amplifying on the diverse perspectives offered by these speakers, over one hundred participants in the 1998 conference presented their work in twenty-eight panels on such diverse subjects as authorship and professionalism, sexuality, gender, consumerism, empire, the law, material culture, women and the marketplace, religion, race, family, and nation.

The selection of essays collected for this issue of the *New Orleans Review* exemplifies the quality and creativity characteristic of INCS scholarship. Focusing, of necessity, on a specific number of the wide variety of subjects treated by other participants on the conference panels—which included matters as varied as sensational murders in a Canadian town, slave traffickers, Queen Victoria, and jewelry made from human hair—the six essays in this collection demonstrate the wide-ranging purview of the work being undertaken by members of INCS. More importantly, however, they share a characteristic of current literary and cultural studies at their best: the impulse to make connections between diverse disciplines and forms of thought.

The first two essays treat the rise of economic thinking during the nineteenth century in its relations to a wide range of subjects and contexts. Gordon Bigelow in “Technologies of Debt: Bank Finance and the Subject of

Economic Thought” traces the emergence of the now powerful explanatory model of economics—the study of the production, distribution, and consumption of products and services—from its origin in eighteenth-century conceptions of political economy, the study of the sources of a nation’s wealth. Surveying the major shifts in economic thought during the century in which it took its present form, Bigelow demonstrates that these developments reflect changes in philosophical theories of language, issuing ultimately in a Romantic conception of the modern market as the expression of a consumer’s desires. As Bigelow argues, “It is only by reading political economy in its broadest cultural contexts that we can begin to study the cultural and ideological work taken on by the discipline of economics today,” and he makes his contribution toward such an understanding by encompassing such diverse subjects as philosophy, theology, banking, gender, and colonialism.

Like Bigelow, Fritz Breithaupt casts a wide net in his essay, “Money as a Medium of Communication and Money as Individuation,” asking, as Bigelow does, why economic thinking should have become during the nineteenth century “a major paradigm to explain the world.” Breithaupt’s answer lies in what he sees as the complex and elusive ways in which money functions: as an abstract and supposedly neutral concept, for instance, money functions as a medium of communication, drawing together people of different interests; yet, in its concrete manifestation (what Marx identified as the “sensual-unsensual fetish of money”), money promotes individuation. Indeed, the abstract aspect of money can screen the fight for individuality that money promotes, obscuring as well forms of social violence that attend the struggle. Like Bigelow, Breithaupt expands the purview of his analysis to explain the extraordinary power that economics has had in defining what we understand as modernity.

In both of the essays in this collection focusing on individual British literary texts, Laura George and Sharon Leah Kayfetz explore the relation between economics and gender, specifically the connections between commerce and masculinity. In “Figures of Commerce in the ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads*,” George reads Wordsworth’s 1800 poetic manifesto in the multiple contexts characteristic of the essays in this collection by linking Wordsworth’s championship of unadorned language with early nineteenth-century conceptions of the “modern, white, British, capitalist masculinity” that is constituted by “the repudiation of ornament and . . . fashion.” Like the business suit, Wordsworth’s ideal poetic language is to be a kind of “second skin.” Although the central bond elucidated in this essay is the identification of language and dress as “two foundational signs of culture,” George’s analysis, like Bigelow’s and Breithaupt’s, points to the relation between capitalism and its gendered subjects, between the women who act out an apparently insatiable appetite for consumption and the male capitalists who paradoxically restrain in themselves the consumerist desires from which they profit.

Similarly, Kayfetz in dealing with George Eliot’s 1859 novel, *Adam Bede*,



connects “the libidinal...exchange economy” that defines the relation between men and women and the “material economy” of “business.” This essay, “Counterfeit Coins and Traffic Jams: Rewriting Masculinity in *Adam Bede*,” draws on and complicates Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential reading of this novel in *Between Men*. Kayfetz explores the ways in which Hetty, as a kind of “counterfeit coin,” actually interrupts the homosocial dealings of two men. More importantly, with Hetty offstage by the end of the novel, Eliot is able to recreate the earlier triangular relation between two men and one woman by placing a second woman, Dinah Morris, in one of the positions previously held by a man. In doing so, as Kayfetz argues, Eliot reveals through her narrative structures the shortcomings of the central cultural assumptions that we still make when we unthinkingly identify activity with masculinity or passivity with femininity.

The other three essays in this collection perform additional variations on the theme of changing philosophies of language and culture and of money as it signifies both. The studies by Thomas A. Vogler and Anne R. Trubek shift our attention from Europe to America. In “The Economy of Writing and Melville’s Gold Doubloon,” Vogler juxtaposes “the act of figuration as symbol” in *Moby-Dick* (1851) to nineteenth-century discourses on paper money and the gold standard. Just as the gold doubloon “suggests a scene of inscription in which signifier and signified are wedded in a union of values...in which we have the thing itself in a double way, both as external existent and as meaning or explanation,” so, Vogler maintains, Ishmael’s tattoos of the whale’s skeleton on his arm signify the fusion of science and art as well as reveal an epigraphic impulse. Focusing on the “Romantic obsession with the epistemology of figuration,” Vogler draws on Romantic poets, Marx, Freud, de Saussure, Lacan, Derrida, and Todorov, inter alia, to show how literary interpretation and narrative structure, like paper money whose “*face* value is [in] its *faith* value,” rely for their significance upon “the trust of the reader.” Ultimately, Vogler uncovers the way in which the novel itself signs the essential indeterminacy of narration: all its voices, from the narrator to the “novel as text,” including “the infinite iterability of signifiers to that image of textual authority our tradition has fixed on the Bible,” fuse together “into the same fatherless web of signification.”

Drawing on concepts characteristic of Vogler’s analysis and Bigelow’s argument, Trubek’s “Forgers of the Real: Trompe L’Oeil Paintings of Money” engages the visual arts. From Ishmael’s tattoos, she shifts our attention to “a uniquely American genre,” paintings of paper money. Maintaining that these paintings and the commodities that they depict have “magical properties, uncannily appearing to be something they are not,” she asserts that both phenomena, “at once brutally concrete and abstract, material and immaterial,” appear “devoid of any human maker and disembodied from any referent.” In her work Trubek makes clear how these paintings both parallel and transcend “the logic of capitalism.” Viewers first lose perspective before these signs of

commodities that in themselves essentially constitute signs. Thus rendered subjects, they are then ready to enact the impulse to touch, if not to use, the represented object. But the desire to make meaning eventually impels viewers to supply the missing perspective: working to construct the story of the painting, each viewer comes, at last, to recognize the gap between representation and reality as well as the artifice inherent in the real.

The final essay in this collection returns us to Europe. In “Regulating the Market: The Society of Authors and the Professionalization of Literary Production,” Timothy J. Wager analyzes the role of the Society of Authors, a literary organization founded in 1884 “as part of a long term effort to improve the socio-economic status of authors.” Treating first a lecture and an essay by Walter Besant and Henry James respectively—both works called “The Art of Fiction” and both appearing in 1884—Wager echoes the insights of Bigelow and Breithaupt, who underscore the centrality of economics to our definition of the modern. Wager claims that modernism “may have developed partially due to professionalism’s infiltration of authorship,” not only because it redefined what was considered high art but also because it had a similarly formative effect on conceptions of mass fiction. Contending that such professionalization arose as a means by which to mediate between the rule of the mass market and that of the so-called elite, Wager establishes why, however, at this “crucial moment in literary history” the Society of Authors failed in its attempt both to “trace and [to] erase the divisions between high and mass literature.”

These essays as a group, therefore, draw freely upon the discourses of contemporary theory to examine the functions of money in the zeitgeist of the West, from the Continent to Britain and America, tracing from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century the complicated economic implications of many of our most prominent cultural forms and practices. As these essays treat philosophy, rhetoric, non-fiction prose, novels, fine art, and the literary marketplace, they expose elemental links between money and signification, money and interpretation, inviting fruitful connections not only to the nineteenth, but to our own century as well. As Gordon Bigelow points out in the essay that opens this collection, economics, currently established as both an academic discipline and “a practice of public policy,” has political consequences precisely because it figures the market as a “neutral arena where each economic actor is seen simply as the agent of his or her own desire.” By tracing back to the nineteenth-century and even earlier the origins of this distinctively modern form of subjectivity, these essays contribute to our understanding of both the real power and the real illusions that define the role of money in our own culture.



## TECHNOLOGIES OF DEBT: BANK FINANCE AND THE SUBJECT OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT

In contemporary neo-colonial relations, power and privilege are understood primarily through the terms and concepts provided by the study of economics. Empire's frank assertions of hierarchy in race, class, and gender have been replaced in foreign policy by the sanitized terms of development, growth, and free trade. As an academic discipline and as a practice of public policy, economics is a crucial tool for sustaining the illusion that domination, either at the level of the household or of the international agreement, is today nonviolent and non-coercive. To understand the consolidation of modern economics, it is necessary to understand the origins of its precursor, political economy, in eighteenth-century thought. This eighteenth-century context is one itself absorbed with the question of origins, not only the origins of wealth, but, significantly, of human language, philosophy, and civilization. Adam Smith develops a theory of wealth and poverty directly out of his engagement with the philosophy of language, in debates about the role of signs in human history, and about the significance of different forms of writing. I work briefly in this essay to understand the development of economic thought, from "political economy" to "economics," in dialogue with the broadest concerns of the philosophy of language.

The widespread philosophical interest throughout the eighteenth-century in the origin of languages was, as Derrida argues at the opening of *Of Grammatology*, a response in part to contemporary scholarly interest in Chinese script and Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. Leibniz for example, following on the work of Jesuit missionaries in China, mistakenly regarded Chinese to be a purely non-phonetic language, detached from the alterable forms of speech (Mungello 197, 206).<sup>1</sup> As a result, he considered Chinese "a model of philosophic language thus removed from history" (*Grammatology* 76). But while Leibniz imagined a writing with direct relation to the forms of thought themselves, unmediated by reference to spoken language, this dream threatened to collapse the understanding common in European cultures of the possibility of truth.

In this dominant European conception, truth resides in the mind of the thinking subject *prior* to its representation. The mental "signified" is privileged as an authentic intention of the subject, before its only slightly debased articulation in speech. As Derrida writes then, "the voice, producer of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind" (11). And while spoken signifiers seem to possess an original closeness to that prior mind, "the written signifier is always technical and representative"

(11), associated with a fall from the interior of truth or presence to the exterior of earthly deceit and materiality. Non-phonetic writing systems showed that it was possible to communicate without reference to the voice and thus, metaphorically, without reference to "truth." In this way, non-phonetic script opened a gap which a tremendous amount of ideological work was needed to close. It threatened to decenter Europe in world history, showing that Asian, African, and New World forms of script were equally sophisticated forms of communication that carried richer traditions of knowledge, and it threatened the dominant conception of the subject, the boundaries of "the human" itself. If writing could exist without being a representation of speech, then it was possible that the essential being of the subject was in fact not in control of the signs it chose. It opened the possibility that the concept of "the self," of the intentional being, was itself "written," a representational or "grammatological" construct. Early eighteenth-century theories of the origin of language addressed these threats by trying to prove that phonetic writing was the most perfect, most highly "evolved" system of script.

But while conceptions of truth and authority are threatened in the eighteenth century by the decentering of the "voice," they are also challenged by a radically new form of money. This challenge arose also out of the contingencies of colonialism, in response to the need for the centralization of power and its exercise across great distances. The first state bank, the Bank of England, was founded in 1694 in order to manage the debts incurred in the military suppression of Ireland and in the competition with Holland for naval supremacy. The bank did this by distributing government debt in shares, which were themselves bought and sold on an open stock market. This system of bank finance institutionalized the possibility of amazingly rapid creation and destruction of personal wealth; share prices could fluctuate widely according to the degree of public confidence in government policies, and with these price shifts thousands of pounds could appear or vanish overnight.

Systems of recorded information challenge the idea that human subjects are sole authors of their thoughts, since reliance on these systems foregrounds the construction of human perception and thought by the sign, as a material system that precedes human intentionality. Banking is one of these technologies of information, one that relies fundamentally on a system of written records. In addition it is a system of mathematical calculation. On a formal level, mathematics has in common with hieroglyphic and ideographic scripts that it is a non-phonetic system of writing. It represents concepts without reference to the voice. Mathematics functions thus as "the place where the practice of scientific language challenges intrinsically and with increasing profundity the ideal of phonetic writing and all its implicit metaphysics" (Derrida 10). With the rise of bank finance then, social power begins to stem less from traditional observances than from the mathematical calculation of financial numbers. This technical "writing" of the market seemed thus to have an agency of its own, undermining

the agency conceived within the speaking subject. The study of political economy emerged in response to these conditions, attempting to confine the agency of financial information within acceptable ideological bounds (see also Thompson, 41).

In eighteenth-century England the instabilities presented by systems of financial information are coded in the metaphor of gender. The veering stock market and the excessive desire of the stock speculator, as the work of J. G. A. Pocock has demonstrated, appear as feminine disruptions to the sense of masculinity traditionally associated with property and political power. The rational calculation of speculative wealth threatens to limit the transmission of power through patriarchal inheritance, just as the form of mathematical signs interrupts the phonetic transmission of the substance of the mind. It becomes the project of eighteenth-century political economy to posit the calculating subject of financial writing as the masculine agent of global civilization. To do this Adam Smith had to construct a world history that would prove finance capitalism to be the key to European superiority, and to refigure the investor within the gender-appropriate terms of masculine "virtue" (Hont and Ignatieff 2; Pocock, "Cambridge Paradigms" 240). However, Smith accomplishes this by assuming that language and signs play a material, constructive role in the formation of the human subject. Smith's scheme recenters Europe but fails to settle the dangerous question of representation, which the technologies of debt finance had posed.

This is the milieu out of which the study of Economics emerges; debates about the practice of finance and the politics of wealth overlapped with debates about human civilization and the evidence of divine power in human history. Political economy's origins are in Europe's struggle not only to clarify the role of capitalism in its own history, but to claim the authority of God in its colonization of the globe. Modern ways of understanding poverty, "development," and markets arose in connection with these debates about the meaning of gender, sexuality, class, and nationality—that is, what the nineteenth century would call "national character," and what the twentieth century would call "race." It is only by reading political economy in its broadest cultural contexts that we can begin to study the cultural and ideological work taken on by the discipline of economics today.

#### 1. HISTORY AS ABSTRACTION: CONDILLAC'S PHILOSOPHY OF SIGNS

While William Warburton's *Divine Legation* inaugurates the origin of language debate in England, his influence is less apparent in Adam Smith's early work than that of Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac. Writing in the 1740s, Condillac accepted Locke's strictly empirical account of human consciousness, but he argued that Locke was imprecise in demonstrating that higher mental activities could have developed from sensations alone. The key to this development, he writes, is "the use of signs" (11). In its first experience of conscious-

ness, he argues, the mind registers only immediate sensory perceptions. Some strong perceptions, however, are, Condillac writes, "occasioned by their objects to continue still in the mind, when those objects are removed" (38). The power to retain or recall to the mind a perception when absent from its object or cause, is what Condillac calls "imagination."

But imagination, for Condillac, is a difficult and taxing mental operation, requiring the mind to recreate a total sensory "image." There is, however, another operation that can recall central features of an object without reproducing its full sensory impact. He writes,

It is not always in our power to revive the perceptions we have felt. On some occasions the most we can do is, by recalling to mind their names, to recollect some of the circumstances attending them, and an abstract idea of the perception . . . the operation which produces this effect I call memory. (38-9)

Memory is a more efficient means of recalling an absent object, but what is necessary for this operation is a *sign*, a marker which can hold the place of the object without requiring the imagination to reproduce each aspect of its full perception. It is on this basis that Condillac writes, "the use of signs is the real cause of the progress" of the mind (51). As long as the imagination "is not subordinate to our command, we cannot dispose of our attention as we please" (57). However, "the very dawn of memory is sufficient to make us masters of the habit of our imagination" (59).

Once the habit of using signs is established, Condillac argues, the mind is increasingly freed to conceive of abstract and general ideas, which are not connected to any single object but rather to the common properties of a whole class of objects. Only through the sign-using power can the mind consider a number of objects simultaneously, comparing their minute similarities. This operation will produce new signs, to mark the abstract qualities a number of objects share. Condillac is quite careful to point out, however, that the categories from which these abstract signs originate are creations of human thought, not inherent in nature. "It is less in regard to the nature of things, than to our manner of knowing them, that we determine their genus or species" (139). This becomes the basis of Condillac's critique of metaphysics, where he argues that earlier metaphysical philosophy, "vain and ambitious, wants to search into every mystery; into the nature and essence of beings, and the most hidden causes" (2). For Condillac abstract ideas are constructed through linguistic combination, not natural truth. But once an abstract concept is built from a number of simple ideas and encoded in a sign, its construction is forgotten and that sign appears to represent a natural essence, instead of a bit of human shorthand.

Condillac's theory of abstraction presents history as the gradual "mastery" of the human mind over an increasingly passive and feminized material world.

He thus offers a classically masculinist defense of European dominance; European society represents the height of abstract “efficiency,” exercising a business-like dominion over the rest of the world, which remains mired in its inefficient sign systems. However, Condillac’s emphasis is on language as a tool, a material technique or technology for “writing” the mind; far from being molded by preexisting human intentions, the sign for Condillac creates the very concept of “mind” through a series of building blocks. This understanding of language threatens to undermine any deliberate ethnocentrism, for Condillac’s critique of metaphysical essences renders any distinction between civilizations radically contingent. Within Condillac’s theory, there can be no permanent and essential differences between human societies, only different modes of conventional practice, encoded in signs.

## 2. THE ABSTRACTION OF LABOR: *THE WEALTH OF NATIONS*

Among Adam Smith’s first published works is “A Dissertation on the Origin of Languages,” an essay that precedes in complete agreement with the principles set down by Condillac. In the *Wealth of Nations* Smith continues to work with the historiographical concerns of this early piece, framing the entire work, in his introduction, with the question of how human productive power developed over time. The engine of economic progress in world civilization, Smith argues, is the division of labor, which he describes in a series of famous passages in his opening chapter, and which turns out to be another application of the principle of abstraction. For Smith the first signs would denote each aspect or attribute of a single object or event, but the range of objects and events contained in early language would be quite limited; with the rise of a diversity of signs, language becomes efficient enough to refer to any combination of objects, and it does this by dividing the early wholistic signs until they refer to smaller and more precise abstract ideas. The history of economic civilization works for Smith in precisely the same way. The first labor was “unified,” both in that one person would perform each task necessary to create a given object or process, and in that each person would perform every aspect of the labor necessary to sustain life. Labor becomes more and more “efficient” when its most general procedures, common to many different types of activity, are isolated into abstract operations, which could be applied to many different kinds of work.

It seems impossible to understand Smith’s concept of free trade, his most well-known theme today, without understanding its roots in the philosophy of language. Perhaps most famously at the end of Book 4, Smith argues that any system which either restricts or protects industry, “retards, instead of accelerating the progress of the society towards real wealth and greatness” (745). This argument is only possible in the context of his earlier thought. Given that Smith works within Condillac’s model of history as a self-perpetuating progress of abstract signs, he concludes that every obstruction to the rise of abstraction amounts to a retardation of human potential.

## 3. THE RISE OF VALUE

But while this justification of free trade served to place market capitalism successfully in a narrative of European exceptionalism, it still presented some problems for capitalism. The very emphasis on the historical dimension of production led, particularly in the work of Ricardo, to a potentially distressing focus on the limits of economic growth. While Smith had defended the frivolous pleasures of the rich, in the famous “invisible hand” passage, on the grounds that they stimulated the division of labor, Ricardo’s 1817 work tended to stress the potential conflict between social classes, and the limited resources any market could make available to them.

The answer to this problem came in a number of early nineteenth-century works, including several essays on political economy by Thomas De Quincey, all of which reoriented political economy around the theory of value, and argued that the only meaningful definition of value in market society was the desire felt by the purchaser for a given commodity. This focus on desire represents a major shift in the understanding of the market. Where Smith and Ricardo posit models of development based on the expansion of production, here consumer demand alone influences the aggregate level and distribution of wealth. In this transition one can argue that the work of Adam Smith is ultimately abolished. Smith’s work was conceived in reaction to the fear that, as financial technologies grew more powerful, the value of all goods (and the system of social “values”) would become increasingly unstable. The idea that the value of a given stock share might rise or fall at the whim of common consumers was interpreted in the eighteenth century as a metaphorically feminine threat.

The work of Adam Smith met this symbolic threat associated with capitalist markets head on, arguing that the abstraction of social “signs” would actually enhance the “masculine” virtues of society. The demand theory of value, however, *embraces* the idea that markets are driven by desire. Thus the eighteenth-century threat against which Smith marshals his whole career becomes, in the nineteenth century, the central assumption of economic thought. But while it was gradually accepted that the demand or utility theory led to a more accurate model of market *prices*, the philosophical problems associated with this idea never disappeared.

Smith’s assumptions about subjectivity developed through his engagement with Condillac, and this turn in nineteenth-century theory also worked in parallel with the philosophy of language. In the Demand theory of value, commodities were conceived as signs not of any single measure—like labor, or gold—but as the expression of a prior feeling in the mind of the consumer. In the same way philologists of the romantic era conceived language as a neutral medium for expressing the prior intention of the speaker. Against Condillac and Smith’s interest in language as a clue to subject-formation, nineteenth-

century philosophers of language sought an “inductive” or “positive” focus on language as actually spoken. Ignoring the eighteenth-century concern with the observing subject, the nineteenth century simply assumed that the speaker of language was a coherent entity, whose thought preceded the process of its articulation in language (Aarsleff, *Study* 96-106, 162-310).<sup>2</sup>

In this way political economy gradually becomes in the nineteenth century what Derrida calls a “logocentric” theory of representation. That is, it posits an ideal desire or intention in the consumer which is unaffected by the market. Eighteenth-century observers worried that signs themselves—in the information system of the national debt—would steal social agency from the propertied classes, by inciting the greed of a class of unscrupulous speculators. The nineteenth century crafts a subject in which the desire for wealth and commodities is natural and pre-existing.<sup>3</sup> Just as Derrida demonstrates that a kind of “writing” precedes speech, critics of political economy since Marx have made it their aim to demonstrate that the commodity, and the whole system of social relations it implies, precedes and constructs the consumer’s desire for it.

The manifold threat symbolized in systems of financial information was addressed in what proved to be more lasting terms by William Stanley Jevons, whose mathematical reformulation of the theory of value set the program for twentieth-century economics. He argued that political economy should confine itself to the positive behavior of individuals and groups in the marketplace, and that, to signal its narrowed emphasis on the calculation of relative value, the discipline ought to change its name from “political economy” to “economics.” “Economics” thus became increasingly distant from “politics” and cultivated a patina of scientific objectivity based in numerical analysis. It avoided judgments—traditional in political economy since Adam Smith—about why certain people or nations were rich and others poor, focusing only on concrete instances of market behavior.

In order to avoid what Jevons called the “the inherent defects of the grammar and dictionary for expressing complex relations” (5), he advocated exclusively mathematical methods: “The symbols of mathematical books . . . form a perfected system of language . . . . They do not *constitute* the mode of reasoning they embody; they merely facilitate its exhibition and comprehension” (5). In this formulation we see the absolute triumph of the non-phonetic language of calculation which had plagued the era of finance capitalism from its first institutions. Against this threat to the agency of thought, Jevons affirms that mathematical symbols (like any other in his view) simply aid in the “exhibition” of thoughts, the display of an already complete and autonomous will.

For Jevons then, the market gives quantifiable evidence of individual desires. “Just as we measure gravity by its effects in the motion of a pendulum,” he writes, “so we may estimate the equality or inequality of feelings by the decisions of the human mind. The will is our pendulum, and its oscillations are minutely registered in the price lists of the markets (11). Rather than being

constructed by natural or cultural systems of perception, the human subject in its private, literally un-spoken desires, is understood here as a kind of natural force, like gravity, which pushes and pulls social institutions into the forms which most accurately reflect it. Within this system, differences between individual economic actors, or between national economies, can only be understood as evidence of different forms of autonomous desire.

It is here that the market as understood generally in twentieth-century economics emerges: a neutral arena where each economic actor is seen simply as the agent of his or her own desire. History and material conditions are presumed irrelevant to economic acts, at the level of their psychological origin. Within this system, poverty—whether individual or national—can be explained implicitly as a matter of choice, merit, intelligence, or natural prudence. This theory of value effectively compensates for the dangerous agency of market technologies. Rather than destroying the fabric of society, or inspiring acts of ruthless greed, money and debt are here seen simply as the transparent language in which humans express their unique individuality.

Just as recent critical theories of language and literature have sought to displace the intentional subject of literary creation, so we need now to challenge the expressivist subject of economics. It took a great deal of cultural work to make the subjectivity of the consumer seem inevitable and universal, although today it is taken as the starting point for any conception of economic relations. Historicizing this economic subject can help us begin to question the rhetoric of economic globalization, and to refine the tools of postcolonial theory and cultural studies that might make clearer the global relations of power this economic paradigm obscures.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Christopher Leigh Connery for this reference.

<sup>2</sup>On the nineteenth-century reception of Condillac, see Aarsleff’s essay “The Tradition of Condillac” in the volume *From Locke to Saussure*.

<sup>3</sup>On this point see Regenia Gagnier’s “On the Insatiability of Human Wants: Economic and Aesthetic Man,” to which this essay is indebted in many ways.

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## Fritz Breithaupt

### MONEY AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION AND MONEY AS INDIVIDUATION

This paper<sup>1</sup> examines how economy was able to become a major paradigm to explain the world. Why is it that we, at the end of the twentieth century, rationalize so many aspects of life in terms of economy? In particular, the question is how the science of monetary circulation as developed by Adam Smith was able to become a general principle of other disciplines during the nineteenth-century, rather than remaining just a 'science of business.'<sup>2</sup> This wider sense of economics allows not only for Marx' explanation of politics and society in terms of economy, but also for Nietzsche's claim that all morals are based on the structure of creditor and debtor and Freud's use of economy for explaining the 'household' of the psyche (Freud invents the apparatus of the psyche as an economic enterprise that organizes its actions in order to increase its 'libido,' the legal tender of the soul). This trend to explain the dynamics of different areas of social interaction in terms of economy continues today. As scholars of literature, we are familiar with terms like "the economy of literature," a common phrase already before Marc Shell's study. Economy seems to offer a model for the explanation of the world that subsumes other models, and it has been claimed that other discourses like politics, morality, religion, aesthetics, culture, and philosophy are in the process of disappearing only to reappear as masks of economic interests. One can even ask whether there is anything that resists money and money economy (this is Derrida's question in *Giving Time: Counterfeit Money*). Our question of why economy is so successful as a meta-discipline, then, includes the question why the money paradigm is 'stronger' than other discourses or paradigms, enabling it to swallow, invade, or undermine them. This certainly is a question with many implications, too big perhaps for a short article, but I will allow myself to speculate on this matter in a hypothetical form.

We owe Jean-Joseph Goux many insights in the structural similarity between economy and other areas such as language and the Freudian psyche.<sup>3</sup> But while Goux' project has been to show how any operation of substitution and any entity operating with substitutions can be seen as an economy, he makes it difficult to explain the rise of such a universal concept of economy. In fact, following Goux' concepts, one would have to conclude that economy was already structurally organizing social life long before capitalism emerged in the nineteenth-century. It is here that I will take a slightly different turn by examining the specific attraction of the economic model. Certainly, it is not as

if one can simply choose the model by which one makes sense of one's world, be it an economic, religious, scientific, ethnic, gender, cultural, or political model. But one can still ask what qualities account for the success of the economic model in the last two centuries.

There are several ways that one can discuss money and its associated phenomena. One can focus on money as a possession, on the rules of its circulation, its different historical or cultural occurrences, or the symbolic order in provides. The following analysis will take as its starting point a discussion of money's ability to bring different agents and objects together in the form of communication. As a 'medium of communication,' money allows for mediation between all kinds of differences. The strength of such a concept is that it not only describes the monetary circulation, but it is also suited to explain operations within and even between other discourses. While other disciplines or spheres are typically based on certain distinctions and fundamental axioms (thus, politics are based on the distinction of friend and enemy according to Carl Schmitt, theology is based on a belief, etc.), money as a medium is in itself completely 'empty' so that it can be applied to all entities. However, as we will see, the task of our analysis will also be to point out what a theory of money as a medium of communication cannot explain. This will bring us to a second concept of money that accompanies the first one and that will help us to explain the expansion of the meaning of economy in the last centuries: Money as individuation. The hypothesis of this paper is that the success of economy is itself the result of a certain overlap within the economic, an overlap that allows for an oscillation between money as a medium of communication and money as individuation.

Explaining the attraction of the economic paradigm necessitates a discussion of what we call the economic. I will begin by recapitulating some of Marx' insights about money and economy, but will then take a perhaps less familiar road of thought.

1) Money makes the exchange of different goods possible by providing a ground of comparison between them. Money thereby does not function as a possession itself, but as a standard of value that can be assigned to objects, entities, or services that are to be exchanged or 'evaluated.' This monetary value introduces a scheme of evaluation that is not itself a feature of the exchanged object but nevertheless determines the object as a 'commodity.' Marx called the unit of this value 'labor.' Every item of trade would be calculated according to the amount of anonymous or abstract labor- time necessary to produce it. Thus, money is not an entity but a mere mental construct that takes a specific place in the relationship of two or more entities that otherwise cannot be compared by one measurement. Marx called this mental construct a "fetish" with "theological oddities"—a 'religious' concept that only exists in the beliefs of people without a basis in reality. Marx' famous words:

The form of wood, e.g., is changed when one makes a table from it. Nevertheless, the table remains wood, an ordinary sensual thing. But in the moment the table makes an appearance as commodity, it transforms itself into a sensual-supersensual [*sinnlich-, bersinnlich*] thing. It does not stand with its feet on the ground, but stands on... its head and behaves crazy as if it would start, on its own will, to dance (Chapter 1).

For Marx, money (and money value that makes a commodity a commodity) is the one existing entity that reaches beyond the sensual and sensible.

2) 'Money,' as Marx suggests, is both a mental construct and its visible manifestation. We will see below that this conflation or confusion of money as a universal mental construct *and* a visible entity with specific ownership called money is decisive. It explains how an empty concept of value still continues to attract personal interest.

3) The "fetish character of money" consists of its presentation of that which is not equal as if it were. That is why it is a mere fetish—it produces an *as-if*-equality. The mental construct makes complex trade between otherwise distinct individuals possible. Thus, the main function of money is to bring people with different interests together and to establish a basis for the bridging of their differences. Since Kant, different philosophies have made it their task to bridge some gap between different, perhaps incompatible areas. But while Kant and the idealist philosophers saw the possibility of closing the gap in the aesthetic (the sphere of the "as if" in Vaihinger's term), Marx sees this closure achieved in the sensual-unsensual fetish of money.

Marx argues that this fetish quality is the very force that brings about a community in the modern sense. While older forms of society like feudalism operated on the basis of separate individuals who play out their differences on many stages, only the medium of money establishes an equality between people, even if and especially since it only operates as a 'fetish' or *as-if*-equality. Therefore, money is the very structure of politics or societability for Marx. He consequently suggests that (modern) society only exists because it is based on this pure fiction of money which allows for communication on the level of one equal standard; otherwise there would only be groups of distinguished individuals. Thus, Marx can subtitle his famous work "a political economy," radicalizing the eighteenth-century notion.

4) In this way, money functions as a means of communication, a medium understood in the sense of a force that provides a "unity of a difference" as Niklas Luhmann puts it,<sup>4</sup> not afraid of the bold simplicity of his statement. However, one should not be deceived by Luhmann's formulation; the fundamental paradox of money remains that it does not bring about a real equality, but only functions as an *as-if*-equality that merely takes the place of a 'real' equality. Money, then, simultaneously points to a gap between incomparable items *and* closes this very gap by claiming their comparability. This ability of

money to open and close a gap in one double movement marks the essence of an autonomous sphere of economics.

5) If one characterizes money as a medium, as Niklas Luhmann does, one is able to notice a significant feature of money that distinguishes it from all other forms of communication. Money allows 'communication,' but at the same time this communication does not result in a simple sharing of information and "richness of shared possibilities" like the communication of other media (Luhmann 246). Rather, money forces both sides to give up the control over some entity. Unlike other communication, trading always includes loss. Once one has traded away one's belongings or faculties like a farmer trading away his or her land for food, one is limited in one's ability of future trade involving those belongings and their potential. While other forms of communication simply include those who participate and exclude those who do not, communication through money remains more complex, since the way one participates decides whether one will be included or excluded in future transactions/communications. The inclusion in the economic communication constantly tends toward the exclusion of its participants. One wrong investment, and you might be out soon.

6) Thus, the specific problem money poses consists of its peculiar position between medium and possession, so that it can always turn from the one into the other. Money can serve to connect different people, but then be taken away from some by others, thereby ceasing to serve as a medium and turning instead into a possession; likewise, a possession can be turned into a means of communication. So, in contrast to other 'media,' money is not simply an operation of uniting. Rather, money provides the basis of a unity, but at the same time allows itself to be withdrawn and appropriated by some participants, who thereby pull away the very link that united the trade partners for a brief moment. (In fact, this aspect can be seen as an advantage in daily life, since no one likes seeing the guy who bought their old car?) This possibility does not simply derive from a mere double meaning of the word money as both a universal standard of value and an individual belonging. Instead, money—the operation that makes money to be money—constantly skips from the one to the other. Money provides a unity of value, but only by allowing personal interest to enter and disrupt the communication of money at any level.<sup>5</sup>

7) What effect does this linkage of money as a universal medium and as an individual possession have? Luhmann makes a remarkable suggestion when he speaks about the effect money has on the administration of limited resources. Luhmann's question is why people tolerate (and perceive it as normal) that a few people own a lot while many own very little. While there certainly is no justification of the unfair distribution of scarce properties, money offers an explanation why this unfairness is tolerated. Money allows us to say that there is a reason why some own a lot: "because they can pay for it" (Luhmann 252). Luhmann, posing this answer why people accept an unfair distribution of

goods, does not go on to address why this answer is, despite the dissatisfaction that we should have with it, still widely accepted. Luhmann's explanation "because they can pay for it" cannot, as he well knows, be a 'real' explanation, but it functions *as if* it were the explanation, meaning it usually stops people from further questioning. Precisely because of this force of persuasion, money subverts and avoids questions of justice and politics. Thus, what seemed to be a mere medium, also functions as a possession. And even as a possession, money and money orientated behavior are not questioned due to the neutrality of money's appearance as a medium. The strength of money as a medium is that it can be 'infiltrated' with personal interests which it in turn hides and protects at the same time.

The persuasive quality of money as a medium derives from the fact that it can be mistaken as a causal connector. So, the exchange 'A for B' and 'A equals B' can also be perceived, deceivingly, as: 'B because A was given for it.' Money, then, is not simply a medium of exchange, but it is also able to slip into other forms of connections like causality.

8) Thus, while economy seems to be based on equivalence and equality, it enables inequality, and the "unity of a difference," that Luhmann describes, secretly tends toward a deepening of differences precisely because it takes place in the disguise of unity.<sup>6</sup> This is what Marx expresses in the famous formula of capital in which money is transformed into capital. Money is (equally) exchanged for a commodity and this commodity is (equally) exchanged for a higher amount of money (M-C-M'). The paradoxical nature of this formula is stressed if one emphasizes the equations involved  $M=C=M'$  which leads to  $M=M'$ . Money is equal to more money. Thus, the ground of unity and equation, money, does not only accidentally tend to inequation and difference, but it finds its very essence in a dynamic of expansion and imbalance.

This growth and fostering of difference is the place where individuality enters the economic realm. Individuals benefit from the production of growth. But these individuals do not simply pre-exist capital and take advantage of its possibilities. Rather, their individuality is shaped in the form of capital. Individuality arises in the same process as capital, namely in the production of surplus. One is who one is by being more than what one is. Since the German early romantics, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue,<sup>7</sup> the essence of any being is thought to be in its becoming. Capital is the most radical expression of this being in becoming. While human beings certainly are not by birth interested in the accumulation of wealth, the structure of capital generates a perhaps irresistible ideal or model for human/inhuman individuality that is based on self-expansion. In the age of capitalism, human beings aim for more than what they are because in this act of extension, they are. Their individuality is an individuality of surplus value, one that emerges, occurs, happens in, and is limited to the  $M=M'$ .

9) What, then, is attractive about economic explanations of social interac-



tion? The economization of non-economic areas promises a strengthening of the individual or the ego- function (not necessarily in the psychoanalytic sense of the word). The capitalist and more precisely "capital individual" is a bookkeeper and exists as a bookkeeping of its own growth. The mental construct of money allows one to 'balance out the books' of several actions or events so that the outcome of such events can be expressed on a scale of losses and gains. The ego is the entity that is who it is by expansion. Freud's theory of narcissism is only one of many examples of this kind of bookkeeping. Thus, capital cannot be thought of without consideration of its ego-function, regardless of whether it is the ego of a human being, a clan, corporation, or nation.

10) One has to distinguish two layers of money to explain its effects and its success. On the one hand, money functions as a fundamentally abstract medium that brings a community together (for its functioning, it makes no difference whether it produces a real unity or a mere fetish unity). As such an abstract concept, money can explain exchange and communication between distinct beings by neutralizing their uniqueness. On the other hand, money becomes the ideal of individuality and becomes, in fact, pure individuality. The interest in money produces interest, produces the individual as interest or surplus. In this sense, the modern addiction to individuality is itself an addiction to money.

Thus, the abstract nature of money (money as a standard of value, a medium of exchange, a medium of communication, a united European currency, etc.) only promotes the fight for individuality, since one can hide or, more precisely, find or inscribe one's egotistic interests under its seeming neutrality and unquestionableness. The hidden form of this generation of individuality promotes violence of all forms.

If money were in fact only an abstract medium, as many claim, then only a few idealistic college professors and students would find it truly fascinating. Yet, the overlap of the two planes of what money is allows both a growth of one's interest *in* and *of* money in a uncontroversial and universally accepted form of behavior. Thus, the description of social interaction in terms of economy is open prey for the inscription and production of personal interest of possession and positive scores in 'bookmaking.' In short, I believe that economy was able to become a leading paradigm of social interaction only because its connector 'money' functions as a universal and seemingly neutral medium of communication while at the same time allowing personal interests to infiltrate money circulation secretly or openly at any level. In fact, the money dynamic even produces these very interests by producing interest, thus producing the one who could be interested, the surplus individual.

For the generation of the ego, there is theoretically no difference whether its economy is played out on an economic, psychic, social, or political stage. What is money in the economic, is libido in the psychic and power in the political. The main advantage of the economic, however, is that it gives the illusion that

money as a personal property can be withdrawn from universal circulation and can be stored as one's own at any time. Libido and power remain abstract without a fetish representation like that of money.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Derek Hillard and F. Corey Roberts for their many comments, suggestions, and their help in editing this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> When contemporaries of Adam Smith adapted his model of economics to other spheres such as nature and its "household," their economic model was one of balance and harmony (Herder, the early Goethe). It was not until the very end of the eighteenth-century that economy was seen to be a model of expansion (F. Schlegel, Hegel).
- <sup>3</sup> *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, Jennifer Curtiss Gage, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1990).
- <sup>4</sup> Niklas Luhmann with reference to Parsons, *Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankford: Suhrkamp, 1994) 232. Luhmann is a contemporary German sociologist whose systems theory has become a major paradigm of social sciences and cultural studies on the continent.
- <sup>5</sup> A similar and related overlap not of the meanings of a word but of "two things" is taken up by Frederic Jameson in his discussion of the "market"; see his *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke U P, 1991) 260-78.
- <sup>6</sup> Similarly, the freedom of free trade covers up the not so free dynamics of trade.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, trans. (Albany: State U of NY, 1988). For a discussion of money in German Romanticism and a further development of "money as individuation" see my article "The Ich-Effect of Money," forthcoming in: *Amsterdamer Beitr%oge zur Germanistik*, 1998.

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Laura George

## FIGURES OF COMMERCE IN THE "PREFACE TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*"

In his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" William Wordsworth famously claimed that the poet is a "man speaking to men." What are the characteristics of this man and his speech? He eschews "gaudiness and inane phraseology." He attempts to write "truly though not ostentatiously." He seeks a "plainer and more emphatic language." He avoids indulgence in "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression [which] furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites." He knows that "there is no necessity to trick out or elevate nature." His poetry is "a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man." He understands as dishonorable "false refinement and arbitrary innovation." He is indifferent to the blandishments of "transitory and accidental ornaments." Above all, his "style is manly."

The project of this essay will be to unpack the context for the "Preface," and for Wordsworth's poetic project more generally and, more crucially, to ask some questions about literary language and the social worlds it inhabits in light of the long-standing Western rhetorical tradition which equates metaphor and ornament so that the words become nearly, but never entirely, synonymous. As Eric Cheyfitz notes in *The Poetics of Imperialism*, the English word "ornament" derives from the Latin word for figure of speech, although, as Cheyfitz points out, "within the classical and Renaissance tradition of rhetoric, 'ornament' does not suggest the superfluous or exterior; rather, derived from the Latin verb *ornare*, which means both 'to provide with necessities' and 'to embellish,' it articulates that place where the interior and the exterior, the necessary and the contingent, are inseparable" (93). While for the classical rhetoricians and their heirs the term ornament may have signified the necessary as much as the contingent, the sense of ornament as contingent became increasingly dominant in post-Restoration England in ways directly connected with the rise of commodity capitalism and the fashion system. The last attested usage of ornament as necessary, in fact, according to the OED, is 1747. This shift in the social status of ornament put pressure on the rhetorical tradition which figured figures as ornaments in ways that accelerate in the eighteenth century, typically described by historians of fashion as that century in which what we now call the fashion system—that system of social status which prizes constant novelty over tradition—decisively becomes dominant. The modern business suit is one response to this shift. So, in another register, is Wordsworth's "Preface." The modern business suit—the immediate antecedents of which are increasingly apparent during the course of the eighteenth century—has represented the imperviousness of modern corporate masculinity to the blandish-

ments of fashion and superficiality, with its relatively standardized lines and sober colors. In *Victorians Unbuttoned: Registered Designs for Clothing, their Makers, and Wearers, 1839- 1900*, Sarah Levitt remarks that during the nineteenth century, “English tailors were sought out: they alone could cut cloth and mold it to the body so that it fitted like a second skin,” (91). The civilized male body, in contradistinction to the poor, the primitive, the feminized body, will be simultaneously fully clothed and not at all ornamented. The fantasy of the suit as a second skin suggests a kind of perfect congruence between body and apparel, and one with which any clear demarcation between being naked and being clothed is elided. The suit supports a cultural ideal of dress without ornament, and responds to the remaking of corporate identities under commodity capitalism. Wordsworth, too, will struggle to find, and to describe, a poetic diction neither too plain nor too elaborate, a poetics of figures in which his poems will neither be so ornamented so as to look artificial nor so unornamented, so “naked,” that is, as to appear lacking in art.

Wordsworth’s rhetoric then locates his concerns within a series of eighteenth-century preoccupations, preoccupations with the origin of human language, preoccupations with the status of fashion in clothing and commodities as the development of consumer capitalism speeds up, and, finally, preoccupations with the status of figurative language as the dress or adornment of one’s ideas. Both Wordsworth’s 1800 “Preface” and his poetic practice, particularly as it evolved from 1795-1807, are written into a typically contradictory relationship with each of these preoccupations. In particular, I believe that the most characteristically Wordsworthian poetry—which problematizes any clear distinction between the literal and the figurative—dramatizes some of the pressures that an increasingly consumerist and commodity-obsessed culture placed on developments in rhetorical theory. Without overstating the sense of historical rupture, as is all too common in accounts of a century characterized by revolutions American and French, but also industrial, commercial, and consumerist, I want to suggest a reading of Wordsworth’s “Preface” as situated at the intersection of two major features of eighteenth century intellectual and social life: the popular theories about the origin of language which typically hypothesized figurative language as primary and the increasing inescapability of fashion as the dominant social means of organizing identity and status.

#### I. EMPIRICAL RHETORIC

As Don Bialostosky and Lawrence Needham put it in their introduction to *The Rhetorical Tradition and British Romanticism*, “That rhetoric declined as Romanticism rose is the commonest of commonplaces, a story seemingly agreed on by all parties” (1).<sup>1</sup> While rhetoric seems to diminish as a field of active academic enterprise during the Romantic period, English writers have had a

notably vexed relationship to notions of rhetoric, particularly as regards figurative language, at least since Locke complained in 1689 that:

If we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all of the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the *Judgement*; and so indeed are a perfect cheat. . . *Eloquence*, like the fair Sex, has too prevailing Beauties in it, to suffer it self ever to be spoken against. And ‘tis vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived. (508)

Locke’s rejection of Rhetorick as a perfect cheat is usually taken as part and parcel of late seventeenth-century empiricism. Thomas Sprat’s 1667 *History of the Royal Society of London*, for instance, expresses a similar concern with the danger of the arts of eloquence:

They make the Fancy disgust the best things, if they are sound and unadorn’d. They are in open defiance against Reason professing, not to hold much correspondence with that, but with its Slaves, the Passions: they give the mind a motion too changeable, and bewitching, to consist with right practice. Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties these specious Tropes and Figures have brought to our Knowledge. (112)

Figures and Tropes are here divorced from rather than liberated from necessity. Most problematically, their seductions create disgust at “unadorned” Reason. According to Sprat, the Royal Society took an activist stand against the excesses of style in the natural sciences:

They have . . . been most rigorous in putting in execution the only Remedy that can be found for this extravagance: and that have been, a constant Resolution to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things almost in an equal number of Words. They have expected from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; the positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits or Scholars. (113)

The continuity between this statement, most usefully located, as Brian Vickers has shown, in the development of a proper (and English rather than Latin) language of the natural sciences, and Wordsworth’s pronouncements about poetry well over a century later are striking. The rhetorical framework is, ironically, the same: the native, the naked and the plain to be preferred over amplifications, and, importantly, extravagance. Clearly, though, the difficulties of rejecting figurative extravagance are rather more enormously foregrounded in the literary arts than they are in science writing, at least as science writing has

been envisioned since the Royal Society. Still, the resolutions are similar: a valorization of the language of Artizans and Countrymen rather than that of Wits and Scholars. There are two important distinctions, however, between the Royal Society's project to reform the writing of science and Wordsworth's project to reform the writing of poetry: Sprat's belief in a "primitive purity" of language is considerably complicated during the eighteenth century and his inclusion of "merchants" as a proper locus of plain language certainly does not recur in Wordsworth. Both changes, as it happens, can be best understood in light of eighteenth-century developments in commerce and fashion.

## II. PRIMITIVE ELOQUENCE

As we have noted, the history of metaphor of dressing, of ornament, to figure both language in general and figurative language in particular, spans the entire history of the Western rhetorical tradition. In *De Oratore*, for instance, Cicero writes:

The third method on our list, the use of metaphor, is of wide application; it sprang from necessity due to the pressure of poverty and deficiency, but it has been subsequently made popular by its agreeable and entertaining quality. For just as clothes were first invented to protect us against cold and afterwards began to be used for the sake of adornment and dignity as well, so the metaphorical employment of words was begun because of poverty, but was brought into common use for the sake of entertainment. (III.xxxviii.155)

Cicero's simile here, linking metaphors to clothing, quickly took on the force of a tradition. Cicero, importantly, associates the development of language with the development of more elaborate forms of dress, although he seems merely to be making a loose connection between clothes and the metaphorical deployment of words—both begin in necessity and poverty, both later come to be "used for the sake of adornment and dignity." Both figure, as it were, centrally and even foundationally in a developmental model of progressive civilization, a model in which both rhetorical and sartorial senses of style are increasingly liberated from "necessity." This narrative, in which more developed stages of civilization are signaled by greater degrees of adornment and dignity, more developed use of metaphor, I believe, runs into a significant countercurrent in the face of empiricist rhetoric, in response to an argument that truly modern prose will resist, in so far as this is possible, the seductions of figures. In "The Prose Style of the Royal Society: A Reassessment" Vickers convincingly argues that, Sprat's oft-quoted passage notwithstanding, the Royal Society objected more to Enthusiastic and overly latinate science writing than to figurative language per se. Still, the generalized suspicion of figures and Rhetorick which we find in a Sprat or a Locke can suggest a certain tendency to see the sober-minded rationality of civilization embodied best in a prose which prides itself on stripped-down plainness rather than figurative elaboration. It's at least

plausible that in response to the force of this narrative, the eloquent use of figures came increasingly to be associated with primitive passions rather than civilized conclusions.

Cicero's formulation was often quoted in eighteenth-century rhetorics. In the 1783 publication of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, for instance, Hugh Blair quotes the famous passage and goes on to give the following advice:

We must remember that figures are the dress of our sentiments. As there is a natural congruity between the dress, and the character and rank of the person who wears it, a violation of which congruity never fails to hurt; the same holds precisely as to the application of figures of sentiments. The excessive, or unseasonable employment of them is mere foppery in writing. . . . For, as in life, true dignity must be founded on character and not on dress and appearance, so the dignity of composition must arise from sentiment and thought, not from ornament. The affectation and parade of ornament, detract as much from an author as they do from a man. Figures and metaphors, therefore, should on no occasion be stuck on too profusely; and never should be such as refuse to accord with the strain of our sentiment. (5)

Neither author nor man, then, should have ornaments, precisely as detachable and potentially distracting superficialities, applied or "stuck on too profusely," the sign of a rhetorical foppery. This passage reflects a characteristic tension between the assertion of a "natural congruity" possible between figure and sentiment and a host of strictures warding off its violation. While garments may no longer seamlessly (as it were) reflect the status of their wearer, they still should express something of his fundamental character, which both for a man and for an author should not be screened by or occluded by excessive ornamentation. Blair writes as if the literal and the figurative are easily kept distinct, but their relative proportions say much about both an author and a man.

Blair is typically seen as a popularizer rather than as an innovator, and in this passage his formulations smack of the derivative and the commonplace. This sort of association of the linguistic and the sartorial is written everywhere in the eighteenth century, for instance underwriting Alexander Pope's oft-cited couplet, "True Wit is Nature to Advantage dress./ What oft was thought, but ne'er so well Express" (*Essay on Criticism*, 297-8). Given that the social organization of costume is generally taken to have remade itself dramatically during an eighteenth-century in which Europe was increasingly involved in world-mapping and colonial exploitation, it's hardly surprising to find particular and over-lapping preoccupations with the histories and meanings of European language and costume, those two foundational signs of culture.

The century from 1750-1850 not only witnessed extraordinary technical and social shifts in Europe, it also marks a hundred-year-long preoccupation with the origin of language, a preoccupation effectively outlawed with the foundation of modern scientific linguistics. To a degree which seems astonishing in the context of a nineteenth-century assumption that so-called "primi-

tive” people are more or less aphasic (which runs quite consistently from Fenimore Cooper’s Uncas exclaiming “Hugh!” to Tonto exclaiming “How!”) many eighteenth-century Britons followed Rousseau in speculating that the first human speech was highly figurative. Hugh Blair, not surprisingly, also develops this commonplace in this discussion of figures:

All languages are most figurative in their early state. . . . Language is then most barren; the stock of proper names, which have been invented for things, is small; and, at the same time, imagination exerts great influence over the conceptions of men, and their method of uttering them; so that, both from necessity and from choice, their Speech will, at that period, abound in Tropes. For the savage tribe of men are always much given to wonder and astonishment. Every new object purifies, terrifies, and makes a strong impression on their mind; they are governed by imagination and passion, more than by reason; and of course their speech must be deeply tinged by their genius. In fact, we find, that this is the character of the American and Indian languages; bold, picturesque, and metaphorical; full of strong allusions to sensible qualities, and to such objects as struck them most in their wild and solitary life. An Indian chief makes a harangue to his tribe, in a style full of stronger metaphors than an European would use in an epic poem. (I. 283-4).

Blair’s model here recapitulates Rousseau’s, but Blair runs into some particular problems in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which exist in order to instruct young men about how to write and how to recognize good writing. At stake, then, is not just appreciation for older literatures but the production of contemporary literature. And here, I think, the use of garments and adornments as the trope for tropes creates pointed contradictions as a belief in figuratively eloquent natives collides with the proverbial nakedness of the primitive state. Ironically, word primitive also works in Blair to figure that naked, prefigurative state of language:

Rhetoricians commonly divide [figures] into two great classes: Figures of Words and Figures of Thoughts. The former, Figures of Words, are commonly called Tropes, and consist in a word’s being employed to signify something that is different from its original or primitive meaning. (I. 275)

That is, the primitive state of language (and here the term is clearly metaphorical) is its naked, literal state, that which exists prior to the supposition of dress and ornament, the figuration with which its naked meaning can be overlaid. Primitives may speak in figures but the literal is a word’s primitive meaning. In complex ways, it seems that Blair wants this shifting category of the primitive to be occupied by and possessed by both the figurative and the literal. Rousseau’s formulation, so compelling for most of the eighteenth century, seems somehow hard to sustain, not the least because it seems to invite a constant and almost vertiginous oscillation between the literal and the figurative.

### III. FASHIONABLE FIGURES

The rise of empiricism, of course, contributed to the enormously profitable technological developments of the eighteenth-century, developments in which British textiles lead the way towards new economic developments, developments which were closely tied to the acceleration of fashion as a driving force in social performance. Fashion is a word whose history and continuing critical relevance would certainly merit an entry in any updated edition of *Keywords*. Usages in which fashion is equated with “manner, mode, way” go back to the 1300s, and the historical shift in which the transition from the stress on “making” to the stress on being current, to fashion as a kind of currency, deserves its own history, one which would more or less parallel the developments of commodity capitalism. While accounts of this history raise familiar and familiarly vexing problems of chronology and narrative, there’s little doubt that the period from the Restoration through the eighteenth century witnessed significant developments in the increasing centrality of commodity production and consumption, in effect of fashion, to modern life. In *Culture and Consumption* Grant McCracken argues that during the eighteenth century in England, an earlier “patina” effect, which located status in the patina of object, that luster of age and wear which could suggest generations of ownership, was challenged by a new system of performing status, one which stressed novelty and innovation. According to McCracken, “As a system of consumption, [the patina effect] served as a mainstay of social organization until its eclipse in the eighteenth century. Supplanted by the “fashion” system of consumption, patina dwindled to its present status: a status strategy of the very rich alone” (31).

While the rise of the so-called “fashion” system of consumption was driven largely by male capitalists, a sharp distinction between the producers, associated with activity and a will to compete and dominate, and consumers, those idle folk like aristocrats and women, was part and parcel of this system (this may in part explain why histories of a “consumer revolution” have lagged so far behind the standard histories of an “industrial revolution”). In *Consuming Subjects*, for instance, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace details “a cultural struggle to define both the meaning of consumption and the practices of modern consumerism” and “the ideological construction of the female subject” (5), a subject whose boundless appetites had long been the stuff of legend, and whose particular appetites for consumer goods were immediately taken for granted.

That is, capitalism and fashion may have been inextricably intertwined, but their respective genderings repeatedly suggested the seductions of commodities and the need to define masculinity as that which resists those seductions. It should thus be no surprise that the latter part of the eighteenth century witnessed a rather unprecedented rejection of any connection between the categories of “masculinity” and “fashion.” In his 1930 study of *The Psychology of Clothes*, the psychoanalyst Flugel gave a name—“The Great Masculine

Renunciation”—to a shift which he dated to 1800: “At the end of the eighteenth century. . . there occurred one of the most remarkable events in the whole history of dress, one under the influence of which we are still living, one, moreover, which has attracted far less attention than it deserves: men gave up their right to all the brighter, gayer, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation, leaving them entirely to the use of women” (111)<sup>2</sup>. For Flugel, modern man in the aftermath of the French Revolution and under the influence of industrialization took up a costume which would, “symbolize his devotion to principles of duty, of renunciation, and of self-control. The whole relatively ‘fixed’ system of his clothing is, in fact, an outward and visible sign of the strictness of his adherence to the social code (though at the same time, through its phallic attributes, it symbolizes the most fundamental features of his sexual nature). . . . Take any ordinary social function,” he continues, “the men are dressed in a dull uniformity of black and white, the very embodiment of life’s prose” (113-114).

Wordsworth’s repudiation of the “fickle” and the “gaudy” should certainly be read in this context. Flugel’s account, a relatively brief section in his much longer treatise on the psychology of clothes, raises the kinds of questions about the meanings of fashion more recently taken up under the rubric of cultural studies. Reading Wordsworth in this context suggests that shifts in the style of literary language may function in a manner relatively parallel to shifts in the style of personal adornment. If we speak of style in language as in fashion, perhaps it’s because as dramas of self-expression both respond to similar social and psychological pressures.

#### IV. NATURAL MAN AND THE FIGURES OF PASSION

We’ve seen Hugh Blair assert that an “Indian makes a harangue to his tribe, in a style full of stronger metaphors than an European would use in a epic poem” because his perceptions are distorted by his passions, which are not yet translated by cool reason. His figures occur naturally; in some sense they offer an accurate (and in this sense literal) record of his perceptions. But what of the cultured, not primitive, writer?

Wordsworth takes up his version of the standard eighteenth-century narrative in his “Appendix” to the “Preface”:

The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative. In succeeding time, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. (160)

This narrative, which Wordsworth can treat as self-evident, will seem almost counter-intuitive by the mid-nineteenth century as the modern science of linguistics will found itself on a rejection of such loose, amateurish speculation about the origin of language. Wordsworth’s particular focus in this passage is an anxiety about the relation between figures of speech and the proper or literal feelings and thoughts which they are meant to dramatize and convey. In later times, we read, men ambitious of the fame of Poets “applied” figures of speech to “feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection.” This nostalgia for a “natural” rather than “mechanical” connection between figure and thought was a particular preoccupation during what we call, albeit somewhat uneasily, the Romantic period. The stakes of this particular nostalgia, I think, become particularly striking when we consider the longstanding tradition which sees figures of speech as garments which adorn the plain nakedness of the literal idea.

It’s clear then, why Wordsworth, as a man speaking to men, must eschew gaudiness and fickle fashion. What’s less clear is what this new poetic practice will look like—and how its relation to the idea of culture—the newly accreting antithesis to the primitive—shall be precisely articulated. In his “Preface” Wordsworth follows Blair closely when he articulates his idea of the proper and improper use of figures of speech—and again, as in Blair, images of nakedness and primitivism are inextricably caught up in theories of rhetoric. Wordsworth is careful, we remember, to justify and delineate those occasions on which such “ornaments” as figures of speech will be proper to the language of a man speaking to men:

For if the Poet’s subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions in the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendor of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. And, surely, it is more probably that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due affect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate. ( 137)

When the Poet’s language is passionate it will necessarily—in the standard organicist formulation—be “alive” with metaphors and figures; however, there is again a reminder of the ever present danger that the Poet might “interweave,” as it were, some “foreign splendor of his own,” destroying the organically figurative with unnecessary additions. While figures are associated with the “passions,” and thus might seem elemental for all of humanity, these same figures, if not deployed “judiciously” and with “propriety” can all too easily suggest this “foreign splendor,” something not quite fitting, as it were, for

manly British plainness. Once again, the concern with unnecessary addition suggests that far from being naturally arising phenomena, figures come in transported (or, literally, as it were) translated across borders. The true Poet's speech, this passage suggests, will use figures only very "judiciously" so as not to call undo attention to surface presentation. Figures should appear natural, make an organic whole with the Poetic subject, but there is always the danger that their potential for ostentatious display, for artifice, render the language of the Poet far from what will now be taken as natural.

The question of style comes up again when Wordsworth feels called upon to defend his new poetry from the charge that it is too plain to qualify as art:

In answer to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end, and who also, in my opinion, greatly underrate the power of meter in itself, it might, perhaps, as far as related to these Volumes, have been almost sufficient to observe that poems are still extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a still more naked and simple style, which have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked and simple are capable of affording pleasure to the present day; and what I wished *chiefly* to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the impression of this belief. (144-5)

One of the keywords here, in my view, is "naked." In the earlier passage from the "Preface," Wordsworth had to defend his poetry against charges that it might be too ornamented, too marked with "foreign splendor" to represent the voice of a man speaking to men. Here he worries that it is too naked to be recognizable as modern poetry, as artful, at all. Wordsworth justifies his poetic practice by arguing that it harks back to the poems which have given pleasure from generation to generation. The temporal logic here is confused, at best. Wordsworth's "Appendix to the Preface" may recapitulate the familiar chronology—primitive stages of speech and poetry are more densely figurative because the paucity of vocabulary and more passionate impulses naturally give rise to figures of speech, and his strictures not to indulge in unnecessary metaphors and figures similarly suggest that they arise naturally under conditions of passionate expression. However the proverbial nakedness of the primitive state now seems to have become elided with a kind of rhetorical nakedness—because these poems which have given pleasure from generation to generation are here characterized not only as simple but as naked, and he means specifically stylistically naked, that is, lacking ornaments such as metaphors and figures. The whole history of the rhetorical tradition which has imagined figures of speech as garments and ornaments is in play here, even if in only marginally articulated ways. A chronology which moves humanity from naked to properly clothed (clothed with propriety) flows as a kind of counter current, working against the

soon to be eclipsed understanding of primitive language as "naturally" figurative.

In "Race under Erasure," David Lloyd describes the construction of the dominant subject in racist discourse as the "Subject without Properties":

The position occupied by the dominant individual is that of the Subject without Properties. This Subject with "unlimited possibilities" is precisely the undetermined subject, Schiller's Person as yet abstracted from Condition, whose infinite potential is a function of a purely formal identity with humanity in general. Its universality is attained by virtue of literal indifference: this Subject becomes representative in consequence of being able to take anyone's place, of occupying any place, of pure exchangeability. Universal where all other are particular, partial, this Subject is the perfect, disinterested judge formed for and by the public sphere. (255-6)

The Modern European Subject, the Subject without Properties (without ornament) will be imagined in contradistinction to a primitive (and feminized) world of both excessive nakedness and excessive adornment, a world in which nakedness egregiously underlies the superficial detachability of ornament and in which the superficial detachability of ornament can only refer back to the nakedness it both highlights and disguises. The western male bourgeois body is, ironically, at some levels of the cultural imaginary, a permanently clothed body. The fantasy of the suit as a second skin suggest a cultural fantasy in which the demarcations between the naked and the clothed can be both blurred and, ironically of course, dramatized.

A persistent, if perhaps unconscious, Western fantasy has united signifying garments with the naked bodies to which they give identity and status. Renaissance sumptuary laws policed this unity (police actions are typically defensive, of course). So do contemporary social codes about gender appropriate costume—as if simple nakedness is always simultaneously and equally a fantasy and a phobia. Around 1800 this persistent dream took on some new contours. The modern male suit—which still signifies the powers and repressions of industrial capitalism across much of the globe—developed as part of a visual system which would make gender the most important visual distinction in spectacle of social dressing. In the world of fraternity, and men created equal, in the world of a man speaking to men, all these men, all of these modern men, would look more or less the same (and cling to the same formal wear for almost two centuries).

The Subject of Western modernity would be neither naked nor ornamented. His clothes would suggest a sober-minded practicality, industry in every possible sense of the word. Both nakedness and flashy ornamentation suggest a kind of ostentatiousness, a kind of display of external charms. The modern Western subject will exert the force of inner being, not superficial charm. The authenticity of the inner self, the self without properties, unmarked by gender, race, or class (because male, Caucasian, and bourgeois) will have no



need for attention to external display. His gaze will be perpetually turned out—evaluating the display of all of those others, those others known to be both inadequately covered and drawn to flashy ornamentation. The development of the modern male suit will be a marker of how different the social and economic configurations of 1800 are from those of 1600. Rather than a kind of proper status, silk and purple, ermine and minever, will signify on the same level of cultural fantasy, a kind of display all too fickle, varying, and deceptive. The Subject of Western modernity will have no business with any of these varying vanities. Instead, clothed in sober colors and simple lines, he will go on about the business of organizing (and profiting from) the known world.

While the stakes for Wordsworth's poetic program are different, the terms he uses to frame it are not. For Wordsworth poetry must be neither naked nor ornamented; like the suit, figures must fit like a second skin. Wordsworth's poetic practice offers repeated experiments in "returning" language to his fantastic primitive origins, when every word was a figure, when the proper or literal remains in permanent abeyance. It's primitive in this sense and in his own terms, but only in the sense of a nostalgic reinvocation, and never, ever finally naked.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, Brian Vickers articulates a slightly more lurid version of this narrative, and one which, typically, focuses on Wordsworth as a kind of prime culprit. According to Vickers, late eighteenth century rhetoric was "adapting itself to new demands on the style, structure, and even content of literature. It was still growing when the first generation of Romantics abruptly cut it off. Wordsworth's 1800 "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* dismisses such rhetorical concepts as 'presentation' or 'effectiveness', and with them the whole Renaissance and Neoclassic structure of literary creation and literary criticism. The new form is the ode or lyric, the subject-matter the introspective emotions of the poet, no longer public, generalized emotional concepts but the subtle, individual states of mind" (58).

<sup>2</sup> Although it has been modified, Flugel's account (and Flugel's term) largely stands today in most versions of costume history. What becomes more complicated is attributing any kind of first cause to this shift. Anne Hollander's recent study of masculine fashion, *Sex and Suits*, dismisses Flugel's account quite cursorily: "The extraordinary persistence of classic male tailoring for nearly two centuries, during a period of extreme social upheaval and scientific advance, has prompted several possible explanations, some of which I intend to explore later. But one looks immediately all too easy: J. C. Flugel called it 'the Great Masculine Renunciation.' The idea is that when fashion became very flighty at the end of the eighteenth century, men simply quit, as if in protest" (22). This actually isn't quite fair: Flugel actually attempts to look for causes and points out that, "Those who have duly considered the matter seem to be in the main agreed that these causes were primarily of a political and social nature, and that, in their origin, they were intimately associated with the great social

upheaval of the French Revolution" (111). Hollander, despite her dismissal of Flugel, in fact rather elaborates on than revises his account, adding associations with trousers worn in colonies, a certain fascination with military uniforms, the rise of the female dressmaker, to the various "political and social" antecedents of the new masculine dress. Incidentally, despite her dismissal of Flugel, Hollander's chapter on "The Genesis of the Suit" reverts often to Flugel's rhetoric of renunciation: "Powerful men were on the verge of having to give up all that for good, leaving it to vain women, actors, fools, and children" (78). This chapter is subtitled "the Great Divide," reaffirming once again the contemporary sense that this shift was indeed a "great" one. While this rhetoric of renunciation may be questionable, the transition in which costume began to stress gender differences more than those of class or rank seems unmistakable.

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Thomas A. Vogler

THE ECONOMY OF WRITING AND MELVILLE'S GOLD DOUBLOON

I would have some body put the Muses under  
a kind of contribution to furnish out  
whatever they have in them that bears any  
relation to Coins. (Joseph Addison)

I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look,  
they look. (Pip)

A doubloon. D'ye see it? (Ahab)

The Romantic Poet's answer to Addison's challenge might well have been, "Everything!" The substance gold seems to offer itself as an example of innate value, available both as a resource and as a measure of other kinds of value. The image of a gold coin suggests a scene of inscription in which signifier and signified are wedded in a union of values, face value equal to real value, different and yet the same, like Hegel's view of the epigram in which we have the thing itself in a double way, both as external existent and as meaning or explanation—word and thing united.<sup>1</sup> Epigraphy, or the study of the relationship of things to statements written on their surfaces, is the passionate hobby Ishmael in *Moby Dick* would like to elevate to the status of science and art, as he tattoos the measurements of the whale's skeleton on his right arm, leaving "the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing" (376). There is also an implicit epigraphic dimension to the Romantic obsession with the epistemology of figuration. If language can be only figurative, then all verbal attempts to become more than figurative will be errors or pretense. But if language can be symbolic then it can transcend mere figuration, escaping that semiology of arbitrary signifiers which for Saussure had no place for symbols. According to Schelling, "An image is symbolic whose object does not merely signify the idea but is that idea *itself*" (quoted in Todorov, 209). As a motivated sign, Coleridge claimed, a symbol always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible:

Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into picture language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being even more worthless than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol (which is always tautegorical) is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the

temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible: and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity, of which it is the representative. The others are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hill-side pasture-field seen in the lake below. (30-31) <sup>2</sup>

In this formulation we can see that we are dealing not merely with a matter of rhetorical classification, but with an issue of fundamental philosophical and theological importance: what is it that can possibly guarantee the validity of an act of figuration as *symbol* rather than empty or abstract allegory?

The Romantic crisis of figuration in poetic language becomes fused in nineteenth-century discourse with the debate about paper money and the gold standard that flourished throughout the century.<sup>3</sup> Paper money, as a statement not attached by any necessity to a material thing, seems to violate that notion of Truth which posits a correspondence between things and statements made about them. The materiality of paper money is not essential to its role as money, for its material properties are irrelevant to the authorized statement or claim made on the paper. I will outline Marx's views of the inevitable progression from gold to paper in a moment, but for now I want to emphasize one aspect of the problematics of the paper money debate and literary writing. With paper money, even when backed by the gold standard, we have a system congruent with Saussurean semiology (borrowed from the Greek *sema*, which could mean "word" or "token"). But such a semiotic system must give up all claim to truth and correspondence, in the name of utility; its value will always be relative to the ability of the inscription to invoke the trust of the reader; it is a writing that can never transcend its status as mere writing, can never certify itself as true "on the face of it" because its *face* value is its *faith* value.

Shall we call it, what all men thought it, the new Age of Gold? Call it at least of Paper; which in many ways, is the succedaneum of Gold. Bank-paper, wherewith you can still buy when there is no gold left; Book-paper, splendid with Theories, Philosophies, Sensibilities, beautiful art, not only of revealing thought, but also of so beautifully hiding from us the want of Thought! Paper is made from the rags of things that did once exist; there are endless excellences in Paper. (Carlyle, 35)

Carlyle's reaction to the French enlightenment here catches the inherent uncertainties and ambiguities in an economic-aesthetic-philosophical-theological model that has to include a place for "Paper" and the arbitrariness of the signifier.

But to move to paper as model meant to give up the literary Eldorado of the Symbol, and its golden promise of universally valid univocal signification, where "The signification of the Symbol, being natural, is immediately comprehensible to all; that of the allegory, proceeding from an 'arbitrary' convention, has to be learned before it can be understood"

(Todorov 202). "The symbolic object at once is and is not identical to itself. Allegory, on the other hand, is transitive, functional, utilitarian, without value in itself" (Todorov 203). These are the Romantic dreams and desires that inform the "Language" chapter of Emerson's *Nature*, which first appeared in 1836, and would have been part of the young Ishmael's reading. "Words are signs of natural facts," Emerson asserts, and there is "nothing lucky or capricious" in those analogies that "Are constant and pervade nature. These are not the dreams of a few poets" (15-16). As Emerson warms to his subject, we find his myth of language re-enacting the myth of the fall:

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, the desire of pleasure, the desire of power, the desire of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will, is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. . . . But wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God. (16-17)

A little of Emerson in this vein goes a long way, but he does not have to go far before he unwittingly reveals the dilemma of his position. Both the fraudulent and the wise use figurative language to utter their truths, but only in some hands is language a "commanding certificate" of the alliance between its author and God and truth, certifying on its face an authentic bond between words and things, the identity of the *gold* standard and the *God* standard. Emerson is clearly striving to convince us of his credentials in this passage, but his image of piercing "this rotten diction" and fastening words to things seems hardly to live up to what it claims to be saying.

We might expect that the shift from an American transcendentalist like Emerson, for whom "the material is ever degraded before the spiritual" (127) and whose motto is "Build, thereforeto, your own world" (35) to Marx, would get us closer to potential connections between words and things. In his discussion of "the process of exchange" in *Kapital* Marx argues that the ordinary "commodity" is a use value, but gold, in its "metallic reality," ranks as "the embodiment of value, as money," which makes "gold, as gold, exchange value itself." The use-value of gold has "only an ideal existence," and the *value* that gold *is* can only be relative, "represented by the series of expressions of relative value in which it stands face to face with all other commodities" (1. 104-5).

These insights are dealt with in more detail in the *Kritik* (1859), where Marx shows us that the appeal to “real gold” is already so implicated in tropological circuits that for the writer it can only function as the metaphor of metaphor; for it is gold’s remarkable availability to be taken as something else that allows it to circulate as the measure of that real value that is always elsewhere. As Marx points out in the *Kritik*, the precious metals are useless in the direct process of production and easily dispensed with as articles of consumption or means of existence (130). Their value inheres instead in how they appear: “They appear (*Sie erscheinen*) in a way, as spontaneous (*gediegenes*) light brought out from the underground world, since silver reflects all rays of light in their original combination, and gold only the color of highest intensity, viz red light” [Stone’s translation, 211]). Thus gold stands for the absent sun, its “shining” ability to reflect red light giving it the effect of a literalized metaphor of the sun, or of an actual deposit produced and left behind by it. Since the sun is the putative source of all natural production, the appearance of gold produces the effect of an essential value. “Nature no more produces money than it does bankers or discount rates. But since the capitalist system of production requires the crystallization of wealth as a fetish in the form of a single article, gold and silver appear as its appropriate incarnation” (*Inkarnation*). At the threshold of its departure the light of the sun is caught briefly by clouds and motes in the air that reflect it most just before the darkness of its absence. But this is the most transitory of phenomena, and since the sun is always coming and going it is our contingent relationship—or vantage point—that constitutes the threshold of arrival or departure. To trope on the image of shimmering air is to trope on the contingencies of transitory relations, to lose the golden gleam even in the act of imaging it. Something of the permanent effect of metaphor is necessary if the “gold” is not to slip through our fingers, but it must be a “symbolic” metaphor, one that in Coleridge’s terms “always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible” rather than “empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter” (what Melville’s Ishmael would call a “hideous and intolerable allegory”). The task for the poet’s words is an alchemical one, to trope on tropes themselves, as “a material of vulgar origin,” turning them from a de-based analog of real gold into the thing itself.<sup>4</sup> For them to perform their functions they must function like money, which Marx shows is an activity of transformation.

Even while denying its naturalness, Marx invokes the metaphor of the myth of natural solar production (*kristallisieren*, *Inkarnation*) for that “silver or gold money crystal” which is “not only the product of the process of circulation, but in fact is its only final product” (131). Such figures are used repeatedly in the *Kritik*. “In its virgin metallic state it holds *locked up* all the material wealth which lies unfolded in the world of commodities...it is the direct *incarnation* of universal labor in its form, and the *aggregate* of all concrete labor in its substance” (Stone 103, emphasis added). Thus “the universal product of the social process or the social process itself as a

product is a peculiar natural product, a metal hidden in the bowels of the earth and extracted therefrom” (131).

The peculiarity of gold as a natural product is its combination of durability, malleability and relative indestructibility, together with its *Schein*, all of which allow it to “appear, in a way, as spontaneous light.” “Spontaneous” is only one of many ways to translate the adjective in Marx’s *gediegenes Licht*, but all of them emphasize genuine value (*gediegen*, “solid, massy, unmixed, pure, genuine, true, superior”). The relationship of gold to that value is its “shining in a certain way” (*Sie erscheinen gewissermassen*), so that it has a *Schein*, an “appearance” (the meaning of *Schein* can range from “light” to an I.O.U. or paper money). Thus insofar as the power to appear (i.e. to reflect or represent) is understood to be an essential part of the gold itself, we might say that gold offers itself oxymoronically as a *gediegenes Schein*, a source of value and the appearance of value combined, as if the gold reflects itself or is its own reflection.

There is another way in which gold “becomes idealized within the process of circulation” (116). For gold properly to circulate as money, it must be stamped with an inscription that indicates its value, and the fact that the inscription is on the coin is the ground of its claim to authenticity. But in spite of its special natural properties, the process of circulation that realizes gold’s ability to function as a medium of exchange also idealizes its essence:

The circulation of money is a movement through the outside world.... In the course of its friction against all kinds of hands, pouches, pockets, purses, money-belts, bags, chests and strong-boxes, the coin rubs off, loses one gold atom here and another one there and thus, as it wears off in its wanderings over the world, it loses more and more of its intrinsic substance. By being used it gets used up.... It is clear, says an anonymous writer, that in the very nature of things, coins must depreciate ... as a result of ordinary and unavoidable friction” (*Kritik* 88).

This leads the coin almost instantly to a situation in which it “represents more metal than it actually contains” so that the longer it circulates the greater the discrepancy between its form (as inscribed coin) and its substance, until finally “the body of the coin becomes but a shadow” (89). This inevitable decay—so often compared with the *usure* of language and metaphor—assures that the gold coins will become “transformed by the very process of circulation into more or less of a mere sign or symbol” (91).

“But no thing can be its own symbol” according to Marx (91), and gold will be “brought to rest” to form a “hoard” (*Schatz*) that can be substituted for in the process of circulation by “subsidiary mediums” that can “serve as symbols of gold coin not because they are symbols made of silver or copper, not because they have certain value, but only in so far as they have no value” (91). We thus have a series of substitutions (from exchange value of commodities to gold money, sublimated by circulation into its own symbol, first in the form of worn coin, then in the form of subsidiary metal currency) which ends “finally in the form of a worthless token, paper, mere

*sign of value*" (94). At this point the state, which at first only impressed its stamp on gold, "seems now to turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp" (98). And paper money, worthless in itself, can circulate as a signifier of difference, mediating between the relative worth of commodities based on the consumer's faith in the presence elsewhere of the absent signified whose value is governed by labor value or the system of natural productivity governed by the sun. The importance of faith in this system of exchange is brought home by Marx's approving paraphrase of Bishop Berkeley, who asked, "if the denomination of the coin remains, after the metal has gone the way of all flesh, cannot the circulation of commerce still be maintained?" Berkeley's point is that the actual existence of some fixed object with permanent value that is absent from "the circulation of commerce" is unnecessary, since it would function precisely as an absence. With this comment we find ourselves located in a structured economy of exchange that needs both absence and faith—the structure of writing:

When a man writes, he is in a structure that needs his absence as its necessary condition (writing is defined as that which can necessarily be read in the writer's absence), and entails his pluralization. Writers ignore this troubling necessity and desire to record the living act of a sole self—an auto-biography. Whatever the argument of a document, the marks and staging of this resistance are its 'scene of writing.' When a person reads, the scene of writing is usually ignored and the argument is taken as the product of a self with a proper name. Writers and readers are thus accomplices in the ignoring of the scene of writing. The accounts of texts are informed by this complicity. (Spivak, 19)

Whether we call it "complicity" or "faith," this fable of writing is the rediscovery in our time of a link between absence and writing that is probably as old as the invention of writing itself, a practice that depends on and exploits absence.

That which circulates through writing is only an orphan, an Ishmael, a messenger whose texts are like paper money, their value dependent on faith in the author as absent source of value. Like the sun itself, we cannot see those intentions directly, only the *Schein* of the author's figurative gold. This relationship is one for which Locke—an author well known to Ishmael—takes gold as his prime example, for the appearance of gold in its secondary qualities must depend on (i.e. "hang from") its substance (that which "stands under"). For Locke, the gap between the essence of a substance and its *Schein* means that we can never know true gold. "For let it be ever so true, that all gold, i.e. all that has the real essence of gold, is fixed, what serves this for, whilst we know not, in this sense, *what is or is not gold?* For if we know not the real essence of gold, it is impossible we should know what parcel of matter has that essence, and so whether *it* be true gold or no" (2:97).

Marx provided an alternative to this lack of authority when he observed that as the state, in fixing its mint price, gave "a certain name to a piece of gold," so the state "can turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp" (98). For those involved in the economy of poetry and literary inter-

pretation this function of the state is performed by the literary establishment through its various departments or "interpretive communities," those agencies that establish the exchange value of the poet's "endless monument" reared against the way of all flesh. Of Melville's contemporaries, Poe was one of the most dependent on and engaged with the day-to-day circuits of literary exchange, in journals with suggestive names, like *Holden's Dollar Magazine*. His story "The Gold Bug" (1843) shows how an impoverished Southern aristocrat, Legrand, looking for real bugs, finds instead the *representation* of a bug. The correct reading or deciphering of this representation leads Legrand to an enormous treasure in gold, which he exchanges at the bank for commercial papers. Marc Shell has emphasized how both the story's tendentious thesis and its form reflect "a concern with money as currency and with paper money in particular as a unique sort of redeemable symbol" (*Money*, 10). Poe struck it rich with the story by withdrawing it from *Graham's*—which had offered him fifty-two dollars—and entering it instead in a contest being held by the *Dollar Newspaper* where it won the one-hundred dollar first prize, edging out Robert Morris's "The Banker's Daughter" which took second place (*Money* 13).

The Gold Rush of 1848, and President Polk's message to Congress at the end of that year—promising great wealth to the whole nation—seem to have provoked an even cleverer response by Poe. His "Von Kempelen and His Discovery" (published in April, 1849, one week before his "Eldorado") was written in the context of what Poe called "the gold excitement" (*Letters*, 433). In the tale he reports the discovery by Von Kempelen that gold can be made readily from lead and certain other substances, and that the effect of the discovery was to depreciate the gold exchange and increase the value of lead and silver. When the Bremen Police break into the suspected counterfeiter's garret (in the "Flatzplatz") they find a strange "apparatus, of which the object has not yet been determined," including a small furnace and two crucibles, one containing molten lead and the other containing "some liquid." Under his bed was a trunk containing "not only gold—real gold—but far finer than any employed in coinage—gold in fact, absolutely pure, virgin." Jerome McGann has discussed the relationship between Poe's literary "alchemy" and Von Kempelen's, suggesting that the literary artist is engaged in the same pursuit, to change the "lead" of the printer's workshop (together with "certain other substances" like paper and "some liquid" or ink) into the artistic gold of the literary work (102-107). But this alchemy too can remain only figurative, a "paper money" drawn on the artist's credit in the literary establishment of his time.

As we move now to take our places before the tropic coin nailed to the mast of the Pequod, we should recall a double sense of how it got there. On the historical dimension we can say, figuratively, that it has always been "there" prominently on display as the enigmatic crux and emblem of the problems of literary value and representation. Within the novel, we should recall that it was nailed to the mast in Chapter 36 by Ahab, after rubbing it on his jacket "as if to heighten its lustre" (or *Schein*) and that it stands as a promised reward for "whosoever ... raises me that same white whale" (142).

Before moving to its literary and tropological significance, we might pause for a moment to consider one of the most obvious of its dimensions: the doubloon represents *money*, the third item in Ishmael's prayer for "Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!" (128).

It seems easy for literary critics, in their pursuit of literary "meaning," to overlook that "little lower layer" where "money's to be the measurer" (143), an emphasis that makes Ahab so contemptuous of Starbuck's materialism. *Moby-Dick* was Melville's sixth novel in five years, each work trying in vain to repeat the financial success of *Typee*. The correspondence during 1850-51 shows him alternating between hopes of making it big and the despairing recognition that "Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter" (558). Earlier in the same letter (to Hawthorne, June, 1851) he had exclaimed: "I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. [...] Dollars damn me.... What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay" (557).

In June of 1850 Melville wrote to his English publisher, Bentley, to request an advance of 200 pounds against the English publication of his novel. In that letter he lied, claiming a "personal experience, of two years & more, as a harpooner" to enhance the authenticity of his work. Bentley's offer, made over a year later (July, 1851) was 150 pounds "on account" for a half-share in the profits. Bentley was well aware of the speculative nature of publishing in general, and of publishing Melville in England in particular.<sup>5</sup> "As we shall be in the same boat," he wittily observed, "this mode of publication is the most equitable to meet all the contingencies" (562), and Melville accepted the offer by return mail. The gold doubloon nailed to the mast might well have served as a reminder to Melville who, like the crew of the Pequod, had to wait for his reward until the end of the voyage.

In this context we can see the doubloon Chapter of the novel as a scene of speculation in more than the metaphysical sense, for the doubloon's strange power to make or multiply meaning is in direct correspondence with that strange ability of money to make money that lies at the heart of the capitalist system. What Ahab belittles ("Nantucket market! Hoot!") is what actually makes his voyage possible, and the whale, as object of metaphysical speculation, cannot be separated from its "double," in the form of the doubloon as the reward for that speculation which first "sees" the whale. In its economic sense to speculate is to enter into a business venture from which the returns of invested capital are conjectural because of the risks involved and knowingly assumed. Henry Adams, in his 1869 essay "The New York Gold Conspiracy," attributed the "speculative mania" (which he complains made "real values" a function of, often indistinguishable from "speculative values") to the increase in paper currency after the war.

The Civil War in America, with its enormous issues of paper currency, and its reckless waste of money and credit by the government, created a speculative mania such as the United States, with all its experience in this respect had never known before. Not only in Broad Street ... but far and wide throughout the Northern States, almost every man who had money at all employed a part

of his capital in the purchases of stocks or of gold, of copper, of petroleum, or of domestic produce, in the hope of a rise in prices, or staked money on the expectation of a fall. (101-02)

Melville can help us to see that Adams may attribute too much to the specific events of the War. As part of the allegorical freight of his novel, in which the speculations of "this sunken-eyed young Platonist" named Ishmael are worth only "the three hundredth lay," we learn in Chapter 16 that "Nantucket Quakerism" in the form of Captain Bildad is grounded on the belief that "This world pays dividends" (72). Instead of wages, Ishmael must negotiate for "certain shares of the profits called *lays*, and that these lays were proportioned to the degree of importance pertaining to the respective duties of the ship's company" (73). The literal and figurative join here, as the economic facts of America's largest mid-century industry (whaling) are spelled out for our benefit: "People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest," says Captain Bildad (71), who with Captain Peleg is one of the "owners and agents" (69) of the Pequod who stay home and wait for the profits.

A consideration of the function of the doubloon as money reminds us also that "in a money economy, one thing is not exchanged directly for another, but is first exchanged for money which seems to represent or be all things" (Shell, *Economy* 56). As we move now to the other side of the doubloon's double significance, we see this function paralleled in its figurative power. Were we to send the pale Usher, "threadbare in coat, heart, body and brain," back to his "old lexicons and grammars" (1), he would return to tell us that the "doubloon" is a "double-one," a simultaneous unity and plural.<sup>6</sup> The novel itself is a double-one in a number of significant ways, most obviously perhaps in its split between the scientific or "cetological" sections (devoted to the materiality of fact and supported by the Affidavit chapter which claims to have material referents for the novel) and the poetic or metaphysical sections. Neither of these ideals is fulfilled, for "the sperm whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature" (118). The main characters, Ahab and Ishmael, are opposing doubles in conspicuous ways, and Ishmael (the white double of Queequeg, and the "feminine" half of their "matrimonial" union) is also the outcast twin of Isaac, implicated in a complex series of double relationships and oppositions. Ishmael's body, as already noted, is represented as a double scene of writing, since his "valuable statistics" are copied verbatim from their tattooed inscription there, and he is careful to see that "other parts of [his] body remained a blank for a poem [he] was then composing" (376).

We are introduced to the doubloon as double-one by Ishmael's famous comment that "some certain significance lurks in all things," and immediately reminded of Ahab's "monomaniac" quest for the final word of a univocal meaning by the "pointed intensity of his purpose" as his "riveted glance fastened upon the riveted gold coin there," and he "still wore the

same aspect of nailed firmness" (358). Ahab (who increasingly can't tolerate the presence of his black double Pip) suggests the classical unity of a text bound together by a single *vouloir-dire*, a governing intention that determines all the elements of a composition and qualifies them as functions of the whole. On the plot level Ahab's monomania would seem to dominate, as he orchestrates the mechanical "unity" of the Pequod in his quest for certainty, sailing for a double failure: the destruction of all who sail with him, and a final silence rather than a final word (he dies "voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim"). The univocal opposite of this stormy finale is evoked in the Gilder Chapter (405-06) where "the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin" appear as a "golden sea" bathed in "golden light." These "soothing scenes" seem to produce a temporary benign effect on Ahab's "intense bigotry of purpose" (141), as "these secret golden keys did seem to open in him his own secret golden treasuries." But the word "gilder" (dialect English for "trap" or "snare") is as deceptive as the momentary hint of a perpetual golden light; we are reminded again of the eternal doubleness of the woven *texture* of existence in which "the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm" (406).

Ahab may be the Captain of the Pequod, but Ishmael is Captain of the narrative, which includes Ahab but is not governed by him. As Ahab's contrary double, Ishmael seems to represent a move away from the attempted fixing of meaning. The tension between these two constitutes the dynamic of the novel as a double movement or oscillation between univocal fixity and endless polysemy. The tropic coin turns two ways, and Ishmael's polytropism is no more satisfying than Ahab's monomania. Indeed, it reminds us at times of the discourse of Babbalanja ("Babble-on-you") in *Mardi*, whose "centripetal is ever too much for the centrifugal. Wherefore it is a perpetual cycling with us, without progression" (378). Ultimately Babbalanja's "polysensum" becomes a "pollywog," his "Bardiana" so overloaded that it sounds like an echo-chamber, full of sound and empty of meaning, with all possibility of significance lost in an intertextual maze.

It is this double motion that gives the tropic coin—already the image of "turning"—its dynamic aspect as a model for the possibilities of signification, and the motions of the characters who approach it reflect still other forms of contrary motion. As a coin "of purest virgin gold" from "a country planted in the middle of the world and beneath the great equator, and named after it . . . cast midway up the Andes, in the unwaning clime that knows no autumn" this "equatorial coin" seems to offer a perpetual new beginning for perception (358). Each character appears to be interpreting the meaning of the coin for the first time, as though he were Adam in the garden experiencing the primal perception of a truth unrecognized before. But the coin they see is already inscribed, stamped with a "luxuriant profusion" of signs, just as their perceptions are already stamped on the characters who approach this non-originary scene of interpretation. The cast of characters and their views have a double direction as well. The progression begins with the venerable order of the "estates," as Chaucer begins his

*Prologue* with the Knight in order to move downward in a social hierarchy whose order reflects different aspects of value in the social structure. In this order Pip comes last, a black slave and servant, like the black graphemes on white paper that serve the higher meaning(s) of the text. But as we shall see, the seed of blackness represented by Pip disseminates all the possibilities of meaning in things that have come before.

As the sign of a sign, the potential unity of the tropic coin can be seen as the potential for a perception that combines signifier with signified in the realm of a single sign. The double motion I have traced above reflects the alternatives between reading any sign as determined or motivated ("symbolic" in the Romantic sense) or arbitrary in the Saussurean sense. The opposition here is between the movement Derrida describes towards the goal "that the thing signified may be allowed to glow finally in the luminosity of its presence" (*Grammatology*, 49-50) and the contrary view maintained by Peirce, that "the meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation: so there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series" (1.171).

On the economic side of this proffered and deferred presence in the semiotic uncertainties of representation, we can find the opposition Marx locates for all commodities that enter the process of exchange:

Commodities, first of all, enter into the process of exchange just as they are. The process then differentiates them into commodities and money, and thus produces an external opposition corresponding to the internal opposition inherent in them, as being at once use-values and values. Commodities as use-values now stand opposed to money as exchange-value. On the other hand, *both opposing sides* are commodities, unities of use-value and value. But this *unity of differences* manifests itself at two opposite poles, and at each pole in an opposite way. Being poles they are as necessarily opposite as they are connected. (*Capital* 1. 104-05)

It is in its role as model of signification, as metaphor of money and money of metaphor, that we can locate the identification by Stubb of the doubloon as the ship's navel: "Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it" (363). Before that he has identified the source of Pip's comment ("I look, you look. . .") in Murray's *Grammar*, and it is Pip's grammatical iteration that helps us to see the doubloon as the navel of Melville's naval yarn.

At the bottom of the hierarchy of speculators, in the place of that supplementary, exterior, detachable status that prompts the quest for the transcendence of the semiotic condition in the first place, we find Pip as "The Castaway" who has fallen into the sea of speculation and discovered the material form of the text as language. In his textual immersion Pip saw "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad" (347). What Pip must have seen there was the foot of the only god there is to see, the weaver-god of the textual fabric



(*textus*, pp. of *texere*, to weave) that began in Chapter 1 with “Loomings” and continued through the “mingled warp and woof” to end with Melville’s proud boast to Sarah Morewood that “it is not a piece of fine feminine Spitalfields silk—but is of the horrible texture of a fabric that should be woven of ship’s cables & hausers” (564). Pip is maddened by the experience, and recovered after his epiphany only as a small inky dot floating on the surface of an endless sea of textuality. In addition to being a “dot” or “speck,” a pip can be a seed (short for “pippin”), and Pip is like one of those “germinous seeds” that Hawthorne, “shrouded in blackness, ten times black” had dropped into Melville’s soul (*Mosses* 429). The “material” promise made to Hagar—that her seed would multiply—was fulfilled through Ishmael. Pip too is one of those “germinous seeds,” multiplying and disseminating the text he finds himself in. As Stubb suggests, his recitation may be from Murray’s *Grammar* book, but its thrust seems more from Derrida’s *Grammatology*, pointing us to the scene of writing where “sermons” are actually constituted (not “writ in high heaven” as Stubb exclaims [361]). His comment constitutes one of those critical self-referential moments in Melville’s text where “the constative or referential context is eclipsed; language conveys only its own empty, mechanical functioning” (Johnson, 94).

“But, unscrew your navel, and what’s the consequence?” (363), asks Stubb—leaving the consequences implicit for the ship, the voyage, and the novel. The tropical coin is the whale’s double, and like the whale (“all twiske-tee betwisk, like him—him—’ faltering hard for a word, and screwing his hand round and round as though uncorking a bottle—like him—him—’ / ‘Corkscrew!’ cried Ahab” [142-143]) it is in constant tropic motion. “Navel” comes from the Old English *nafela* by way of *nafu*, which also produced *nave*, meaning the central hub of a spinning wheel. Stubb’s joke is doubtless the ancient one that promises the secret of life and the universe to the young postulant if he will only contemplate his navel. After he does so for a few years, he discovers that it will turn; he turns it, and turns it, and turns it.... Until his ass falls off. <sup>7</sup> When the ass of a novel falls off, the pretense of unified, organic structure is gone. The bottom, base, support—what you thought you sat on—turns out only to have been an “attachment” in a rotating double/one structure, held together by a screw whose threads are like the threads of this navel yarn that Ishmael pretends to be spinning and weaving.

“Well, that’s funny” Stubb had said of Pip, anticipating the joke. But if it is funny, the reader is at least implicated in—if not the butt of—the joke. Not only a nodal point of attachment between the “scientific” and “poetic” poles of the novel, the coin-as-navel is a point of connection between the text and any reader who like Ishmael might be looking for the “meaning in all things.” As a point of connection between the material text and the reading space of the reader, its coming unscrewed allows the reader to escape from the unifying fiction of the first-person narration, unmasking that too as a fiction or a function that can “fall off” the text. And if our “escape” is a detachment from this textual umbilicus, and a loss of secure

relations between text and meaning, we may be left floating like Pip, the Castaway, in an endless sea of signification.

If we contemplate a navel archaeologically, it appears as the physical trace (“index” in Peirce’s terminology) of a lost umbilical connection with the mother as *source* of nourishment, being and life itself. As a special point on the surface of our bodies, different from all others, and as a sign of lost “attachment,” it can function metaphorically to suggest any and all modes of attachment, including that between inside and outside, across or through the barrier of the skin that covers our physical identity. Considered in this light, Melville’s metaphor of the coin as ship’s navel is functionally similar to Lacan’s troping notion of the *point de capiton* (usually translated as “anchoring point,” literally “upholstery button”). The *point de capiton* is for Lacan the *mythical* point at which discourse hooks itself on to signification, evoking the primal source of language in our childhood experience, and that first point of metaphorical attribution, where the child *disconnects* the thing from its name and the animal from its cry, effecting a division between concept and signifier, between the “real” and the “symbolic” without the possibility of a return. For Freud there had always been “in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream” a point where there was “a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled.... This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown” (564). For Lacan the attempt to “reconnect,” to “screw” a signification onto a signifier in a definitive or final way can only attach another signifier to the first signifier, giving rise to a new signification, and so on and on, indefinitely.

The *points de capiton* function in two ways for Lacan. Although only a trace of the lost connection to the Real, the *point de capiton* can succeed in producing a kind of psychogrammatical closure of signification at the level of the sentence. As a function on the diachronic axis, it can be seen to effect this closure only with the last term of the sentence, constituting only the briefest of pauses in the ongoing chase after signifiers—a chase which Lacan, like Melville, compares to the pursuit of a fish:

In it [a diagram] is articulated what I have called the ‘anchoring point’ (*point de capiton*) by which the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement (*glissement*) of the signification. [...] Only in this vector does one see the fish it hooks, a fish less suitable in its free movement to represent what it withholds from our grasp than the intention that tries to bury it in the mass of the pre-text, namely, the reality that is imagined in the ethological schema of the return of need. (303)

The synchronic function of the *point de capiton* is for Lacan the more hidden one, the one that takes us to the source of detachment and to metaphor, simultaneously the point of (organic) detachment and (only) rhetorical re-attachment.

One of the differences between the anatomical belly-button and the *points de capiton* is between the singular and the plural. The surface of the human body has only one, but the surface of a text—like the analyst’s

couch—is studded with them, functioning both diachronically on its syntagmatic axis and synchronically on its paradigmatic axis, as warp and woof of the textual fabric. Melville's novel is a vast textual *surface*, dotted with such *points*. Father Mapple's sermon, delivered to an audience in the *nave* of the church ("Midships! Midships!") reminds us of the metaphorical etymology of "nave" in *navis*, for ship. Behind Mapple's back as he speaks is

a large painting representing a gallant ship beating against a terrible storm off a lee coast of black rocks and snowy breakers. But high above the flying scud and dark-rolling clouds, there floated a little isle of sunlight, from which beamed forth an angel's face; and this bright face shed a distinct spot of radiance upon the ship's tossed deck, something like that silver plate now inserted into the Victory's plank where Nelson fell. (43)

"What could be more full of meaning?" asks Ishmael, and it is impossible to miss the point of Mapple's sermon. He offers us a message of comfort, even when the navel has been unscrewed and the ass has fallen off: "Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him" (51). But some who preach are themselves "castaways" (50) he notes, and Mapple too though on land is at sea in the book, trying to go beneath its surface of "yarns" and "strands" to the "depths" of meaning that Jonah's "deep sea line" sounds (45). On either side of Mapple's pulpit the white marble walls present texts that tell a different story, the story of a wall as "Flatzplatz," a surface text without depth, a writing without referent. "Those frigid inscriptions on the wall" (40) memorialize absence, both of the lives of those dead and of their bodies (lost at sea) which also have no physical presence in the text: "What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave" (41). The white surface wall of writing that frames Mapple's plunge into the "depths" of the text provides a commentary on his sermon, and suggests the similarities between him and Ahab, whose textual madness is to take the metaphor literally, to try to reach through the wall to touch the physical body of its meaning: "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough" (144).

Mapple's sermon is based on the text of Jonah, who was upset in the end because his hearers in Nineveh heeded his warnings, thus violating the Cassandra-code of the biblical prophets who preached in vain. Even if we heed Mapple's message, trying not to perish *because* of it, we are left with a "surface" image of survival, struggling on the surface of the sea of life with only our own efforts to keep us afloat, and only the image of a superficial "delight" if we succeed. The novel's Epilogue provides another synchronic *point de capiton* to serve in lieu of the indefinitely postponed closure of meaning. Ishmael escapes the "closing vortex" of a deep and final signification only to float before us on the white surface of the text, contemplating

its navel for the last time: "When I reached it ["the closing vortex"], it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve" (470). Ishmael is saved from closure first by the bouyant coffin, that seems to turn the whole affair into a textual joke, as if it were an answer to Ishmael's plea in Chapter 3: "Landlord, for God's sake, Peter Coffin!" shouted I. 'Landlord! Watch! Coffin! Angels! save me!" (31). But after we watch the coffin save him in the appointed manner, we read that he is also saved by the "devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" (470). Thus he is saved only to continue revolving around the ship's navel, as he steps forward to tell the story of how he came to tell the story of . . . .

"Father" Mapple had concluded his sermon with the promise of a "deliciousness" for him who "can say with his final breath—O Father!" (51), calling on the great author both as source of the cosmic textual logos and authority for its validity and value. But Ishmael is an orphan, and his text, like all written texts, comes before us as an orphan. "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee," writes Ishmael, quoting verbatim from the English of the King's Bible. The "I" here slides from the fictional representation of a narrator of the novel, to the voice of the novel as text, through the infinite iterability of signifiers to that image of textual authority our tradition has fixed on the Bible. All fuse together into the same fatherless web of signification. "This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught," wrote Ishmael (128). And a "draught," as well as "the quantity of fish taken in at one drawing" (*dragan*, to draw) is a kind of writing that constitutes an order for the payment of money drawn on funds that are elsewhere. Like all authors, Ishmael leaves us only with "paper money," in the form of his personal check.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Marc Shell (*Money* 172) for a discussion of Hegel. Shell's general thesis is that "a formal money of the mind" speaks "ventriloquistically, as it were, through the mouths of theologians, poets, and philosophers" (4).
- <sup>2</sup> Like so many of Coleridge's formulations, this can be traced back to several German exemplars. Todorov conducts a long discussion of the "Romantic Crisis" and the opposition of symbol and allegory without mentioning Coleridge once. The crisis of representation here invoked is not new *per se*, merely a new attempt to deal with the perennial one. Cf. Exodus 32, where Aaron in the absence of Moses makes an idol or golden calf to be worshiped in place of the true god who transcends all forms of material representation.
- <sup>3</sup> See Marc Shell (*Money*, Chapter 1) for some useful views of the American debate between 1825-75. His Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with Kant and Hegel, Goethe, Lessing and Heidegger.

- <sup>4</sup> Paul Valéry defines poetry as “an effort by one man to create an artificial and ideal order by means of a material of vulgar origin” (192). This is the *alchimie du verbe* of Rimbaud that later inspired Breton and his group.
- <sup>5</sup> Less than a year later, negotiating for the publication of *Pierre*, Bentley claimed that only someone ignorant of “the absolute failure of your former works might be tempted to make a trifling advance on the chance of success,” and appealed to the “considerable outlay of advertisements to make it pay, much more to yield a profit” as justification for insistence on his terms (562).
- <sup>6</sup> He would also track “doublon” to *doblón*, aug. of *dobla*, from the Latin *dupla*, fem. of *duplus*, double. It seems related to *dubius*, doubtful, as if hesitating between two alternatives, as well as to *-plex* (-fold), from *plicare*, to fold, or perhaps *plectere*, to weave, plait, entwine. Having bared these threads he returns to his archives.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Thomas Pynchon’s version in *V.*: Somehow it was all tied up with a story he’d heard once, about a boy born with a golden screw where his navel should have been. For twenty years he consults doctors and specialists all over the world, trying to get rid of this screw, and having no success. Finally, in Haiti, he runs into a voodoo doctor who gives him a foul-smelling potion. He drinks it, goes to sleep and has a dream. In this dream he finds himself on a street, lit by green lamps. Following the witch-man’s instructions, he takes two rights and a left from his point of origin, finds a tree growing by the seventh street light, hung all over with colored balloons. On the fourth limb from the top there is a red balloon; he breaks it and inside is a screwdriver with a yellow plastic handle. With the screwdriver he removes the screw from his stomach, and as soon as this happens he wakes from the dream. It is morning. He looks down toward his navel, the screw is gone. That twenty years’ curse is lifted at last. Delirious with joy, he leaps up out of bed, and his ass falls off.

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COUNTERFEIT COINS AND TRAFFIC JAMS: REWRITING  
MASCULINITY IN *ADAM BEDE*

George [Henry Lewes] expressed his fear that Adam's part was too passive throughout the drama, and that it was important for him to be brought into more direct collision with Arthur. This doubt haunted me, and out of it grew the scene in the Wood between Arthur and Adam: the fight came to me as a necessity one night at the Munich Opera . . .

George Eliot, "History of 'Adam Bede,'" *Letters* (504)

In her journal entry for November 30, 1858, George Eliot articulates one of the central concerns that arose in her otherwise nearly effortless drafting of *Adam Bede*:<sup>1</sup> the shape masculinity "should" take. In this passage, a sense of masculinity as necessarily active, even combative, emerges as a palliative for "doubt[ful]" passivity. Moreover, Eliot's entry posits the problematic locus of revision as something that must constitute itself in triangulation and exchange, for "the scene in the Wood between Arthur and Adam" marks the moment in the novel in which the two male vertices of the central love triangle (completed by Hetty Sorrel) recognize and physically confront one another for the first time. Indeed, the triadic formulation of masculinity serves as a foundation for the text as a whole, as becomes apparent when Eliot discusses her composition process: "When I began to write it, the only elements I had determined on besides the character of Dinah were the character of Adam, his relation to Arthur Donnithorne and their mutual relation to Hetty" (*Letters* 503).

That an emerging bourgeois masculinity and the exchanges it enables and is enabled by serve as the focal points of Eliot's novel has readily been discerned by both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics.<sup>2</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of material and symbolic exchanges between men in the nineteenth-century novel, and more specifically, her highlighting in "*Adam Bede* and *Henry Esmond*: Homosocial Desire and the Historicity of the Female" of the toll such exchanges take on the "contemptible female figure" who functions as "solvent" for those exchanges, are by this time well-known, and require no further rehearsing here (*Between Men* 160). Sedgwick's argument has functioned as a powerful model for many of us as theorists and critics of exchange in nineteenth-century literature and culture.

However, it is precisely the power of her gesture that I will reexamine in my reading of *Adam Bede*, for despite Sedgwick's care in noting power (as well as class and morality) differentials between men, her sketch of the relations

between men and women in *Adam Bede* ultimately refers back to a structural vision of a triangular male traffic in women. The seductiveness of Sedgwick's model lies precisely in the fact that, as an uninterrogated given, *the exchanges always work*, and therefore, masculinity coheres, even if historically it can be classed and powered differently within itself. Thus, even as Sedgwick highlights and thereby critiques woman's role as "solvent" in exchanges between men, the abstracted triangular structure of libidinal exchange upon which she relies functions as a solvent for her theoretical positioning.

Returning to the novel that seems to present itself in Sedgwick's very terms—a novel that, as we have seen, grew out of a central love triangle and in anxious response to masculinity "haunted" by passivity—I will focus on the third vertice of the central triad, namely Hetty Sorrel, and the ways in which she not only fails to lubricate the exchange between Adam and Arthur, but even disrupts and renders this transaction impossible. The third section of my paper addresses the "traffic jams" in the homosocial spectrum that result, and examines the effects of such jamming of the system on formations and representations of masculinity. In order to avoid the difficulty that I locate in Sedgwick's analysis, I will attempt throughout the paper to be specific about the metaphors and registers of exchange with which I am working. Namely, I will highlight the moments in which the libidinal symbolic exchange economy—the traffic in women—slides from or into the material economy—the business—represented in the novel, and explore what such outgrowths and collisions do not only to the "objects" up for exchange, but also the "subjects" attempting the transactions. In the final section of my paper, I will suggest that while Eliot concludes *Adam Bede* with another (altered) love triangle that in some ways reinscribes the system of a male traffic in women, the shifts in the triangle occasioned by Hetty's "jamming" simultaneously represent a denaturalizing of the system itself.

I. COUNTERFEIT COINS AND MASQUERADES

You must learn to deal with odd and even in life, as well as in figures. I tell you now, as I told you ten years ago, when you pommeeled young Mike Holdsworth for wanting to pass a bad shilling, before you knew whether he was in jest or earnest—you're over-hasty and proud, and apt to set your teeth against folks that don't square to your notions.

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (290-1)

Addressed to Adam Bede, this relatively innocuous sounding statement seems to function simply as a bit of mentoring on the part of Bartle Massey, who instructs male artisans and laborers like Adam in reading, writing and arithmetic. However, Eliot makes it clear that Massey's advice is anything but innocuous, for the flagrantly misogynistic old schoolteacher who phallicly "paus[es] between every sentence to rap the floor with a knobbed stick which

rest[s] between his legs” serves as a substitute for Adam’s emasculated and dead father (281). Drawing upon an event that never finds representation in the novel, but that all the more foreshadows the “necess[ary]” fight in the woods between Adam and Arthur Donnithorne (a point to which I will return at the end of this section), Massey uses this example of Adam’s hasty adolescent pugilism to warn Adam against turning down the position of manager of the local lord’s woods—a position that would catapult Adam from his status as artisan carpenter into managerial bourgeois—simply because he and the “old Squire” disagreed once over a small business transaction. Moreover, given its position in the discussion between Adam and his surrogate father, and in the novel’s larger narrative, the passage cited above reverberates in more registers than merely the economic.

Immediately following his admonition, Massey provides a simile for Adam’s illogic: “It’s as foolish as that notion o’ yours that a wife is to make a working man comfortable. Stuff and nonsense!—stuff and nonsense!” (291). With this linguistic substitution, Massey brings together class and romantic concerns, and highlights the difference between two visions of the material and symbolic value of wives. For Massey, economic and social advancement arise from education—“having a head on your shoulders, instead of a turnip” (291)—a progression that only can be jeopardized by a wife.

However, Adam’s vision differs greatly from Massey’s, as it echoes to the point of caricature the middle-class vision of domesticity and the “Angel in the House”:

[T]hose kitten-like glances and movements are just what one wants to make one’s hearth a paradise . . . How she will dote on her children! She is almost a child herself, and the little pink things will hang about her like florets round the central flower; and the husband will look on, smiling benignly, able, whenever he chooses, to withdraw into the sanctuary of his wisdom, towards which his sweet wife will look reverently, and never lift the curtain. (197-8)

Clearly, this bourgeois fantasy, paired with Adam’s refusal to propose to Hetty until he has amassed sufficient funds to provide a home “such as he could expect her to be content with after the comfort and plenty of the Farm” (254), reveal that for Adam, a wife, and more specifically, Hetty Sorrel as wife, symbolizes (his) departure from the laboring class and firm positioning within the ranks of the emerging bourgeoisie.

That this discussion with Massey about business prospects cannot be dissociated from the traffic in women can be seen when we position the encounter within the larger narrative of the novel. At the conclusion of the prior chapter, when Adam goes silently to woo Hetty and attributes her blushes for Arthur Donnithorne to himself, Hetty dresses as her Methodist cousin, Dinah Morris, in order to mock Adam’s puritanical criticism of her love of finery:

The little minx had found a black gown of her aunt’s, and pinned it close

round her neck to look like Dinah’s, had made her hair as flat as she could, and had tied on one of Dinah’s high-crowned borderless net-caps. The thought of Dinah’s pale grave face and mild grey eyes, which the sight of the gown and cap brought with it, made it a laughable surprise enough to see them replaced by Hetty’s round rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes. (273-4)

An obvious moment of foiling, Hetty’s cross-character-dressing not only foreshadows the substitution of love objects that Adam will make at the end of the novel, but simultaneously paints Hetty as one who practices masquerade. We of course know what Adam does not yet know, namely that Hetty is engaged in an illicit affair with his childhood friend, the old Squire’s grandson, Arthur, and that her constant encouragement of Adam’s attentions represents an ongoing masquerade.

While Hetty obviously cannot be characterized as the “particular type of intellectual woman” that Joan Riviere targets in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (210), Hetty’s performance nonetheless functions according to the dynamics Riviere outlines for masquerade in her essay. Hetty’s role-playing suggests, by extension, that there is no difference between “femininity” and the performance of femininity. And as a female narcissist par excellence and as the lover of the phallus- (and penis-) wielding projected patriarch of Hayslope, Lord Arthur, Hetty doubly “has” the phallus. For in Freudian and Lacanian narratives, the subject position of female narcissist equates to woman’s “possession” of the phallus in her substitution of her whole body for the phallus she would normally “get” from a husband or male lover.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Riviere’s “intellectual woman,” Hetty does not publicly display her possession of the phallus; she cannot perform either her intense narcissism (which she must practice alone—of course—in her room by the light of stolen candles) or her role as Arthur’s lover before others, due to social (religious and class) prohibitions. However, similar to Riviere’s case studies, Hetty enacts her coquetry as a blind, a shield to protect herself from the social retribution that would fall on her for that “ownership.”<sup>4</sup>

With this understanding of Hetty as masquerade artiste in mind, I would like to return to the quotation I cited at the beginning of this section, and more specifically, to the notion of the “bad” (counterfeit, or perhaps demonetized) shilling, in order to highlight the metonymy at work and the ways in which it subtends the coming together of both material and symbolic economies in Eliot’s novel. Succinctly put, in her capacity as masquerading femininity, Hetty is a “bad shilling.” Like a counterfeit coin, which furthers exchanges insofar as it can masquerade as that which it is not, Hetty seems to function in the capacity of the “solvent” that Sedgwick pinpoints in her analysis of the libidinal economy of *Adam Bede*.

However, also like a counterfeit coin, even as she appears to be exchanged, thereby upholding the workings of the traffic in women, Hetty’s status as duplicitous narcissist mocks and even troubles the logic of exchanges. Her

“value” diverges greatly from what the transactors believe it to be (the value they give to her), and therefore, the exchanges they attempt to make are riddled with an unknown uncertainty. By giving us an example of a “real” (in the context of the novel) breakdown of exchange, a sort of *coitus interruptus* between the young Mike Holdsworth (a telling name) and Adam Bede that erupts into violence, Eliot foreshadows the very real fight between Adam and Arthur over Hetty, and simultaneously hints at the breakdown of the traffic in women between Adam and Arthur that, if only momentarily, arises from their violence. I would like at this point to examine this violence more closely, to trace out the extent to which the failure in symbolic exchanges that the violence represents enables Eliot to rewrite middle-class masculinity and the libidinal and material exchanges that subtend it.

## II. TRAFFIC JAMS AND NEW ADAMS

[T]he issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal . . . [Women] should not put it, then, in the form “What is woman?” but rather, repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side.

Luce Irigaray, “The Power of Discourse” (78)

That Hetty’s disclosed status as counterfeit coin, or “disruptive excess,” occasions a “jamming” of the male traffic in women is borne out by the plot of *Adam Bede*. Even though Hetty engages herself to Adam once Arthur has left her, the “hand-off” the betrothal represents fails like a dropped baton in a relay race. Unable to resign herself to a lower middle-class future, and terrified of revealing her sexual fall to friends and relatives, Hetty flees Hayslope and kills the infant she delivers during her wanderings. The failure of the libidinal exchange has further ramifications for the text’s material exchanges as well. As Margaret Homans notes, Adam refuses to let Arthur “pay” (exonerate himself) either materially or symbolically for his damaging relations with Hetty (“Dinah’s Blush” 161). Or rather, the only “repayment” Adam will take is that taken forcibly and violently from Arthur in the form of a pound of flesh when he beats Arthur into unconsciousness and subsequently refuses to shake Arthur’s hand. Moreover, Adam, his brother Seth, and Hetty’s relatives, the Poysers, plan to relocate to another region because they cannot allow themselves to work under the aristocratic patronage of Arthur Donnithorne and his family.

However, inasmuch as the combat in the Wood serves as an initial rupture of exchange economies that echoes throughout subsequent chapters, the violence between Adam and Arthur not only intensifies the male homosociality,

and even homoeroticism, of the world Eliot depicts, but also enables Eliot to rewrite masculinity in such a way that the libidinal and material exchanges on which that world is based seemingly disappear. The first of these two points (the shoring up, through violence, of a homosocial spectrum that encompasses in its register a desire between men more intense than their respective desires for a common love object) emerges in Adam’s reaction to Hetty’s incarceration for infanticide. Although he travels to Stoniton (the place of Hetty’s trial), where he is joined by Bartle Massey in the capacity of caretaker, Adam has no desire to see Hetty, and even is petrified—quite literally—at the prospect of an encounter with her. Alone in his room on the morning of Hetty’s trial,

[t]his brave active man, who would have hastened towards any danger or toil to rescue Hetty from an apprehended wrong or misfortune, felt himself powerless to contemplate irremediable evil and suffering. The susceptibility which would have been an impelling force where there was any possibility of action, became helpless anguish when he was obliged to be passive; or else sought an active outlet in the thought of inflicting justice on Arthur. (471)

Indeed, Adam becomes possessed by an obsessive desire to track Arthur down in Ireland, where he has been stationed, and to inflict Hetty’s suffering upon Arthur: “I want him to feel what she feels. It’s his work . . .” (467). With these words, Eliot overtly links libidinal and economic registers. Moreover, what we seem to get here, as the language of passivity and activity suggests, is Eliot’s working through and deflection of the infecting doubts George Henry Lewes raises about the masculinity represented in her novel—a literary and narrative form of “homosexual panic,” to use the term Sedgwick develops in *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, at the same time, Eliot’s project entails much more than simply the reification of cultural definitions of emerging middle-class masculinity as active and powerful. In fact, Eliot attempts simultaneously to do just the opposite: to rewrite “active” bourgeois masculinity in such a way that, without falling into “passivity,” it nonetheless contains an ethic of care that balances the competitiveness and even violence culturally inscribed within it. We see this first in the interactions between Adam and Arthur just after their fight. Fearing for a moment that he has killed Arthur in a physical encounter between “man and man” (versus artisan and gentleman) that momentarily levels class hierarchies, Adam experiences an “intense joy that flooded his soul [and] brought back some of the old affection with it” when he sees Arthur breathe (354, 348). “Tenderly,” and “with a trembling voice” (348), Adam proceeds to nurse Arthur, even as they continue with the discussion that leaves them at odds.

As well, it is with a call to male homosocial bonds and bonding that Bartle Massey convinces Adam to give up his desire for (doing violence to) Arthur: “Adam, my boy, the blow falls heavily on [Martin Poyser, Hetty’s uncle] as well as you: you must help poor Martin; you must show courage. Drink some wine



now, and show me you mean to bear it like a man" (473). To which Adam responds, "I used to be hard sometimes: I'll never be hard again" (475). Clearly, we are dealing with several registers of "hardness" here. First, the line refers to Adam's agreement to attend the remainder of Hetty's trial and to expunge the violence he feels toward Arthur. Bartle Massey's injunction suggests a certain lack in Adam; Adam must fight his passivity in order to "bear it like a man"—read as "be a man." Simultaneously, however, Adam must resist being too "hard," or as the phallic connotations of the word suggest, "too much" of a man; Adam must learn to balance the intensity of his love/hate (flip sides of the same coin) bonds with another man with not only forgiveness, but also with a heterosexual union that works. However, Adam's statement itself calls into question his ability to perform this balancing act. Paired with Arthur's absence, Adam's promise can be read as a lament: "I'll never be hard again" suggests a loss of sexual functioning with the disappearance of Adam's (unconscious?) male object of desire, Arthur.

Thus it is that Adam turns to Dinah, a move, or redirection of desire, only possible upon two conditions: the disruptively masquerading Hetty must be expelled (first in deportation, then in death) from the novel's economy; and Arthur, too, must remain absent from further direct representation. This second requirement might suggest that the male traffic in women and the intense homosociality extending into homosexuality that accompanies that traffic end with Eliot's development of her "new Adam," her representative of a "new" middle-class masculinity. However, Eliot's refigured masculinity appears not so much to cause the male homosocial libidinal exchanges to disappear as to take on a new, more subtle guise. For Eliot ends *Adam Bede* by constructing yet another triangle in which Adam and Arthur serve as two male vertices, with Dinah, in lieu of Hetty, as a third. Set up by the reconciliation between Adam and Arthur before Arthur physically disappears from the text, this triangle seemingly functions not according to intense male bonding via a circuit of rivalry, but rather, according to the logic of the gift:

"But there's that sweet woman—that Dinah Morris," Arthur said . . . "I could worship that woman; I don't know what I should do if she were not there [with Hetty, in the last hours before she is deported]. Adam, you will see her when she comes back: I could say nothing to her yesterday—nothing of what I felt towards her. Tell her," Arthur went on, hurriedly, as if he wanted to hide the emotion with which he spoke, while he took off his chain and watch—"tell her I asked you to give this in remembrance of me: of the man to whom she is the one source of comfort when he thinks of . . . I know she doesn't care about such things—or anything else I can give her for its own sake. But she will use the watch—I shall like to think of her using it." (515)

With this scenario, Eliot redirects the traditional paths of exchange; rather than having gift and woman move in opposite directions, as in a trade between men,

the watch goes to Dinah through Adam. As transmitter, rather than transactor, Adam's embodiment of a masculinity that resides between activity and passivity enables Eliot to rewrite both material and symbolic exchange systems.

An act of gratitude for Dinah's caring for Hetty, both during and after the trial, Arthur's gift-giving nonetheless functions as a cloak for the fact that this second love triangle, even though reconfigured, remains a potential site for a form of male traffic in women. Soon to be physically distanced from Adam and Dinah, Arthur still assumes the position of an imaginative voyeur "watch-ing" Dinah "use" the symbol of his unexpressed emotions, and thereby appears to remain within the triangle, even if in absentia. The libidinal economy, aided by a mask of materiality (the gift) meant to hide exchanges even as it enables symbolic exchanges, seems to continue to underpin the space of a bourgeois sphere cleansed of its aristocratic Arthurs and peopled with its manly—but not too manly—Adams and their doting families. For as Dinah (now Bede) asks Adam after he returns from an "off-stage" visit with Arthur in the Epilogue, "Didst tell him I'd always used the watch?" (583).

### III. CONCLUSION

Have we ended where we began, then? Does Eliot's novel allow a fleeting jamming of the male traffic in women, only to develop a more insidious, because more subtle, system of exchange? And does this new system, represented by a "gentler," but not too gentle, masculinity, take an equally strong (if no longer killing) toll on the women embroiled in its workings? For once Hetty, a "most impossible sign" (Johnston, qtd. in Doane 28), has been ejected from the symbolic and material economies she disrupts, we indeed seem to be left in Dinah with a form of femininity that has metamorphosed from powerful Methodist preacher into the embodiment of a "new, silent, doglike eros whose only expressive faculty is through the eyes, and whose main erogenous zone is the feather-duster" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 142).

To these questions, I would respond yes and no. In no way do I intend to claim that Eliot's final positioning of Dinah is ultimately liberating, for Dinah's sphere and power indeed have contracted by the end of the novel. And the second triangle that emerges, one that is harder to discern than its predecessor because one of its vertices (Arthur) remains absent, indeed could be read as reconfirming homosocial bonds even as it attempts to hide them.

Yet something about this second triangle demands our attention: namely, the physical location of the gift (the watch), and what that location does to the triangle itself. As we have seen, Arthur gives the watch to Dinah, *through* Adam, purportedly for caring for Hetty. Rather than *being* the gift or being exchanged *for* a gift between two men (as Hetty was), Dinah *receives* the gift from one man through another. This constitutes a redefinition of the vertices of the triangle, for Dinah does not merely replace Hetty by filling her emptied position in the triangular structure. In the first triangle, Arthur equates to the active, mascu-



line giver; Hetty represents the purportedly passive, feminine gift; and Adam? As masculine recipient of the gift/woman, is Adam active, passive, or both? This seems to be the question Eliot really struggles with throughout the novel. The Epilogue appears to clarify this ambiguity by positioning Adam as the envied because undisputed “owner” of a domesticated Dinah, a booming business, and thriving family unit. Yet in the closing triangle, Arthur remains the (albeit absent) active, masculine giver, and a feminine figure (Dinah) comes to occupy Adam’s former position—the position that troubles Eliot so: that of the recipient of the gift, who seems to be both passive and active. And Adam? What does it mean that he functions as the transmitter of the watch? Where does he “fit” in the triangle?

To answer these questions, we must return to the watch. Is the watch all that Arthur gives to Dinah, and is it only for aiding Hetty? Recall Arthur’s words when he passes the watch and chain to Adam: “[T]ell her I asked you to give this in remembrance of me: of the man to whom she is the one source of comfort when he thinks of . . . I know she doesn’t care about such things” (515). To whom do these ellipses refer? If we assume the name they replace to be “Hetty,” then why use ellipses at all? I would argue, given the ambiguity generated by the substitution of ellipses for a proper name, that Arthur simultaneously gives Adam to Dinah, and sends the watch to Dinah for caring for Adam. Thus, Adam functions at one and the same time as transmitter and as the “passive” gift itself: he carries the gift, even as he is the gift. On some level, then, Adam ends in a much more pacified position than that in which he began. The vertices of the triangle have changed radically, as have the genders assigned to those vertices.

What I would like to suggest with all of this triangle mapping is not that Eliot ultimately does away with the structure underpinning exchanges; the triangle remains. But by giving us one transaction that simply does not work, and thereby opening up who and which genders can assume which positions within exchanges, Eliot denaturalizes the “traffic in women” itself. *Adam Bede* enables us, then, to avoid taking certain models of exchange for granted, and in so doing, helps us to generate more nuanced and specific understandings of the theoretical models in which we traffic.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As she notes in her “History,” “[t]hroughout the book, I have altered little, and the only cases, I think, in which George <has> suggested more than a verbal alteration, when I <have> read the M.S. aloud to him, <have been> were the first scene at the Farm and the scene in the Wood between Arthur and Adam” (*Letters* 504).
- <sup>2</sup> See, for example, the reviews entitled “*Adam Bede*” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (April, 1859) and the *Edinburgh Review* (July, 1859); for another recent essay that notes the work the novel does on emerging middle-class masculinity as well as femininity, see Margaret Homans’ “Dinah’s Blush, Maggie’s Arm: Class, Gender, and Sexuality in George Eliot’s Early Novels.”
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this, see Freud’s “On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914),” wherein he euphemistically discusses the female narcissist’s “self-sufficiency” with regard to her object choice (60-70). Elizabeth Grosz reads Freud’s notion of female narcissism through a Lacanian lens in *Jacques Lacan* (119).
- <sup>4</sup> Eliot casts Hetty specifically in such a role in her depiction of Hetty’s response to Adam’s transmission of Arthur’s epistolary break with her: “‘You’re in the right not to read it just yet,’ said Adam. ‘Read it when you’re by yourself. But stay out a little bit longer, and let us call the children: you look so white and ill; your aunt may take notice of it.’ Hetty heard the warning. It recalled to her the necessity of rallying her native powers of concealment, which had half given way under the shock of Adam’s words” (369).
- <sup>5</sup> For Sedgwick’s articulation of this “most private, psychologized form in which . . . men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail,” see *Between Men* (88-9) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (19-21, 138-9, 182-212).

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Anne R. Trubek

FORGERS OF THE REAL: *TROMPE L'OEIL* PAINTINGS OF MONEY

William Dean Howells' warning that "when realism becomes false to itself, when it heaps up facts merely, and maps life, instead of picturing it, realism will perish, too" reveals a fear of description untethered by narration, of details piled upon each other without any framing, guiding perspective (973). A caveat to literary realists written in 1886, Howells' statement could just as well have been directed towards a group of *trompe l'oeil* painters who were gaining increasing popularity in the 1880s. The paintings by William Harnett, John Haberle and others offer visual examples of what Howells sees as the abnegation and death of the realist project: "heap[ing] up facts merely," they extend realism's tendencies towards description and objectivity to its logical end-point.<sup>1</sup>

Howells' contrasting of "mapping"—a collection of data—with "picturing"—a framed, guiding narrative, correlates with two different models of perspective in painting, the dominant single-point or Cartesian perspective, and its less-common and less-known other, the descriptive perspective, or absence of perspective, found in *trompe l'oeil* paintings.<sup>2</sup> *Trompe l'oeil* does not offer a perspective *on* the real, but seems to offer an eerie, threatening perspective *from* the real. Predicated on the suppression of single-point perspective, *trompe l'oeil* seeks to present, rather than represent: a *trompe l'oeil* painting "sets out to make us forget that it *is* a painting....[it] aspires to be a fragment of reality" (Sterling 125). But *trompe l'oeil's* very name assumes a viewing subject who completes the painting: the form is dependent on the viewer's shock of apprehension of the painting's "trick" which gives the form its name ("fool the eye"). For the form's illusionistic goal to be met, a viewer must experience two temporally sequential moments: the moment of 'being fooled' and the subsequent realization that he or she *has been* fooled. Thus *trompe l'oeil* reveals realism's participatory valences, its ability to mobilize viewers precisely as it immobilizes and stills the real. The viewer forges perspective precisely upon recognizing its apparent abnegation.

The formal leveling of perspective in *trompe l'oeil* is repeated thematically in the depictions of commodities. While envelopes, letters and leaves of books were common themes of *trompe l'oeil* painting before the nineteenth century, the late nineteenth century American painters added to this standard repertoire the flat surfaces of consumer capitalism: playbills, photographs, newspaper clippings, ticket stubs, matchbooks and paper money. The formal "trick" of *trompe l'oeil* is also repeated through the objects presented: both *trompe l'oeil* and the commodity have magical properties, uncannily appearing to be something they're not. At once brutally concrete and abstract, material and

immaterial, commodities and *trompe l'oeil* painting appear devoid of any human maker and disembodied from any referent.

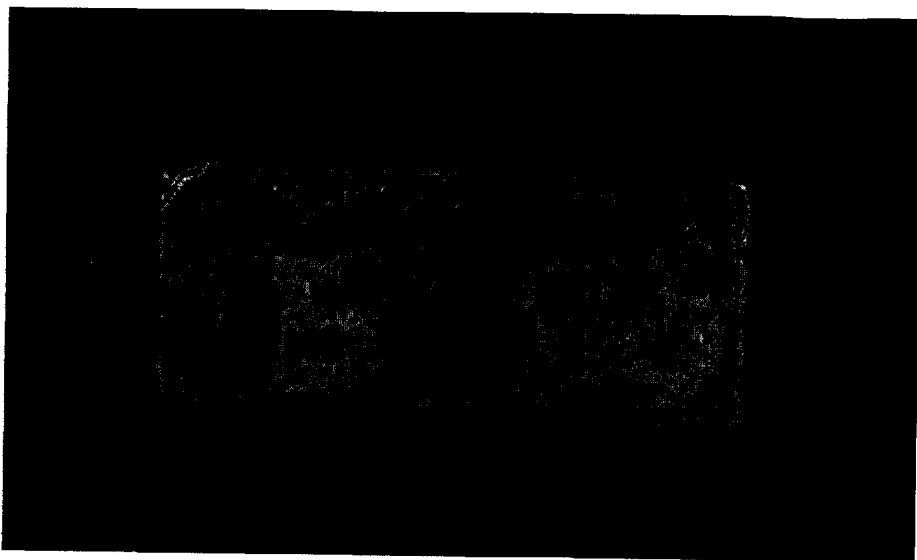


Figure 1: Five Dollar Bill

Paintings of paper money are a uniquely American genre. The first known American *trompe l'oeil* painting of money was William Harnett's 1877 *Five Dollar Bill*, which depicts an old, crumpled bill, slightly off-center, on canvas painted to look like a wooden board (see Figure 1). As if a business's talismanic framed bill behind the cash register, the starkness of the note asks to be read as a portrait. And there is a portrait within the bill: a man, presumably an American leader, is depicted in an oval on the bottom right. In the center there is a genre-like scene of a pioneer, carrying an ax. On one side of the man a dog stands upon a log; on the other, a woman sits before a house. Honoring a great American individual, recalling sentimental portrayals of the frontier and the image of woman as caretaker of the American hearth, *Five Dollar Bill* is a deceptively complex image, displaying Harnett's knowledge of American art history as well as his artisanal background in engraving.

Harnett's money paintings gained popular appeal, and their notoriety led him to be accused of counterfeiting. In 1886, two of Harnett's money paintings were displayed at Theodore Stewart's saloon in New York. Stewart was a patron of Harnett's, and the paintings were part of barroom bets on whether or not the objects depicted were real. The money paintings displayed in Stewart's saloon attracted the notice of the New York Secret Service office, whose agents confiscated the *Five Dollar Bill* on suspicion of forgery. Counterfeiting was a pernicious problem at the time these paintings were produced, and paper money was a question of enormous national debate. In the 1850's, as much as forty percent of paper currency was counterfeit, and the creation of a national banking system

in 1863, which took state banknotes out of circulation, was partially a response to the proliferation of forged bills.<sup>3</sup> Frankenstein speculates that Harnett was suspected of being "Jim the Penman," a notorious counterfeiter during the 1880s and 1890s. While the Treasury Solicitor in Washington inspected *Five Dollar Bill*, he deemed it not worthy of a trial. Harnett was warned, though, to desist from producing any more money paintings in the future.

While Harnett seems to have heeded the Secret Service's warning, others flaunted the authorities by taking up Harnett's theme. Jefferson David Chalfant's painting, *A Perfect Counterfeit* (1887), was exhibited only upon the provision that he absorb any legal fees, should a trial ensue. Charles Meurer's *My Passport* (1892) was threatened with confiscation: only after he painted red lines across the faces of the bills was the painting allowed to be exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair. In an almost mind-boggling footnote to this history of forgery and counterfeiting, Chalfant's *A Perfect Counterfeit*, whose title most likely refers to a now-lost Harnett painting entitled *A Bad Counterfeit*, was stolen from the Brooklyn Museum in 1935, and remains unlocated. In 1985, Harnett's 1877 *Five Dollar Bill* was stolen from the Philadelphia Museum of Art.<sup>4</sup>

John Haberle, inspired by Harnett's infamous arrest, painted currency which directly taunted the legal authorities and reflected on Harnett's woes. *U.S.A.* (1889) depicts a bill face down, upon which is clearly painted the government warning against counterfeiting. On the bottom left corner, a painted newspaper clipping, referring to another of his paintings, reads: "...entirely with the brush and with the naked eye...*Imitation* by John Haberle is one of those clever pieces of artistic mechanics showing an old greenback and other...". When *U.S.A.* was hung in the Art Institute of Chicago in 1889, an art critic published an article which accused Haberle of pasting actual bills on the canvas. Haberle went to Chicago where, in the presence of experts, he proved the painting was indeed a painting.

In Haberle's *Reproduction* (1886-7), the self-referentiality of *U.S.A.* is taken even further. A ten dollar bill is painted in the middle of the canvas. In the lower left, a tintype of the artist is painted on top of two newspaper clippings. The headline of the first clipping reads "A Counterfeit," followed by the subheading, "A Remarkabl...Painting of a ten-dollar...ted States' bill." The first line of the article reads "A...would humbug Barnum." That clipping lies on top of another, larger one which contains an engraving of the man depicted in the tintype slouched over a desk, working intently. The text of the clipping reads, "John Haberle the Counter[feiter]/[de]ceives the eye into the belief that." *Reproduction* is an illusionistic painting commenting on itself and illusionism, as well as on the *trompe l'oeil* artist's role as "counterfeiter." Nicholai Cikovsky argues that the painting is one of the clearest clues we have to the "self-awareness and sense of purpose—the consciousness—of an illusionistic painter" (26). But, as Haberle's "signature" as painted self-portrait attests, the artist does not

express but display himself: his is a radically exteriorized “consciousness,” the artist present only as the subject of a newspaper article.

The legal charges against the artists seem redundant, as the paintings themselves self-reflexively comment on the *trompe l’oeil* artist’s role as counterfeiter of the real. Assumptions of authenticity and inauthenticity are inverted: if authenticity is reduced as mechanical processes intervene, and art culturally elevated as it eschews the machine-made, these paintings are reversely, perhaps perversely, authentic. They are exacting, labor-intensive hand-made replications of machine-made things. Their aura is the opposite of Benjamin’s pre-modern work of art. For Benjamin, the authenticity of the physical presence of the original work of art bound it to history and tradition and imbued it with fetishistic value.<sup>5</sup> The aura of *trompe l’oeil*, as allegorized in the money paintings, is the reverse authenticity of commodity fetishism.

Like *trompe l’oeil*, money inverts perceptions and values, representation and reality. If money makes relations between people into relations between things, the *trompe l’oeil* paintings suggest that money’s reversibility also gives it an ability to remake things into people. By *presenting* the real, rather than representing it, the money paintings dramatize a coming-out-of reification between subject and object. They accomplish this two ways: first, they make intimate the commodity form through its meticulous hand-rendering; second, they transform the alienating commodity into portraits to individual bills, replete with iconography from America’s past and implied narratives of previous experiences of use. Subjectivity is created *through* the market and the *trompe l’oeil* form which abolish distinctions between authentic real and counterfeit representation.

Despite the mechanistic technique required by the form and the smoothness of the canvas, the money portraits do not celebrate the flat, shiny surfaces of capitalism. Almost all the bills depicted by various artists are old, crumbled, dirty, torn, stained. They imply narratives of *use*, not simply exchange; they bear the patina of the subject in the market. Time-worn, they have either been passed through countless hands or hoarded and saved in the wallet of someone down to their last bill. These paintings suggest not the dominance and abundance of money but its scarcity. Representations of crisp, new bills would signify prosperity, the relative unimportance of any one particular note. Old and torn bills imply poverty, money’s scarcity. Not surprisingly, the *trompe l’oeil* money artists were almost unanimously poor and from working-class backgrounds. Painting money meant painting something precious, as Charles Meurer expresses through the title of his 1900 painting, *My Last Six Dollars*.

In *Money to Burn* (1898), Victor Dubreuil, departing from the *trompe l’oeil* form, provides a counterpoint to the “portraits to money” such as *Five Dollar Bill*. *Money to Burn* (as well as similar Dubreuil paintings entitled *Barrels of Money*) depicts a seeming endless array of wood barrels crammed with bills ranging from one to one thousand dollar denominations. The money looks

unrealistic, painted in cartoonish greens and reds. Crammed into uncountable buckets which stretch toward a unseeable horizon, this money is pure fantasy. Dubreuil’s stockpiles of money provide a political commentary on the dangers of unchecked greed; the “portraits” display one result of such avariciousness: a poverty which transforms ephemeral bills into rare possessions.

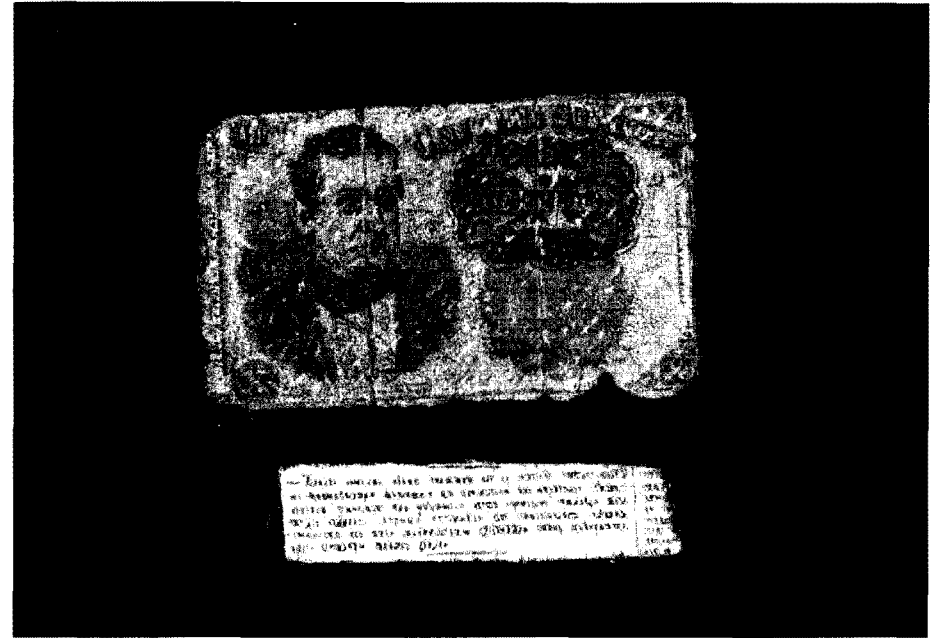


Figure 2: Shinplaster

The conditions of the bills in *trompe l’oeil* paintings transform money into both thing and sign, a possession as well as a means to possession. Many of the bills painted *only* contain use-value; others were highly speculative, at risk of being worthless. Bruce Chambers points out that Harnett painted three kinds of notes: ten-cent fractional notes and five and ten dollar Treasury notes (see Figure 2). The fractional notes, also known as “shinplasters” (so called because they were useful only as bandages), are Civil War currency printed when change was becoming scarce, long taken out of circulation when Harnett painted them (20). The Treasury notes are the infamous “greenbacks” put into circulation after the Civil War. A consequence of the debate over the gold and silver standards, the Treasury printed fiat currency or greenbacks which could not be redeemed in metal. National banknotes, also in circulation at the time, could be redeemed in gold. For many, particularly the wealthy, greenbacks were seen as speculative, unsound money. They were deemed “people’s money” because they were preferred by the poor, who would benefit from inflation. A majority of money paintings depict greenbacks or other speculative currency, such as the silver certificate in Haberle’s *Reproduction*. Again, Dubreuil would offer an explicit commentary on the paintings’ relationship to the currency debate: his

1896 *Cross of Gold* was painted in the year of William Jennings Bryan's speech of the same name. Like *Money to Burn*, Dubreuil's *Cross of Gold* offers an unusual *trompe l'oeil* commentary on contemporary debates about the gold standard.

David Lubin has argued that Harnett et. al.'s paintings are nostalgic; certainly, many of Harnett's tabletop still lifes seem to recall with melancholy a pre-capitalist time.<sup>6</sup> But it is difficult to extend this argument to the paintings of old bills, given the painters' fetish of paper money and adoption of mechanical technique. These paintings do not harken back to a previous historical moment; rather, they depict a moment severed from the ground of history. Jean Baudrillard writes that the ephemerality of paper in *trompe l'oeil* paintings signals "the effaced and unimmediate signs of a lost transcendence now vanished into the realm of the everyday" (55). As the artists refuse to adopt the God-like transcendent position afforded to the artist by single-point perspective in favor of the artist-effacing, un-authorial perspective of *trompe l'oeil*, they paint bills which similarly represent devalued or unstable power.

The paintings of money do not celebrate or illustrate the loss of subjectivity in the face of consumer capitalism's structures of exchangeability, nor do they harken to a better, earlier time before money reigned supreme. Rather, in these paintings, money is change, connoting movement and temporality. Several paintings explicitly draw this connection between money and motion: Ferdinand Danton, Jr.'s *Time is Money* (1894) is a pictograph of its title. On the left of the canvas is an alarm clock suspended from a green ribbon; carved next to it is the word "IS" and to the right of the carving is a pile of money suspended by a red ribbon. Below this equation is a painted slip of paper reading "Time is Money." Danton's painting stretches *trompe l'oeil's* already abstract formal dimensions: the alarm clock, bills and the painting itself are all signs of unrepresentable concepts: the real, time and capital. Haberle's virtuoso *Changes of Time* (1888) chronicles the history of American currency. Transforming *trompe l'oeil's* descriptivity into narrative, Haberle asks us to read his painting from top to bottom and left to right. On the top of the canvas he paints pre-Revolutionary shilling notes; on the bottom, he portrays greenbacks. In the center of the canvas stamps, coins, fractional notes and Confederate currency are depicted. Around the painting is a frame with carved portraits of all the American presidents, from Washington in the upper center to Harrison on the bottom center. A painted clipping about the charges of counterfeiting brought against him completes the paintings' historical self-referentiality. Showing no state or banknotes, all the depicted currency is either out of circulation or worthless.

Danton and Haberle's thematic exploration of the temporality of money parallels the temporal experience of viewing *trompe l'oeil* paintings, which involves a phenomenological movement from stasis to mobility, absorption to

meaning. According to Michael Fried, the stilling of temporality within realist paintings and the transfixion of the viewer in front of those paintings produce the effect of the real. In realist paintings, Fried argues, figures are presented as absorbed into activities, such as Vermeer's letter writers, and oblivious to their surroundings. As the paintings seem to portray a frozen moment, the paintings "encourag[e] the viewer to explore the representational scene in an unhurried manner" which "serve the ends of pictorial realism" (42). In *trompe l'oeil*, though, there are no such absorbed people, only objects. Uncannily animistic, these objects are self- or subject-absorbing. Instead of being transfixed in front of a scene of absorption, *we* become the absorbed figures absent in *trompe l'oeil*. The representational space of the painting in effect widens the painting to include the viewer. This sense of our anticipated and required presence often is reinforced by the words in the paintings, which seem addressed to the viewer, now also a reader. We are hailed into the space of the paintings.

On first glance, this initial absorption and interpellation of the viewer repeats the commodity thematics of the paintings. The money paintings seem to thematically and formally confirm capitalism's ability to melt inside/outside distinctions and dissolve subjectivity into its formative structures and systems of representation. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary argues that the early 19th century saw the beginning of an era of "pure perception." Sight became abstract, severed from the body and the sense of touch. Decentered from any fixed reference, the observer is without perspective, without "the point of view around which...meanings had been assigned reciprocally to an observer and an object of vision". According to Crary, this loss of perspective transforms viewers into subjects amenable to capitalism, which "uproots and makes mobile that which impedes circulation, and makes exchangeable that which is singular" (10).

But this dizzying loss of self only obtains on first glance. Like the depicted bills which, upon closer inspection, turn out to be worthless commodities, the observer is only momentarily lost in the vortex of endless circulation of meaning. The paintings incite the desire to *touch*, exactly the sense supposedly overturned by modernity. The viewer is impelled to act, to get up close and touch the painting, grab the visible edge of the bill, read the newspaper clipping. Unlike Benjamin's distracted *flaneur* of modernity, the viewer is curious, mobile, and sometimes must be physically barred from touching the canvas, as were the viewers of Harnett's "The Old Violin," exhibited at the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition in 1886, where police were forced to guard the painting constantly, preventing people from trying to tear off the clipping or pick up the violin.<sup>7</sup>

The curiosity of the objects on the canvas and the viewer before it produces an awareness that the paintings have attempted to arrest space and time, and the viewer becomes aware of their status *as* viewer. For example, to "read" Haberle's 1890-1894 *Bachelor's Drawer*, you must first move close to it (see Figure 3). The painting is covered with words, all legible, and one is compelled to stand within



Figure 3: Bachelor's Drawer

reading distance. As in *Changes of Time*, the painting's dense, jumbled collection of objects inexplicably adhering to the drawer ask to be read from top left to bottom right. While the top left quarter of the drawer is empty of objects, by the time the eye reaches the lower right quarter, the painting seems rushed and breathless, squeezing fragments of stubs and receipts into the bottom edge of the painting, as if Haberle had run out of space, or canvas.

Standing inches from the canvas, the desire to touch is palpable, and it is hard to prevent one's hand from reaching out to "prove" the painting to be three dimensional. Arm outstretched, one finds oneself mimicking Haberle in his imagined "space" and stance "behind" the canvas. The concentration of objects in the lower right quadrant of the painting seems to make spatial sense; it would be the most comfortable position for Haberle to stand, the place where a hurried, right-handed bachelor would stick things, were he painting an actual top drawer of a chest-high bureau. Victor Dubreuil's "The Eye of the Artist" (c.1896) comments on this imagined aping of the artist by the viewer. The painting depicts a letter addressed to Dubreuil and a five dollar Silver Certificate taped to a wall. A crude hole is cut into the wood, and an eye looks out from behind it. "Eye of the Artist" appears to be a mirror reflecting our own eye as we gaze at the painting. But it also appears to be a window onto the process of the painting's production. Our imagined projection of the artist is made "real": the title tells us that it is Dubreuil, presumably still working, peering out from 'behind' the canvas. Artist and viewer have become interchangeable, and production and reception have become simultaneous.

Positioned as we imagine the artist positioned while painting, so close to the canvas one can only see fragmented pieces of it, one loses perspective on the canvas (as the canvas, lacking formal perspective, has on the real).

Phenomenologically, we experience the immanence of the form: as Haberle

mimics the real, we mimic him. At this point, we are positioned as Crary argues the modern observer is, without point of view or stable reference, lost in details. Our eyes move from detail to detail, more compelled by the part than the whole.

But this is not our final position or perspective on the canvas. Insistent as the desire to step up close and touch the canvas is, the desire to step back again and "gain perspective" on the painting and its deceit is stronger. Perhaps in reaction to a feeling that we have been taken in, pulled as puppets across and down the picture plane, or the dizzying sensation of being lost in the chaos of details, we step back again. To make sense of the painting, we need to provide it with the inverse perspective it lacks. As we step back from the painting, we become the horizontal axis suppressed by the painting's verticality. Thus temporality and narrative, not as formal dimensions of the painting, but as the independent construction of the moving viewer.

If *trompe l'oeil* is an immanent form describing capitalism's threatening obliteration of distinctions, it is only so for a moment before the viewer realizes the form's deceit, that impossible and fascinating moment of stasis, self-sufficiency, ahistoricity, atemporality and loss of perspective. Then, the paintings are free floating, like the commodity form *trompe l'oeil* mimics both formally and thematically. But this split-second is rapidly supplanted by the viewer's recognition of the painting's formal contours, and the freezing of time becomes a moment in time. It is as if the viewer, getting the joke, breaks the spell of reification as they recognize the artificiality of the real.

"Heap[ing] up facts merely," to return to Howells' quote, the late nineteenth century genre of money paintings thematically doubles *trompe l'oeil's* absence of any horizontal ordering principle—perspective, artistic authority, history. Both *trompe l'oeil* and paper money level the field of social relations, whether of artist and audience, maker and user or seller and buyer. Seizing the means of production themselves, the money painters transform the impersonal signs of capitalism into intimate and personal objects through mechanistic technique. The viewer, on the same level as the painter, becomes the third dimension, the horizontal axis projected out from rather than behind the plane of the canvas. Formally and historically, American *trompe l'oeil* paintings of money afford a view from the inside out: the "map" of the real is "pictured," and perspective (re)gained. Thus artist and viewer are *forgers* in all senses of the term: they are counterfeiters, imitators, fabricators, workers of resistant material, creators, makers.

- <sup>1</sup>In addition to those discussed in this essay, artists working in the genre of *trompe l'oeil* paintings of money include Nicholas A. Brooks, Thomas H. Hope, Peter McCallion, Otis Kaye and John Frederick Peto. For discussions of their work, see Alfred Frankenstein, *After the Hunt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969) and Bruce Chambers, *Old Money: American Trompe L'Oeil Images of Currency* (Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc., 1988).
- <sup>2</sup>For a discussion of these two models of perspective, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- <sup>3</sup>On Harnett's and others' difficulties with legal authorities, see Chambers and Frankenstein.
- <sup>4</sup>On *A Bad Counterfeit*, see Frankenstein. On *Five Dollar Bill*, see Ann Jarmusch. "Who's Minding the Museum?" (*ArtNews* March 1985, 17-19).
- <sup>5</sup>"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." (*Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1969), 217-253.
- <sup>6</sup>David M. Lubin. "Masculinity, Nostalgia and the Trompe l'Oeil Still-Life Paintings of William Harnett." *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). 273-358
- <sup>7</sup>For a discussion of the often sensational reception of Harnett's paintings, see Paul Staiti's "Illusionism, Trompe L'Oeil and the Perils of Viewership," in *William M. Harnett* (Ed. Bolger, et. al. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1992) 31-49.

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REGULATING THE MARKET: THE SOCIETY OF AUTHORS AND  
THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF LITERARY PRODUCTION

In April 1884, Walter Besant addressed the Royal Institution on the topic of “The Art of Fiction.” Most widely known at the time as the co-author with James Rice of a series of twelve extraordinarily popular novels starting with *Ready Money Mortiboy* (1872), Besant had also written four novels on his own, of which *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1883) was the most successful. While his earlier novels with Rice were popular entertainment, Besant’s recent writing had a more sociological bent and addressed the serious living conditions of the poor in London’s East End and the role that entertainment could presumably play in lightening their burdensome days.<sup>1</sup> At the Royal Institution, Besant’s talk—later published as a pamphlet—took the form of an advertisement for the right of fiction authors to assume the social station of ‘professional,’ and thereby maintain themselves and their occupation above the crowd of other middle-class laborers and trades. Besant bases his call for professional status on what he defines as the condition of fiction as an art, taking ‘art’ to mean a creative activity having rules governing its practice and into which the novice must be initiated. It follows, then, that he needs to argue for the acknowledgment of the underlying laws of fiction writing, which he outlines at some length. Subsequent to the acceptance of fiction as an art, Besant claims, will arrive the social recognition that its authors so richly deserve but so sorely lack.

In September of that same year, no less a literary personage than Henry James responded to Besant’s lecture in an essay of his own entitled “The Art of Fiction,” published in *Longman’s Magazine*. James was already well known in England as the author of *Daisy Miller* (1878) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1882), with *Princess Casamassima* (1885) and *The Bostonians* (1886) soon to follow. James objects strenuously to several of Besant’s positions, especially the precision with which he feels the art of fiction can be described and taught. Furthermore, making rules for the artist is counter-intuitive, because the status of fiction as an art depends on the liberty of its creator to write as he or she pleases.<sup>2</sup> While he addresses the problems he finds with Besant’s argument for fiction as an art, James seems to ignore the premise of Besant’s essay—his interest in the social status of the author. However, a shared concern for the protection of the social position of the author hovers in the background of James’s essay: authorial freedom, of course, must not be hindered, but more than this, the author holds a ‘sacred office,’ which must be safeguarded, above all by authors themselves.

The appearance of these two pieces from authors with such different audiences—the one read and received as a mass culture writer, the other received as a high culture author—demonstrates a widespread anxiety among authors of the time not only about the social function of literature, but about the author’s own public status and social position. Besant’s lecture indicates his fear that the fiction author has been lost to the public’s eye—that in the rush to crown businessmen (including publishers) as the new aristocracy, the author has been left behind as common labor. James, on the other hand, sees Besant’s laws of fiction as a part of the problem, for they are akin to the demands of the public, which impinge on authorial freedom, to the point at which the individual author may disappear as anything but the mouthpiece of popular tastes. In the literary industry that had developed to satisfy the burgeoning market for fiction throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with increasingly high numbers of books produced with every passing year, the public standing of the author had been a topic of much concern for a long time. What was the author to be: a cog in the machinery of publishing, moved this way and that under the control of the market’s hand, or a highly respected individual artist, regulating his or her own work?<sup>3</sup> In their essays, Besant and James both fear the former and attempt to foster attitudes in their readers that will help bring about the latter of these two options. What becomes clear from James’s and Besant’s essays is that they took part in a general effort on the part of authors during the last fifteen years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to gain control over their work and their social status, an effort, in other words, to ‘professionalize’ authorship, to remove from it the taint of the factory and the market. A history of literary professionalization allows for a re-positioning of authors traditionally viewed as producing mass fiction such as Besant *vis-a-vis* high culture authors like James, allowing us to see both their shared concerns with the market and their different approaches to regulating authorship from within.

The professionalization of authorship has been connected with the rise of literary modernism in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries by several critics, including Raymond Williams, Thomas Strychacz, Bruce Robbins and Louis Menand.<sup>4</sup> For these critics, the move to professionalism was a distinct attempt to adapt literature in the face of the mass market, to carve out a space for the artist-author in the face of industrial capitalism, an attempt identified with modernism. As Robbins says,

[M]odernism proposes an avant-garde or elite literature that is likely to be obscure or shocking to the ordinary reader and that claims independence both from the life of its author and from the standards of ordinary public morality. Each of these commonplaces collates with those of professionalism. A minimal description, stressing the claim to esoteric, specialized knowledge as justification for a privileged local sovereignty, immediately offers several points of contact: autonomy, exclusiveness, anti-empiricism, obscurity to the layman. (65)

For Robbins and these other critics, professionalism in authorship is an attempt to separate literature from mass culture, to provide critical distance between the author and the society in which he or she lives. As such, they concentrate primarily on texts and authors of high literature, for which opposition to the majority is a defining factor. What these studies do not generally acknowledge, however, is that professionalism was influential throughout the various levels of literary production during this period—on authors of both mass fiction and high literature. A broader understanding of the professionalization of authorship—that it was a widespread effort to place control of the literary market in the hands of authors—yields previously under-examined connections between what we have come to know as high literature and mass culture. In fact, what are generally termed ‘high literature’ and ‘mass fiction’ can be seen as distinct yet affiliated components of literary professionalism, partial by-products of an extended effort to professionalize literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In other words, modernism may have developed partially due to professionalism’s infiltration of authorship, but it was a highly specialized *part* of the professionalization of literature, not its sole consequence.

Generally, “The Art of Fiction” essays have been used as exemplary instances of the tremendous differences between authors of high literature and of mass fiction. For example, in *The Common Writer* (1985), Nigel Cross sees the exchange between Besant and James as a crucial moment in the rift between high and mass culture.

By the mid-1880s an irrevocable schism had occurred in the bourgeois literary world. Where there had been literature there was now middle-brow and high-brow literature. The two antagonistic positions were clearly marked out in an exchange of essays between Walter Besant and Henry James on the Art of Fiction. (216)

These two essays do indeed stand in antagonism to each other; at the same time, however, Besant’s and James’s positions are significantly more similar than Cross allows. Moreover, the differences between them have been exaggerated to help to define a gulf between ‘high literature’ and ‘mass fiction.’ The most significant interest shared by Besant and James is in (re)asserting authorial control over writing in the face of the publishing industry and the public. This interest emerges from a concern that there is just too much bad writing being published. Professionalization will bring about authorial power over quality control. “The time has come,” Besant claims, “when only those who have a thing to say will secure a hearing” (331). In a later essay, “The Future of the Novel,” James most clearly sets out his position: the overproduction of novels is a flood that, “at present swells and swells, threatening the whole field of letters, as would often seem, with submersion” (100). Some force outside of the market must intervene to stem the tide and save literature. This common interest helps to demonstrate that both authors were participants in an effort to profession-

alize authorship. The push to professionalize authorship aided authors of both high and mass culture texts in self-definition in the face of being overwhelmed and crushed by the wheels of the literary industry, producing books for a growing and demanding public readership.

That authors of both high literature and mass fiction aspired to the status of professional does not, however, make them inherently similar on all counts. For while professionalization can be seen as bringing high and mass culture together in that their practitioners both were concerned with gaining control over their work in the literary market, the paths whereby authors of high and mass culture texts chose to attempt to gain this control sometimes differed significantly. The greatest source for this difference is in the dissimilar perspectives authors such as Besant and James held on the relationship between the author and the reading public as market. In “The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James,” John Goode points out the major disparity between James’s and Besant’s positions: “Like Besant, James is concerned from the very beginning with the relation between fiction and its readers, but he is less concerned with the effect of the novel on the public than with the effect of the public on the novel” (261). James, Goode notes, was most interested in the protection of the ideals of literature in an age dominated by the mass market, while Besant was more interested in protecting the public from bad literature. Besant concerns himself most with satisfying the needs and desires of the public, desires that come in a variety of forms. For instance, in “Literature as a Career,” another essay on the writer’s place in relation to the market and the reading public, Besant distinguishes among a wide spectrum of standards, from the highest to the lowest, but maintains the value of all of them:

There are lower standards—those which appeal to the better class, the class whose literary taste is not so keen, or subtle, as that of the first class, yet is sound and wholesome. And there are lower standards and lower still.... Yet it is all literature, the literature of the nation, the literature of the people, from highest to lowest. At no point on this ladder of printed sheets can one stop and say, ‘Here literature ends.’ (310)

The public’s tastes may range from the more to the less refined, but everything they gravitate to remains literature. For Besant, the public demonstrates an almost all-knowing taste for what is good, not necessarily the best, but good according to its own standards. Indeed, for Besant there is nothing lower than the author who produces books for which there is absolutely no audience or market:

There would seem nothing lower or more miserable than the lot of those who try to earn a livelihood by the production of bad fiction. But there is a small—now rapidly decreasing—class more miserable still. It is the class which lives by manufacturing books not wanted. (330-331)

It is from creatures of this persuasion that Besant hopes to save society at large. James's concern lies more with the protection of literature from the public and the market. His solution is to place his faith in the sacred trust of the figure of the author-critic who is capable of making unerring distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable literature; the influence of the reading public and the market must be excluded during the process of composition. For instance, in "The Art of Fiction," James finds great fault with Anthony Trollope for admitting that he will write to please his audience. James describes his shock at Trollope's "want of discretion" in revealing to the reader that he is only "making believe": "He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime" (5). For James, the author must not be constrained by the public's desires, but should dictate the terms of the relationship between them. For Besant then, the author must strive to save the public from bad literature, while for James, the author must seek to preserve literature from the bad tastes of the public. Dissimilar as they are, both James's and Besant's perspectives were partially produced by the influence of professionalization on authorship. A history of the professionalization of authorship at the end of the 19th century, then, reveals the shared concerns and the differences between high and mass culture texts, and can help us re-evaluate the gulf that has been set up between them.

The professionalization of authorship has this dual valence or trajectory because professions themselves have both a proclivity to exclusiveness and a tendency towards democracy.<sup>5</sup> 'Professions,' broadly speaking, are occupations that have an elevated social status, due to their exclusionary nature. Professions are exclusive due both to the specialized knowledge required to practice, often necessitating years of training, and to the self-regulation manifested over them by a professional organization—both of which limit the number of practitioners and regulate the quality of their work. Exclusivity and self-regulation allow members of the professions a certain amount of independence from the open market and control over their standards of practice. Turning inward, the exclusive nature of the professions protects and husbands specialized knowledges the maintenance of which, it is felt, cannot be trusted to the public at large or to the vagaries of the market-place. The three traditional professions—law, medicine and the clergy—have clearly defined bodies of knowledge, the administration of which is one of their main duties. These professions were originally designed to shelter some sort of ideal—justice, human life or god—and to mediate between this ideal and the public. This mediation provides the professions with their second trajectory—outward; they serve the needs of the public at large by providing the benefits of the knowledge maintained and guarded by their practitioners. Lawyers pledge to uphold justice in the abstract and to bring this ideal to the public at large. Doctors do not simply keep knowledge of human health alive, but they keep human beings alive as well.

Ministers maintain and extend biblical and religious knowledge and minister to the spiritual needs of their constituents. Presumably, then, a professionalized authorship would not only help to propagate artistic ideals such as aestheticism, but also to distribute these ideas widely and actively to a public readership. These contradictory impulses of professionalism are held together, sometimes tenuously, by an ethical code to which all members are expected to adhere. At times, however, they come into conflict with each other, pulling professional practitioners in different directions as to their social function and responsibilities.

Further confusion arises over the definition of 'professional,' because it has two meanings that at times overlap, but at others do not. These definitions are most easily explained by pairing 'professional' in opposition with two different terms: 'amateur' and 'tradesman.' A professional can, on the one hand, be anyone who makes a living from performing certain services in exchange for money; on the other hand, a professional can also be anyone whose labor is highly skilled and self-regulated—who practices an occupation that has been organized into a profession. While the former type of professional is ineluctably tied to making money by her or his labor, the latter has an uneasy relationship with the market. Occupations are professionalized in order to protect them from the ravages of ruthless competition on the market, but at the same time in order to make any sort of living at all professionals must charge a reasonable fee. At times, however, professionals have a tendency to see themselves as not only withdrawn from market capitalism, but above making money at all. The consummate professional, it has often been thought, is one who cares deeply about upholding the ideals and ethical codes of the profession, but who has little interest in the wealth accrued by practicing

This internal conflict over the definition of the mission of the professions was compounded by their expansion during the course of the 19th century to include a number of occupations other than the traditional three. Incorporated into professional organizations during this time were architects, engineers, accountants, and many others. These organizations lobbied for and attained governmental support in establishing sovereignty over their own affairs: training, certification, internal governance, codes of ethics and standards of practice. The upward social mobility and increase in income that professionalization provided was attractive indeed for the middle and upper-middle classes, inspiring them to push for the extension of the professions further and further. Despite optimism about the greater good of this expansion, the former socio-economic stability of a rigid professional system was shaken, and the widening of the interpretation of the term 'professional' led to its becoming somewhat diluted and nebulous. Ever since this expansion beyond the traditional three, exactly which occupations qualify as professions (and what levels of exclusivity and self-regulation qualify them as such) has been subject to debate.<sup>6</sup>

In an ever-expanding commercial market and the increasingly fluid social structure accompanying this expansion, it paid (both literally and symbolically) to professionalize, and literary authors felt this need throughout the 19th century. As such, there were several efforts to establish either organizations for the support of literature in the early and mid-century that, in retrospect, can be seen as part of an attempt to professionalize literary production: in 1843 Dickens, Thackeray and Carlyle were among a group of authors who attempted to form a “Society of British Authors”;<sup>7</sup> George IV established the Royal Society of Literature in 1823, and the Royal Literary Fund was chartered in 1818. However, these organizations were either extremely short-lived, as in the case of Dickens’s Society, or retained about them an air of the system of patronage, which was ineffectual and openly denigrated throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> The main obstacle to successful professionalization, though, was the nature of publishing. Because anyone could write a novel, essay or story and sell it for publication, it was impossible to attain exclusivity and self-regulation—the chief hallmarks of a profession, the absence of which Besant bemoans in “The Art of Fiction” and another essay on the professionalization of authorship, “Literature as a Career.” Without this crucial ability, and against the socio-economic pressures of the burgeoning and wide open market in fiction, authors had to turn to other methods whereby they could gain the status of profession for authorship and maintain some sort of regulatory control over the way their products entered the market. T.W. Heyck has noted that these methods included collectivization — the formation of groups of authors with common market and/or aesthetic interests — and specialization — serving the tastes of a particular audience.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the professionalization of authorship in the late 19th century is distinct from the concept of the ‘author by profession,’ a term in wide use from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onward. The ‘author by profession’ was a single individual who was capable of supporting him or herself entirely by the sale of writing, while a professionalized authorship is necessarily a collective of specialists. The aim of professionalization was to transform authorship into a highly-specialized occupation for which one studies rigorously and which only the properly trained should practice.

Standing as it does as the most concrete historical example of the attempt at the professionalization of authorship, Walter Besant’s Society of Authors serves as a focal point for the larger study of which this paper is a part. The Society was founded by Besant in 1884 (the same year as his “Art of Fiction” lecture) as part of a long term effort to improve the socio-economic status of authors.<sup>10</sup> As Chairman of the Committee of Management for the majority of the Society’s first 20 years, Besant envisioned gaining for authorship the status of ‘profession.’<sup>11</sup> Besant’s vision for authorship began with collectivization, which brought with it both bargaining power with publishers and greater, more widespread knowledge about publishing practices. Besant also felt that the power of collectivization would enhance the author’s image as both financially

capable and socially exalted. To Besant’s mind, this improvement of authorship’s public image was long overdue. Judging from the rapid growth in membership (to approximately 2,500 from the founding 8) during the Society’s first fifteen years, there were many others who felt that they could benefit both socially and financially from the professionalization of authorship.

Of primary importance here is the role the Society played in bringing together authors who have been classified as producing high literature and mass fiction, which bridges the ideological gulf typically seen as lying between them. In the aforementioned study, *The Common Writer*, Nigel Cross follows a fairly standard method of classifying authors from the thirty-year period on either side of the turn of the century: into those who produced ‘high art’ for a small, highly-educated and intellectually demanding audience and those who wrote with little concern for ‘art,’ but addressed a largely uneducated, less critical, mass audience. Cross labels these groups ‘artists’ and ‘tradesmen,’ respectively.

Literature, especially fiction, became a battleground between ‘tradesmen,’ as [George] Gissing called them, writers such as Walter Besant, Anthony Hope, and Andrew Lang, and ‘artists’ such as Henry James, George Meredith and Gissing himself, who had little confidence in the market-place but some confidence in posterity. (205)

While Cross attempts to portray a wedge driven between high and mass culture, it is interesting and enlightening to note that all six authors he mentions in this passage were at some time or other associated with the Society of Authors, whether as more or less active members (in the cases of Gissing, James, Hope and Lang), President (Meredith), or as founder and chair of the Committee of Management (Besant). The neat division espoused by Cross between ‘artists’ and ‘tradesmen’ blurs when viewed with this crucial fact in mind, because all of these authors were concerned enough about the socio-economic position of authorship as a whole to join the Society. Other authors often placed on opposing ends of the spectrum in their attitudes toward the social function of their literary output who were also members of the Society are as follows: Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli, Thomas Hardy (also a President), Jerome K. Jerome, H.G. Wells, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Arnold Bennett and George Bernard Shaw. Certainly, the levels of commitment of these authors to the Society varied widely, but their association with it speaks to its mediating position between producers of ‘high’ and mass culture—a position attributable to the Society’s role in attempting to professionalize literary production and thereby regulate the market for writing.

Because professionalism encompasses both an elitist move away from the public and the marketplace and a democratic move toward them, it attracted writers of very different persuasions, offering to both high and mass culture authors a sense of social status and self-regulation of their work. Accordingly, professionalism and a professionalized authorship tend to crop up as a thematic

concern in literary texts of both high and mass culture, and I would like to give you an idea of this with a few examples of authors from many avenues who demonstrated an interest in professionalism and the professionalization of authorship. Perhaps the most well-known example is Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), which takes as its central tragedy the absence of any regulation of the literary market to the great disadvantage of the author. In another novel, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), Gissing is more contemplative about the relationship between authorship and the market; it is written from the viewpoint of an author who had struggled his whole life to make a living in London, but who eventually inherited a large annuity and moved to the country to live and write as he chose. In another example, one of the central plot-lines of Rider Haggard's *Mr. Meeson's Will* (1888) revolves around Mr. Meeson's publishing house and its terrible treatment of authors who are forced to sell their wares to ruthless capitalists who haven't a care for the quality of the works they buy, but only want books that they can acquire cheaply and sell at a large profit. A humorous aside in H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909) further demonstrates a general consternation at the implications of literature's need to compete side by side on the open market with other commodities. Literature, the narrator claims, is a special kind of product, one that should not be left to fend for itself on the market. At one point, he describes the cover of an issue of *The Sacred Grove*, a literary journal that had been taken over by his entrepreneurial uncle who had made millions by selling liver remedies. The cover lists the contents of the journal—including a "Hitherto Unpublished Letter from Walter Pater"—side by side with a rather garish advertisement for liver pills. The juxtaposition strikes the narrator as indicative of a need for regulation of the market by the State:

I suppose it is a lingering trace of Plutarch and my ineradicable boyish imagination that at bottom our State should be wise, sane and dignified, that make me think a country which leaves its medical and literary criticism, or indeed any such vitally important criticism, entirely to private enterprise and open to the advances of any purchaser must be in a frankly hopeless condition. (205-206)

As with the medical profession, literature, the narrator contends, deteriorates as it is forced to fend for itself in the market alongside commodities with which it cannot compete. Moreover, along with Gissing's novels about writers, there are a number of *kunstlerromans* of the author in an age dominated by market capitalism. Sir Walter Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* (1883); Clive Holland's *A Writer of Fiction* (1897); James Payn's *A Modern Dick Whittington or, A Patron of Letters* (1892); May Sinclair's *The Divine Fire* (1904); and Arnold Bennett's *A Man from the North* (1912) all deal with the development of an author, guided, hindered or stunted completely by the necessities of the capitalist market in literature. Furthermore, authors of both high and mass

culture texts demonstrate a concern with professionalism in general. In *Discovering Modernism* (1987) Louis Menand has pointed out the crucial role of professionalism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and its importance to Eliot. Such mass culture authors as Arthur Conan Doyle, in both the Sherlock Holmes and Professor Challenger stories and novels, and E.W. Hornung in the Raffles stories thematize the importance of professionalism to their central characters. While these authors, of course, have differing ideas and opinions about professionalism—often leading directly from the contradictory trajectories of the professionalism—, the preponderance of it as a topic in a variety of kinds of texts, along with the founding of the Society of Authors, demonstrates the fundamental nature of authors' consideration of professionalization.

The contradictory impulses of professionalism contributed to disagreements among authors that can be seen as promoting a division between adherents to its elitist and democratic tendencies. The exchange between Besant and James on the art of fiction is a primary example of this kind of disagreement. This type of disagreement continued because of the fundamental differences between the two trajectories of the professionalization of authorship—toward serving the needs of the public and towards protecting the ideals of literature as art. Under Besant's guidance, the Society of Authors came primarily to be a legal organization, representing its members in contract and copyright negotiations and publicizing to them the inner workings of the publishing industry. As an advocate for members who were involved in contract or copyright disputes and other business dealings, the Society was alternately championed for defending authors' financial interests and demonized for concentrating too narrowly on the monetary aspects of writing and publishing. This latter eventually became the dominant portrait of the Society, and it is often thought to have emphasized nothing but the 'trade' aspects of literature.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Besant does demonstrate an unusually strong faith in the public's tastes and the mass market in "The Art of Fiction." The publishers, he claims, were foisting off undesirable and undesired books on consumers, and the market simply needs a different set of regulators than publishers—authors themselves. Over time, this more democratic impulse of the professionalization of literature came to be almost wholly identified with mass culture and literature as a trade. A concern with 'professionalism' in literature, meanwhile, has become more and more associated solely with its elitist impulse. This is why that in writing the history of professionalism and authorship, critics such as Menand, Robbins, Williams and Strychacz have concentrated on high literature like modernism.

While the idea of professionalism in authorship arose in response to mass culture, it was not a simple retreat from the market, but an attempt to meet it on authors' own terms. The problem of what literature was to be in the face of the dominance of mass cultural production plagued writers as the population of literate consumers grew throughout the 19th century. Was literature to be identified with the hegemony of the masses, or was it to oppose the rule of the

mass market? Professionalism attempted to negotiate between these two positions, to combine them within an institutional setting like the Society of Authors. However, this attempt failed because professionalism's contradictory impulses tore it apart from within. From this failure came the solidification of our notions of high and mass literature as separate realms; but a literary history of professionalism in authorship provides us with a way of demonstrating the kinship between the high and the mass. Professionalization was a crucial moment in literary history, and in tracing its development we can at once trace and erase the divisions between high and mass literature.

## NOTES

- 1 *The Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1902) provides a sense of Besant's commitment to the provision of entertainment as philanthropy. According to Besant, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* was used as a 'text-book' by Sir Edmund Currie in 1887 to build a "People's Palace of Delight" to house amusements for the population of the East End.
- 2 This does not absolve the author of the responsibility to represent reality and to aspire to attain the 'truth' about the characters he or she represents. See John Goode "The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James" in Howard, Lucas and Goode, eds. *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967) for a longer discussion of James's position in this and other essays on the responsibilities of the author.
- 3 See Leo Lowenthal's "Cultural Standards in Nineteenth Century England" in *Literature and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984) for an interesting survey of 19th century attitudes toward the mass's infringement on the territory of culture.
- 4 See Raymond Williams, "Distance" in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson, 1989) and "Beyond Cambridge English" in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1985); Thomas Strychacz *Modernism, Professionalism and Mass Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 1993); Bruce Robbins *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993); and Louis Menand *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).
- 5 Magali Sarfatti Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1977) and W.J. Reader's *Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in 19th Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) provide excellent discussions of the definition of the professions and their history in England.
- 6 A few of the key texts in the sociological debate over the definition and function of the professions are as follow: Howard S. Becker *Sociological Work* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970) (especially Chapter 6 "The Nature of a Profession"); Eliot Freidson "The Futures of Professionalization" in Stacy, Reid, Heath and Dingwalls, eds. *Health and the Division of Labour* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Keith M. Macdonald *The Sociology of the Professions* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995); and Harold Perkin *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1996).

- 7 Besant examines this organization in "The First Society of British Authors" in *Essays and Historiettes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1903).
- 8 In *The Profession of Letters: a study of the relation of author to patron, publisher, and public, 1780-1832* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1928), A.S. Collins points out that patronage had been seen as an outmoded form of support for literature since at least the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- 9 See T.W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982). See also Louis Menand *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), John A. Sutherland *Fiction and the Fiction Industry* (London: The Athlone Press, ULondon, 1978) and Thomas Strychacz *Mass Culture and Professionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 1993).
- 10 See Victor Bonham-Carter *Authors by Profession* (Los Altos, CA: William Kaufman, Inc., 1978 & 1984) for a history of the Society of Authors from its inception through 1981.
- 11 Stefan Collini discusses the symbolic power of the term in *Public Moralists: Public Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), p.31.
- 12 See John Goode's "The Decadent Writer as Producer" in *Decadence and the 1890's* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1979) for a critique of the Society's conceptions of the literary market and their focus on 'literary property.'

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Rita Signorelli-Pappas

THE ROOKERY

Hours like white petals. Spring Beauty, trillium, Solomon's-seal.  
In the glittering forest moments unfold  
to lose themselves in light, and then  
a faint dream of shadows in the trees,  
the wind drops as long gray silhouettes  
make a slow return to their nests  
like the broken breath of amazement.

We travel this morning staying close  
to the water line, watching and listening  
for the ones who remain high over our heads,  
who gaze without memory at the blue horizon,  
the abandoned slumber of a dissolving moon,  
who have not heard of death yet know  
nothing disappearing from the forest  
forgets to return, to take root and rise  
from the depths of mossy earth, nothing fails  
to be blessed by the river's incantation  
whispered endlessly under their wings.

I believed my life was unhappy yet  
nothing can stop this infusion of light  
through our bodies or the music of our voices  
in the pines, for we have entered the place  
where thin, silky monks hunch invisibly  
in remote monasteries of air and leaves,  
we want them to fly down and walk beside us  
or else come to stand at the water's edge, greeting us  
with hoarse, mysterious cries that lose themselves  
in meditation like the voice of the river.

For Mollie Sandock

Nick Barrett

MY MOTHER'S COOKING

I believed the world went the way  
of my mother's cooking: hams glazed  
and puckered by layers of caramel liqueur.  
Spikes of clove. Sweet, exotic discs  
of pineapple cut into cubes and eaten hot  
from the delicate tips of toothpicks.  
I believed in her black beans that floated  
like viscous jewels, the epaulets  
of escarole sautéed with knobs of garlic  
shaved as thin as almonds. For some,  
food is fuel, the body-engine stoked  
by complex carbs that transmogrify  
into fits of long term energy. For others,  
it is the amount left on the plate,  
the partially eaten torte, the lipsticked glass  
of Merlot tossed, prodigally, half full.  
But for my mother, food was a lesson.  
When I was young, it was constancy  
and love—meals taken at five, antipasto first,  
salads last. And because my father didn't  
pay attention, or couldn't, we ate  
when we wanted after their divorce:  
provolone and prosciutto clamped between  
pieces of dark bread for a pre-dawn breakfast,  
a syrupy port and pears and a blue cheese  
nights when my mother was alone.  
But the meals I remember best,  
were the ones shared with men  
she hoped to love, each one teased  
by shellfish that could be swished  
out with the quick flip of the tongue  
and thumb-sized shrimp cooked  
to a perfect, skin-pink, the erotic refrain  
of fork to mouth, glass to lips,

small purses of fresh basil dribbled  
with bitter chocolate as the understated  
dessert she fed to each one before she  
showed him to the door. O, how  
the little cockpits of their cars  
must have been unbearable as they drove  
home with nothing but a sweet taste  
in their mouths and the image of my mother,  
radiant as the sexy hairs of saffron she coveted  
in a secret vial and used in her paella.  
No pusillanimous palette could survive  
the wrath of her culinary passion for long—  
nothing seemed to survive in the end—  
and how bleak and inconsolable the wreckage  
was by morning—the lesson I did not want—  
the dirty sink, the dry, hungover smell  
of warm wine, the remaining mussels gone  
a little sour, embedded in a diaphanous bed  
of rice, and opened like a pair of willing lips.

M. Rukmini Callimachi

## UNDRESSING

First, I teased you with my hair band,  
    putting it on to hold my shaft of blue corn,  
scraping the last curls behind my ear,  
and when you thought I wasn't looking,  
I undid the black ribbon  
and uncoiled the brown,  
the black, the bluejay feathers.

And I think I saw you look away  
    the first time I did this:  
as this is magic, brother,  
and I put my hair in a tight chignon,  
ready to spring like the Diamond Back  
of the Carolinas, like the blue-eyed Cobra  
of Bangkok—I have a handful of snakes,  
my dear, and if you look my way,  
I might just turn you into stone.

And I lick you with my gaze  
    making you look sideways  
as the leaves of my bangs  
come undone. This is the way  
the harvest comes, with the falling of leaves  
with the shredding of corn, and in Ojai  
the rattlesnakes undo their skins,  
leaving their bodies black  
and naked upon the open land.

PACIFIER

What strength I had was way inside, like cream filling in a sick old treat.

I tapped the window with a brass candle snuffer to make all the birds dissolve into the sky. The sky was a potion of bird. The witch held the apple sky to my mouth. Behind the window glass I shrunk down near this child who was living in my house.

"Do you think I should spit in it?" asked Lucy, in her jeans and rubber boots, pulling up her undershirt and pointing to her bellybutton. When I picked her up she tucked her head into my neck, as if she were an infant, not three.

I heard the birds crying in my backyard, low and sex-starved and soulful. I had fed them for a month then stopped. In moments they would be back in my tree.

I wore sweats and a brown flannel shirt. My makeup was smudged awfully underneath my eyes. Mascara under my eyes makes me look even younger.

"Peregrine!" I called, shifting Lucy to my other hip. "Where did I put the scissors?"

Elena, four, wandered out from behind the kitchen wall. Her hair needed to be pulled back from her face. Otherwise she resembled a mad monkey, insane mad. Her brown eyes were like two dishes of the sea floor, where the earth is wet and burdened. She was the middle child.

"You're doing it right now," Elena said.

"Peri! Will you please bring me the scissors?"

"You're seeing my sister and not me," continued Elena, her intelligence a plague. I felt made of glass. These children were about to drop me. I had just turned twenty-three.

I stood by the wall to shield my body from gunfire, an instinctive move in this desert city, and pulled back the curtain. The tree was filling with bird shapes. A huge gliding black shred of the night in the sun turned into a crow. The crow swooped down near the ground and back up into the twilight. On the ground like a splinter pulled from the earth was another crow, dead.

"You're not very happy with Elena, right?" asked Lucy, smiling happily.

Elena thrust out her skinny arm in violence and declaration and pointed at her little sister. "You're mean, Lucy! You're mean!"

Peregrine, six, walked in from the hall, pinching some skin from her stomach. "See. I can pull my bellybutton out."

Elena started to cry. Her shoulders shook and her mouth pulled down in a

sad clown face. Her impossibly thin arms dropped to her sides. Her stomach pouched out roundly under her sweater. "Candy," I said, and even though I was twenty-three, motherhood still felt like playing dolls. "Forget about the scissors. I'll get some candy."

"I want money," said Peregrine, the oldest of the three girls.

"I want yellow cheese," said Lucy. The baby.

"I'm the only one in this house with a real outie," announced the middle child, Elena.

I stared out the window at about fifty screaming birds settling back in the tree.

\* \* \* \* \*

Max had come to New Mexico for the year. He was a visiting professor at the university.

"People get better every day," he reminded me, touching the tip of the feather to my forehead and carefully drawing it down the side of my face. The feather tingled my face until my spit glands had little spit gland seizures.

He ran the feather down my arm and stopped at my wrist.

"You're very dramatic," he continued softly, turning on the light. "What happens when you have to give them back? It's not that I'm worried about you."

He dropped the feather on my bare feet. Then he crawled over the sheets and I thought he was like an astronaut, white skin like a spacesuit, his skin was so white it was practically blue. He was thirty-seven.

The room was lit with the cool, pale skin of the afternoon. Before he turned on the light, the two lamps next to the bed had shone gold for not more than an inch out from themselves. Black and deep yellow met in metallic reflection off the chrome bed. The curtains covered the window completely as the eyelids of dead things. My dress was on the floor. I smelled like applesauce, from being at that daycare even five minutes. The smell got in the oils of my hair and skin, bad as nicotine. I inhaled a hot water scent when I pressed my nose to his shoulder, hot water or boy.

On the way to the sink, I tripped on my dress and banged my knee on the wall. The pain was like an aged toothless rat biting hard.

I thought of his wife, unemployed, taking care of their two sons, who were 6 and 3, and how she bought ingredients for things from the cooperative market. I shrugged his hand from my back and tasted chlorine in the tap water. A tiny red light glowed on the typewriter that was set up on the desk. The stack of paper had the gray of church light on hymnals, so I wanted to hear my mother sing.

A tiny headache in the center of my forehead had started to pinch when he turned on the light. I grabbed my gray dress off the floor and slipped it on fast.

"Leave, I don't care," I said. "I want you to."

"Yeah, right," he said, standing there naked. I smoothed my dress and

picked off a few little orange fuzzies that were from carpet.

"I'm taking these little wrapped soaps to those kids who live in my house," I tried. The paper on the hotel soaps was waxed and crisp as parchment.

"That's how you refer to them? The kids who live in your house?" His intelligence seared his gaze and moral arrogance fizzed just over skin, carbonation of goodness and fatherly love.

"They really are living in my house," I said.

"How's their mother?" he asked, not looking at me. More than anything he seemed blank, as if he was alone but felt someone staring.

"She isn't doing what she needs to for the state to get her kids back. It's been over a year."

"Tell me what she did."

"I don't need this anecdote to appear in your book."

"People do get better," he repeated.

"I think I want to keep the kids," I said.

"You're out of your mind." He draped himself over the bed and took the feather from my feet in one swiping gesture. The skin on his back was white and unmarked. I switched off the light. "You're going to give up everything for them? What about the modeling, New York, Pella? Pella, did you know that is also a city in Iowa? Every year they have a tulip festival."

"Ha, ha. I lived in Iowa too," I said, trying to remind him. "I know about that. What you just said about Pella, it wasn't an original thought."

I turned off the lamps by the bed. The room was pure dark with gold edges around the window as if the curtain were starting to quietly burn. The carpet felt soft and faintly damp on my feet. When I got into the bed the sheets and blankets felt better on my skin than his skin had felt. I listened to him breathe and to his wakefulness. I could see sleep then. Because in my mind was the desert from when I was a girl, not emerald like here, not mystical like the New Mexican desert. Saguaros reached and reached into the fresh hot air, in my memory. And it was fun, so fun. In my dream I was on my friend's dirt bike, in this thought that was more dream, riding away from a nasty little dog who limped out of someone's trailer and kicked up dirt, dirt teeming with tuberculins and Valley Fever bacillus, I imagined; the dirt hazed in clouds as the little ugly dog stumbled after me. The air tasted heated and sterile, like nothing alive, like shine against your tongue, brand new. Then in my dream I was under a Christmas tree chewing on a Barbie doll's rubbery foot. The bit of plastic was high heeled with little toes etched in and it felt so good between my teeth, so chewy. Deeper, deeper into rest, where a fear took me.

I awoke with a hard shake. The bed was a plate of silence.

"I've got to go to work," I said, my voice cotton, no, wool. I felt dizzy with exhaustion. Even thinking about Pella didn't give me any charge of energy. The phone, Laurence Buckminster, more voice than man.

I knew my life was spinning in a cycle that had me like a prisoner, no

worse, I was someone lacking in imagination. I switched on a lamp and kicked around on the floor until I found my heels.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied hopefully.

"Where does it take you?" he asked.

"What did you say?" I turned on the light to try and find some food.

"When's the last time you slept for longer than an hour? Does Pella like you to look this way? I mean, looking like you need to be committed to some institution, locked in a room, force fed by nurses? What would you do if they had to take the kids away from you because you weren't taking care of yourself?"

"I think I just had a dream about tuberculosis," I murmured, lifting the blanket then kneeling to look under the bed. "Anyway, I don't see you bringing me anything to eat." My voice was small as a pin and neater.

"I already have two children."

"And I have three," I said. "And no wife."

"Oh. This is a Who Works the Hardest contest."

"You lose."

"So what. I lose." He yawned. I had no interest in being with him. Earlier this week, when I called him at the university after seeing his photograph in the newspaper, the longing had not even been sexual, more cerebral, because I was too hungry and tired. Pella at least fed me. And Laurence could be reached on the phone. Laurence who I refused to see any more in person.

Poor me. How poor, Peri would say whenever there was a baby rabbit or kitty. How poor!

Six years ago, when I was with the novelist, those nights in the Midwest, betraying my psychoanalyst, the novelist betraying his family, Max had made me feel like a cover girl. Even now, as a cover girl, I never felt like it. I hadn't told him I didn't like his work. Now I realized why his art was boring, why his fiction was so well-received by academics.

I took my briefcase from the counter and went to the door. For a moment the light glowing on the typewriter made me stare. The red light glowed like a gauge on a heart monitor. The paper in the machine was blank. I walked over and put my hands over the keyboard. My hands were violet in the sunlight that was sifted through heavy curtains. I thought of my six-year-old foster daughter's hands in ballet class.

"Baby," he said, thick as maple blood drooling out of a tree after the stab, "come here and sleep."

"I don't feel safe with you," I said, hearing my own voice. I sounded like my sister.

He didn't even hear me. He was asleep. I could do anything. I could cut his hair. I could put lipstick on his mouth, I could write in permanent ink on his skin. He trusted me. That was ridiculous. I sat down on the bed and dialed Laurence's phone number in Iowa. The machine was on. I left a message for

him to call me at work. I dialed Pella's home phone number. He answered. I breathed. He hung up the phone.

I left the hotel.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was only seventeen when I started attending a university in Iowa. My health insurance would only pay for my counseling sessions if I saw the child psychologist. That was six years ago.

I had rented a house near enough to the university so I could walk to my classes even in the deepest snow. The ice skated on me during the winter, I felt, on the smooth plain of my obsession.

Max.

"What you have to remember," Dr. Laurence Buckminster said during our first session, responding to a remark I had made about the weather, "is that cold is cold. Even in the desert you were cold, because you never would have dressed for winter. Is that true?"

"The hair in my nose never froze," I said.

"Cold is cold," he said, "pain is pain." From all the photographs he had of himself on his desk, it was obvious that twenty years ago he had been a pretty man.

"It doesn't have to be this way."

He sat in front of the window in his office. The snow came down in Christmas card kindness and in detachment. The lamp on his desk was porcelain Little Bo Peep but she was grown up and without a lamb. He had a standing black lamp by his chair that was sturdy and gave off a white butter light. The bookshelves along the walls were not stocked with books but with tiny toys for the children he saw. He had one bookshelf with a door that locked for his books. The shelves were lined with doll house sized people and cats and dogs and farm animals, wolves and dinosaurs, milk bottles, beds, rolling pins, the complete cast from the Wizard of Oz, and geodes, crystals and feathers, watercolors and little paintbrushes. A pitcher for water and a large white tub of sand were on a table across the room from his desk. There was a wooden step stool painted light blue. It was blackened by shoe rubber and salt from the iced pavement in front of the building.

When it was my appointment, he turned off the overhead fluorescent light, leaving me for a moment in darkness, with just the gray light from outside. I was shadowed with the smiling flakes of ice that came down outside the window like time, an illusion of nothing ever growing, nothing more alive than me, certainly.

He switched on the lamp over his chair. That gave me an idea. Then he turned on the Bo Peep lamp. Two other lamps were in other parts of the room, on a child's desk and on the floor over the sandbox. They lit up several pillows and dolls that were scattered in a corner of the room next to a tiny crib.

The lighting was so yellow it was almost orange, and the contrast against the kingdom of toys, romantic tone and baby talk, the sparkle of the yellow light off his glasses and brown hair, his tanned skin against the winter light of the window behind him. . . I wanted to talk.

"I'm in school," I said, "but a degree isn't going to help my career."

"I think you feel very powerful," he said, "because of the mild fame of what you did before you entered the university. I don't think you care about the friends you could make. I think you're involved with a married professor because you want what you can't have. I think you have had everything you ever wanted. I think what you want is more of what you can't have. I wonder if you're thinking that if you make me fall in love with you that you'll be more in control. More than that, like, if you can make me feel something for you that my work will be ruined. Estelle, you can't hide the hostility you feel toward me."

"Dr. Buckminster, none of this has anything to do with you. I don't understand what you mean. I'm here because of what a man is doing to me. He's made me crazy. I can feel pins shoving into my eyes, right now. He must have some kind of voodoo doll of me."

"Do you really think he cares enough to have a voodoo doll?" The psychoanalyst's lips became thin and white, I thought, then I decided it must be the natural light off the snow and the electric lamplight playing tricks with his expressions. "If he did you wouldn't be the one in therapy."

"I want to tell you what he's doing to me. He's a madman. A maniac. He isn't even attractive. I finally found something good and ugly and it's trying to kill me. I wanted that too, really, my death at the hands of a monster. How can I let go of that? I mean, the hurt is so golden. I cherish these feelings, as I would a sister."

He laughed. Behind the shine on his glasses I could see that he was openly enjoying looking at me and he wasn't even trying to hide it. He kicked off his shoe and scratched the heel of his stocking foot with the tip of his other shoe. Tears filled my vision with underwater color. I held my breath until he slipped his shoe back on and put his notebook and pen on the floor. He crossed his arms and his smile became quiet. I looked past him at the snow. My face was dry. Then time breathed and slept. Some of the anxiety chilled and set; I shivered, and lived in the moment. I felt rested.

"Have you written any books?" I asked.

"That line won't work with me." He handed me a folded blanket of striped yarn.

I wished I could take the blanket from him. How would that look though. Me sitting in this man's office with a blanket around my shoulders. Add a hundred years and a fireplace and a cat and I'd be his great-grandmother. "Why don't you use it?"

"Tell me about the man who's putting pins in your eyes."

"Max Kattrall. He's a professor of literature." I paused, thinking that if only

he had just cuddled himself into the blanket, I could have loved him with the love of a good daughter. "What's so funny?"

"If I had a dollar for every student that came in because of that psychopath."

"Excuse me? You know him?"

"He's a repeat offender."

I was an outlined image in a coloring book on sexual harassment.

"You're coloring outside the lines, Dr. Buckminster." I breathed around the mouthful of humiliation.

The next four years while I lived in Iowa, Laurence Buckminster and I bonded in his warm dark office, Max kept writing, had another baby with his wife, and, according to Dr. Buckminster, seeded inspiration from relationships with students. Then came literary success, for Max, and the loss of a therapist, for me, as I became Laurence's best friend.

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Six years after that first appointment with Laurence, I lived in New Mexico far away from Iowa City. I drove to Santa Fe after leaving Max at the hotel. Pella's studio is isolated in the desert. He is there for the Santa Fe address, but it is a grungier part of the desert than Albuquerque.

I listen to the camera grind and split time and light. The photographer has become interested in cold skin. We are outside his studio and the day is clear and bright. I lay in the sand and he comes down, down, from above me. I smell the oil and steel of the camera, I think, and insect too, that bitter smell of crushed exoskeleton, only I have not seen anything alive today except the cactus and streaming shrubbery of dryness and lime green. I have on a deep gold slip. The straps around my shoulders are three inches of yellow satin studded with a tiny emerald studded buckle.

Pella pushes back his black hair. His eyes get young when he wants to talk. They sky is shallow today, I think.

The rocks bite into my arms through the blanket. I feel cold and sharp and dirty. I already stopped caring about hurting.

The camera was finally quiet. The rush of wind through dry leaves was loud and steep. I heard ice protest against the drawing of the wind, the drawing of sunlight in ice, the melting. I got off the ground. I walked toward him until he had to take steps backwards. The pictures came closer together.

"Come inside. I'll get you something hot to eat," he said, "and you can rest."

The studio was quiet. It was cold in the building as it had been outside. I switched on the heater and warmth thundered through the little iron gating in the wall by my feet. I slipped off my dress and stood in front of the hot rush of warm heated air. Pella had been bored with seeing me naked from the day we met. I had been obsessed with him for months. As time went on and he never

fell in love with me, I started to relax. So did the illness that for me is romantic love, because surely the deepness of my feelings toward certain men approaches pathology.

I had continued to write Pella threatening notes and make harassing phone calls. He didn't know it was me. I thought it was strange that through the games I played with him, without him even realizing it was me, we had become closer friends. He had started confiding in me the day after I broke into his car.

He poured hot water from his thermos into the plastic lid. I didn't have much shame with him anyway. I wanted as much as I could get. I was still cold so I put on my robe. He tore open an envelope of cream of chicken soup and poured the smooth powder into the water. He stirred it with a plastic spoon then set the cup on the desk nearest to where I stood. He gestured for me to take a chair.

The soup was white with green flecks. The steam came off in a hot cloud.

"Will you please eat? I'm not watching you, see? I'm looking at the wall. Estelle, I've got some ideas for a new set of takes. I know you have the kids, and you know how I feel about that. I think it's time for you to get on with your life. I'm going to New York. I want you to come with me, you know that. Only lately I've been thinking a lot about infants and feeding. I never thought of any of that before you, Estelle. You know, I've had several women in my life. As far as I know, I've never fathered a child. And your children aren't yours. But I was a child, and you are a mother, even though you're not their real mother."

I set the empty cup on the floor and tied the robe. A drop of soup was on my thigh. I traced it then licked my fingers.

"Pella, you're never boring. I appreciate that. And I'm sure of nothing in my life. Only two things, that I want to take care of the children as long as the state will let me, and I want to work with you. You're asking me to decide between you and the foster kids."

"How much longer will they be with you? When are they going back to their mother?"

"I don't know," I lied. I thought I was lying, anyway. Sometimes time makes you honest.

"Maybe you want them too much. The state must feel they're better off with the rich girl. The celebrity."

"That has nothing to do with it!"

"Maybe your desire has more to do with outcomes than you'd like to believe." He had distances slipping between us like sheets of plastic, cellophane, wrapping to keep off air and germs and cat hair. His face was settling into an anonymity of dailyness. I knew if I couldn't change the subject back to him that he'd be gone fast.

"Wasn't there something you wanted to ask me?" It was a desperate toss, like a rope out to a man with green skin floating in a lake. He ignored me and glared at the wall. It was rare to see anger in him. Like most powerful men, it

usually disintegrated into a whiny sort of affectation that was easily deflected.

"I'm finished eating," I whispered.

He swerved his chair to face me. The deadlines and the clotting up of future came off him in slipperiness and left him with a fresh confusion. It was like a toy he offered me and I was a little dog. He wanted his philosophy and emotions to be chew toys for me, or I wanted that. I had learned a lot about interpretation and meaning, from Laurence.

"I liked what you gave me to eat," I said quietly. "I feel better now."

"That's nice," he said, a vague confusion settling on him like a beautiful moth. For a moment he could not brush it away, because of the brilliance of the beauty and the color of the flying insect. Only the little beast was touching him, so that made it obscene.

"What are you thinking?" I asked gently.

"She called and left more messages at my house. I couldn't tell from her voice who it was. She sounded like a woman talking in a little girl voice. A real cliché. I don't think it's good for the woman I'm having a relationship with," he said, coughing slightly, his face wet with perspiration, "for me to keep getting these strange messages."

"Certainly," I said, not blinking. I set my mouth into a professorial frown and raised an eyebrow.

"I know only one way of losing arrogance," he said, "and that's through personal tragedy. And there are a few ways of keeping drama in your life. Women, of course. But that loses its—" he paused. I had never seen him sweat like this. I was really scaring him, I realized, with my anonymous phone calls. I needed to end all of it, or move to the next stage. Like my grandmother used to say, *Estelle, you could go either way. Good or bad.*

I knew that whenever he started talking about his stalker, who was, of course, me, that he really wanted to talk about something else that was happening in his life. More than fear, I gave him topics of conversation. Because he was as bored as I was with the death threats. And the weak fear opened up his other terrors. I used to be hurt that I didn't have the power to scare him. Then his stories started coming out of his mouth, butterflies I caught by listening, their wings turned black in my imagination, their bodies stiffened in my mouth. I felt less empty.

That's all I wanted, I was realizing. To fill that space, the nothing heart, to make the hot sunlight in my veins bleed instead of shine.

"Drama," I said, finishing his sentence. "I want you to tell me your new idea." I held my bathrobe around my arms and walked in bare feet to the blue room. The lights were hot and the metal chair burned my feet in a good way that I could get used to. I sat alone in the room for several minutes. When I returned to his office, he was still staring at where my face had been, where I had been listening. I knew the ache of his words was burning a hole in his stomach.

"Come on. I can't stop thinking of the new idea you have for some photographs. The infancy and feeding idea. I'm really ready. Please?"

He grinned, a good sport. I shuddered at the glow of his face, what was inside coming to set the attraction I felt to a mess of a fire in me. I was sick of the power I had over men who were older than me. Only here there was no innuendo, no flirtation, not from Pella. We had become friends, I realized.

He stood up and moved his tie in a gesture I had seen him use a thousand times, to cover the buttons of his pressed white shirt with his tie. We walked to the blue room and I sat on the high metal stool in the middle of the room. He moved me to the floor with a light touch of his hand on my shoulder.

"I wanted to ask," he said, stopping abruptly to interrupt himself, walking to the windows and pulling down each dirty shade. Instead of hiring a maid he painted. I could not even smell new paint anymore. But the blinds were filthy. The wood floors of the studio were dull in dried splashes of what had been green tea. His clothing was always immaculate. I knew there was a woman.

"My idea has to do with you," he continued, sliding the last shade closed. Sunlight left the room like an open church door closing on a dark perfumed Sunday. I could smell the soap I had used in the hotel room, glycerin and a lemon that was not made in nature.

I hated myself because I already missed Max. I knew the regret had nearly nothing to do with his marriage. His wife knew more about the loss than I did. His young sons haunted me. His sons were not enough to make me stop.

"We'll have to work on this in addition to the other projects. I know you're already working three days a week. That leaves you some time. I think that if you won't come with me to New York you at least have to give me this time before I leave."

I was starting to feel faint, like the print from a marker that has been uncapped for weeks, and it was as if the soup I ate was reminding my brain of a lot of neglect. I wondered if I could sleep with my eyes open. Whenever hunger and exhaustion undermined my will, I missed Laurence.

It was like being at Girl Scout camp, having all these men. Max, married man, novelist, professor of literature. Pella, the photographer, my boss. And finally there was the psychoanalyst, Laurence, who I refused to see. All of them were old enough to be my father, technically. And there were campfires of memory of other men, several other men. Men had never been a problem. Summer camp life and men and sunshine, bonfires and snow and sex, ideas and conversation. I knew what Laurence would say, suddenly, without even telephoning him. *If you don't start sleeping and eating, Estelle, you'll die.* I heard myself screaming Yes I can take care of the children.

*I didn't even mention the children. I wasn't talking about them.*

I had three hours before I needed to pick up the three girls from daycare. Pella was talking. I wanted to hear him but reality was fussing around my ears. I stared up at his face. It was like a book where you flip the pages to get the



drawing to move in an animation effect. I saw his face in a hundred still shots a second.

"I had to change the light so I could talk to you instead of see you. When I look at your face and body, Estelle, that starved and anemic beauty, I have to tell you, I think of the money. You've helped me deal with some of the annoyances in my life, especially the stalker, and I appreciate that. You've become the greatest drag in my life, you know, not agreeing to move with me. I wondered about that the other night, for a few minutes after dinner. I thought about motherhood. I want to do some pictures. These won't be for commercial reasons," he glanced at me quickly, as if he wondered if I were going to laugh.

I wasn't. The edges around my sight were becoming wild, wanting to meet in the middle, and black was coming. I laid on the floor and kept up enough eye contact so he would know I was listening to him.

I hoped I wasn't going to have to go to the hospital.

"I was hurt when you told me you wouldn't go to the city with me. Not because you couldn't live without me. I felt as if you were holding something back from me, and that made me furious. I want to use the best part of you. If what is most important to you is taking care of those kids, then I need some of that. This will be art," he said shyly, as I relinquished myself to unconsciousness.

Darkness and sweet nevermore, and he was pretending I was his mother, a real mother. I woke up into a sick desire. His gestures were frivolous and pretty, and what he was doing was wayward, too perverse for me to even discuss.

I was used to situations deteriorating into something that would not let me be weak.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What do you like better," Peri asked me later that evening, "ribs or vertebrae?"

"Hum," I said, slicing the lush green from the broccoli stems. The dark green part that you eat is made of flowers.

"I l-o-v-e y-o-u," she spelled, leaning on the plastic gate that kept her and her sisters out of the kitchen. Peri was six, the oldest of the three sisters I took care of in my house. She was the darkest of the three girls, but her features were the most traditionally European, I thought. She was like a china doll that had been washed with dark brown watercolor.

"I love you, too," I said, happiness spreading in me, mild yet brisk, like the feel and taste of a butter mint melting in my mouth.

"Two?" She held out two fingers, frowning.

"No, that's t-w-o."

"Next time spell it for me, Estelle! What do you like better, b-u-t or b-u-t-t?"

"OK, now."

"I have a song to sing for you, but it's not appropriate," she said, resting a hand on her neck for a moment to wait for my reaction. I piled three little

plates with miniature rainforests of cold broccoli.

"Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi. Boys go to Jupiter to get more stupider!"

"Girls aren't sexy," I said, spooning out homemade macaroni and cheese.

There was a wonderful brown crust on the macaroni that I knew the kids would hate, so I got theirs out of the middle. I had made it the previous night and just put it in the oven for forty minutes when I came home. They would have liked the box kind better, but I cooked out of working mother guilt, and for what I liked. I really was hungry and this was going to be heavenly. I had slept for an hour before picking them up from daycare. I felt better.

"I know. What do you like better, that song, or Miss American Beauty with her red hot lips?"

"Real chapped lips, you mean."

The gate crashed to the tiles with her sprawled on top.

"I'm really sorry," she said, staring up at me in fear. She was a sprawl of bony legs and arms, her bare feet were white with baby powder that faded into her brown skin. Her hair was dark brown and fine and there was a lot of it, even though it didn't grow more than a few inches past her shoulders. She was wearing an old black dress of mine that had rhinestones around the neck, was sleeveless, and went to her ankles. I knelt and reached for her. I put her hand against mine. The skin on her fingers was wrinkly and dry. The delicate skin of her cuticles was ripped in a few places, skin lashes peeled back from the cuticles, and her thumbnails needed clipping. She grabbed my hand with one of hers and laid on the floor, pulling me to her to kiss me on the lips. I turned my head and felt her tiny dry kiss on my jawbone. I bit my lip against the future.

She was thin as I had been when I was her age. She resembled her birth mother in her expressions only. She was built like me, severe angles and edges, but her face was a doll's face, traditionally cute. When she got in my face about something she'd get her head going back and forth like the women in Spike Lee films. The girl was like a marching band. She was strident and lovely and much larger than her tiny frame suggested.

She wrapped her arms around my neck and hung there, a suicide rope which made me heavy. She smelled like dust and strawberries. Her two little sisters ran from their room over the plastic fence and tumbled over Peri to embrace me.

I remember picking them up from the police station over a year ago. The officer's voice caught as he said goodbye, pouring orange poprocks into their stretched out little hands, six hands total from my Jeep's window, in three different shades of skin. Peregrine and her two sisters sat in the back seat of my car and dipped their tongues into their hands. Poprocks popped.

I rolled down my window and put out my hand to the officer, a large black man about my age. He looked worried, I thought, shaking the empty pop rocks envelope over my hand. Peri grabbed my hand and wiped the sticky gluey candy from her hand onto mine.

I brought the gunk of child spit and carbonated candy on my hand to my mouth and the officer grabbed my wrist. All sentiment was gone from his face.

"You don't know what they have," he said, serious and loud enough for them to hear. "I know a foster mother who got hepatitis after sharing an ice cream with a new foster kid. This is obviously your first placement. You don't need to lose your life over this, lady."

While he wasn't smiling at me, Elena, the three-year-old middle child, started singing a song of no words, just sounds, and Peri laughed and laughed. The youngest one, Lucy, was two. She said nothing and stared out the window.

"Take care of yourself," he said. I was bored by men telling me that. Only this large black man holding an empty envelope of candy was actually my age, and he stared right into my gaze, and it wasn't sexual or even warm. The sun felt hot on my hand. He let go of my wrist. I wiped my hand on my jeans.

"You'll have a lot of people tell you how lucky these kids are," he said, "which is ridiculous."

"Thank you very much," I said to the middle child, Elena, as she removed a folded, unopened envelope of poprocks from her sock. I took the damp package from her small brown hand. Her hair needed a lot of brushing, I noticed happily.

"You're welcome very much," she said, her face veiled in a calm I had only seen before on statues of Jesus' mother, in the Catholic church where I used to creep about when I was an ignored and peaceful child, before I turned five.

The officer was whispering something to himself as I rolled up the window. I gazed at his hands to see if he was pressing beads in a rosary. The five-year-old, Peregrine, laughed crazy hard. Her little sisters ignored her.

I thought before I took in the kids that foster parents were white trash people who needed extra money to keep up on the payments on the television they were renting to own. And I thought when a child was silly and laughed crazily that meant she was happy. I imagined the birth parents of foster kids were the kind of people who didn't use creme rinse. I figured every girl in foster care had probably been sexually abused. I imaged that foster kids started fires, it was just a matter of time until they burned down your house. I thought you couldn't have a kitten and a microwave oven and a foster kid. I could undo anything with love. My foster children would be either ballerinas or good at math. I could be their mother. I could keep them safe.

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My lust was clean compared to what Pella did to me earlier that day. Even the three children I was taking care of didn't pretend I was their mother. I desperately wanted to believe that the kids and I still didn't really know each other very well.

"What you're doing to me is making me sick," I said, pushing him away.

I had a thought that was like a jewel rolling out of the dark blood of my mind. Tiny and shining, rolling and catching a light more eternal than my soul, the jewel was an insight that kept falling down the limitless expanse of my ideas. As heaven forsake the rock of truth into me, I tasted bitterness and coal, or embers, something useful that had been burned clean. I smelled music, then, and heard my mother's voice.

The respect I had for Pella was like marble pillars holding up so much. I felt the stone of feeling for this man liquefy. The flood of honor washed me to my throat, and I forced myself not to gag. His hair smelled like lime and was soft and clean against my neck.

He got to his knees and rubbed his face with both hands. His lower arms were brown against his white shirt and his hands seemed sculpted, as if so much care had gone into forming them. The attraction I had felt for him, the obsession that had led me to threaten him anonymously, the merciless desire I felt, all of it had vanished. Then I knew he was never what I had wanted. He was another man I cut out of the gingerbread of the present, to bring back someone else. I needed to find another obsession real fast.

He smiled up at me from the floor. Smiling in a frost of vengeance, I imagined. The dust mites swirled in front of the window, behind his body. It became frightening to even breathe; I found the thought of inhaling dust sickening. I could limit my sleep and my intake of food but I could not hold off breathing. The cells of glow floating in the narrow beam of sunlight behind Pella made existence feel as if I were constantly rolling in filth.

"I think I know what you mean," he said, standing and leaning against the wall. He wasn't looking at me even though my robe was open to my waist. That made me insecure and I let the robe fall all the way open. He watched the ceiling.

"I want to get some pictures. This isn't porn, Estelle, and you've done that. Anything you've done for money is pornography, when it has to do with your photographed image, whether or not you have your clothes on. These pictures won't be published for commercial purposes. This is art I have in mind. This has nothing to do with sex."

"My feelings are larger than I am," I said. I was careful not to touch the cold glass of the window as I pulled up the blinds. Even though the sun was shining, a few clouds were sifting ice. Glitter, naturally.

"Can you think of someone else besides you? You're so selfish. Those aren't even your kids, but since the first day you've made them into your personal motorcade. You're in a limousine with a senator or a priest, waving at the rest of us from behind batons and confetti. The kids though."

"What?"

"I just don't think it's fair to them."

"What isn't fair to them?" I asked, faking nonarousal.

"How you feel like you're theirs."

"I thought we were talking about you."

"No, we weren't. You have a way of taking in a man by pretending that who you've been talking about is him. Every sentence you say is really about you."

"I want to be with you right now," I said.

"Thankfully this is a normal reaction you're having."

"Normal? Being humiliated is normal? Wanting more even though it's all so disgusting?"

"Can we talk about my vision? Or would you like to keep talking about yourself?"

I realized that the little yellow shapes on his tie were ducklings. Tiny little creatures, each with one black eye.

"I do want to hear about your vision," I said, taking his tie in my hand. The silk felt wet without moisture, in other words, expensive. "I feel that anything strange has got to have something interesting about it. And I really would rather talk about something other than myself."

"First I want to hear about you," he said.

And my desire for him and physical weakness melted into that glowing clearness of stone and light that was falling and falling in the foggy blood blackness I saw when I closed my eyes.

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The rain fell weakly in drops big as quarters. The lawn was wet and shone as the motion detector lights switched on. The season had been dry. Several flowers had just started to blossom in the unkempt garden, messy as the girls' hair and mine in the morning. Pink snapdragons, white anemones, some tiny purple gem flowers, and these large yellow flowers you could use to make dolls.

When I was a child my grandmother wanted me to memorize the names of all the flowers. I lived in the desert and there weren't any flowers.

The homicide cop took me and Liberty to a lot of films whenever grandmother visited. He let her clean out the house. Sometimes there would be dead scorpions in the garbage after she cleaned. When mom wasn't around he was a lot nicer. I secretly wished mom would have to go to the hospital more often just so the cop could take us out for pizza and be happy. I only saw him happy when mom was gone or when he drank. He never got mean drunk. He would just feel better.

Sometimes I think about the children's mother. Every week she has to take two urine tests that screen for alcohol and drugs. She can't have the kids back until the tests are clean for at least three months. It has been seventeen months.

The last time my grandmother visited was when I was about sixteen. I told her I didn't think I was pretty. She said even worrying about that made me vain. She said that was what made my mother so sick in the head. Too many men.

Once Liberty rented a car and we drove out to visit grandmother. We took

her to a park and then to an expensive restaurant. She was mean to Liberty and worshipful to me, because I was mean to her and Liberty worshipped her.

I was seven when my grandpa died.

Those were my mother's parents. I never even thought the homicide cop had parents. He was like some kind of a monster that walked out of the river one day, I figured.

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I slept that night. Waking I felt rested, not seized in some trap of need for exhaustion or escape. My legs felt like water in the cotton sheets, the cotton was liquid somehow, only so clean and dry. The warmth was from me and not the sun. The blanket smelled like my dog. The plant in my room was fifteen years old and had started to blossom, it was so old. The flowers were disturbing little pink bells that seemed plastic and artificial. The visual effect of those flowers on the wall of leaves caught over one window was unsettling. The man who sold me the house loved the plant and didn't want to move it because he was worried it would die. It made me sneeze and I always forgot to water it. The scent from the flowers was delicate, one note, as if someone walked by a piano and touched one key, and the sound swelled to fill a quiet house.

The wood floor was cold on my bare feet. The children were still asleep. My head was packed with blood. Breathing hurt. The room was warm and so was my bed but my skin felt cold. I looked in the mirror. Black smudges of makeup were around my eyes; I put on my glasses and the darkness magnified. A small place deep in my lungs ached. I coughed and it was like the flesh inside tore. I hadn't had a fever since childhood.

Max had arrived with his suitcases late the night before. He had just fallen asleep in my bed without waking me up. His eyes were still closed but I knew he was awake.

"I've been in love with the idea of what I've been doing," I told him, "for over a year. Seventeen months. In the beginning, it felt like this desperate stretched hand that was time so far in front of me. Just like growing up, you never feel it will happen."

"So the state is going to give them to you."

"You know, Elena and Lucy see their mother four days a week at the treatment daycare. The kids' mom doesn't always show up. But it is court ordered. Anyway, Elena told me her mom got a kitten. White, with blue eyes. She named it Pacifier. Think of the connotations. The meaning. The ironic humor. Pacifier!"

"She probably named it Lucifer, and Elena screwed it up." He groaned and turned to the other wall. But I knew from his voice he needed me so I kept talking.

"No, no. Pacifier. Don't use that in your book, Max—"

"You're in love with the kids' mother, too, you know, as well as the idea."

"Oh, please."

"Really. How could you not be, with her story?"

"True." I snuggled the blanket with my face.

"But now the kids are yours. You wanted something different from you.

The child couldn't be from you, or from a man you loved. No. You spent a few weeks jumping through hoops that the state of New Mexico half-heartedly held up for you, and then you took three. Easier too, to love three than one, because they have each other, always will. And you of all people know about sisters. Sisterhood, the impossible knot."

"They're not exactly mine yet."

"You think she's going to get better? Better? Better? What was ever really wrong, Estelle? Seriously. These kids didn't have cigarette burns, emotional damage, eating disorders. Christ, they're healthy kids! Elena has her issues."

"No, Elena is fine. Peregrine, on the other hand."

"The point is that nothing too damaging ever happened to them. They're fine."

"So you think the state should give them back?"

"I'm saying if their mother wanted them, she'd have them."

"You think she doesn't want them?" I heard a soft meowing in the hall, and I didn't have a cat. The children were awake.

"I think she sees that there's a white lady with blue eyes."

"What? Anyway in case you haven't noticed my eyes are green."

"Never mind."

"You're blaming me. I'm tired of thinking about this."

"It is boring," he said. I went to sit in a chair across from the window. The blanket felt good and I gathered it into my arms. I rocked the soft bundle and closed my eyes when the hail started. Small creaks on the glass and little pounds on the roof made the room warmer and the electric light primitive.

"Boring," I whispered. The blanket was sweet to hold. I felt the drifting pride I had for my old, strange house. Around all the shock of the permanence of this peculiar love affair with the state of New Mexico, was a gentle toppling boat of pride, a peace. Outside it was hailing even though there was not a storm, just cold and clouds. Inside the fireplace was cold but the radiator puffed out huge breaths of hot thoughts. My lover was with me. He had a real family, but he was with me. The children had a real family, but I had been allowed to have them such a very long time that the time no longer felt stolen. I had a psychoanalyst for a best friend, even though for him the children were a real turn-off. I had Pella who wanted to be an artist and thought that would take me. I felt like a piece of driftwood on a gentle lake. I was taken through seasons through no responsibility or choice of my own. For months it would be cold and then it would be warm and then it would be cold. I was indifferent to natural comfort. Homemade lace was on my fireplace mantle. Candles of raw wax spiked with wildflower petals were on my mantle. Plaster muffins were

there, and none of it had been made by me. I wanted to keep the three little girls fed and clean and give them a place to sleep. I even gave them a place to store their art projects. Just like Max kept his manuscripts in my spare bedroom. And Pella left his ideas on my face. And Laurence put his fist of care down my throat to try and get my past. And I had my memories to blame for suffocating all action I might take.

"Have you met my sister?" I asked Max. His eyes were closed and rimmed with pink. The skin on his face blended in with the color of his lips, white with pink blotches. His hair was greasy and sticking straight up from his forehead. When I wanted an aesthetic I couldn't get it from the novelist. Max was not a pretty man. But he was more intelligent than I was, I thought, and it always gave me a tiny rush when he made me feel stupid. Unlike Laurence, who brought out the best in me. I recognized the cycle and started to feel impatient little buzzes of needing to call Laurence.

"Yes," he said impatiently. "No, I don't know. Estelle, can I use your house today to write?"

"Hum. What's wrong with your house?"

"Estelle." He opened his eyes. His eyes were so blue that you never would have known his past. The hunger, the shame. His wife kept him well-fed. His black hair was thick and shiny and he didn't wash it very often.

A wash of watercolor came over the blank page of my history, the page I had carefully erased clean and white and pure, and when Max cried it was like colors. Severe pain in my stomach doubled me over. I put my hand over my mouth and tasted blood. I looked at my fingers and some thin streaks of blood stained spit were on my fingertips. I had bitten my tongue.

He rolled over off my bed with a large thump, to cry on his arm on my wood floor.

When I returned from the daycare he was gone. His manuscripts were still in my spare bedroom though. The phone rang. I knew who it was. She had told me she'd call back after giving me one more day.

\* \* \* \* \*

That evening I sat at my vanity with a paintbrush and several tiny pots of eye shadow. I dipped the paintbrush in the dark blues and greens and purples. I had a porcelain bowl for a strange pallet. The vanity was silver and glass. Transparent light bulbs lit up the corner of the room. Away from the vanity the room was dark.

From my bedroom in the day I could watch the birds. The window across from the vanity faced the bird feeder. Now I sat with my back to the bird window. The blinds were drawn up and I felt the birds outside watching me.

I had the idea to feed them one day after seeing a little white bird among the sparrows. She sat on a pear on the tree outside my window. She didn't eat

the pear. She didn't wash her feathers with her beak and bird tongue. She didn't build a nest. I felt that she was sitting there so I could look at her. I had an idea from the unpainted white of her feathers. Her eyes were black as the oil color my mother told me never to use. She said, *Make black from the other colors. Never use black from a tube.* I wanted to stop being afraid of birds. The bird that wasn't a sparrow made me want to love the sparrows.

At night I could not see into my backyard and the pear tree and the disheveled garden, toys like maggots, everywhere on my yard that should have been rotten from too much watering. Instead it was lush as a jungle. In the day the children hid in the thick vines near the fence. The light filtered through to them in a lime juice beam of green and yellow. The girls were calm in the green light. We never worried about scorpions. We didn't have to. They stayed in the desert that was just beyond the fence. Twice I had seen a brown mouse rush across the leaves near the water fountain. My mother had taught me to respect little animals and bugs. I used water. I paid a lot of money for the water. Some people would say my use of water in the desert was criminal. I didn't work on the yard. I just watered it. My yard is succulent; the care I give is extravagant, not illegal.

So I sat at the vanity with my back to the window of dark and bird song. I opened a nail polish jar and let a drop fall into the blend of eye shadow cream. I held the saucer to a light bulb on my vanity for heating. My room was cold but the light bulbs were very hot. I had on the brown flannel and my black underwear. My legs were bare and during story time I had been informed that I needed to shave my legs.

Max had placed yards of black gauze over my reading lamps. The shadow was not a pretty black. I felt smug that I knew more about color than he did. Mr. Novelist. Didn't know a thing about lighting. Mixing colors. Color and light. I loved the gauze for reminding me of my mother. Without coming out and reminding me, like Laurence, who always wanted to talk about her. What had happened to Laurence? I hadn't heard from him in several weeks.

\* \* \* \* \*

The children were asleep. I turned on the light in their room. I sat on the edge of Elena's bed. I dipped the paintbrush into the porcelain bowl and knelt on the floor. I held my hands over her face as if she were a piano. The yards of hair were still on the kitchen floor. I had the cola and the chocolate ready for when they woke up in the morning. I had their best dresses too.

"What have you done to the children's faces?"

"Max." I dropped the paintbrush and the dish of the mixture of warm black cosmetic. It smelled like nailpolish and oil. He turned off the light. He grabbed each of my arms and pulled me out the room. He laid me down by the heater grating in the floor. He ran to the fireplace and threw in a commercial

log and lit it three times. It blazed in a smooth fit that would steadily burn for four hours. I could not sleep until it was out because of the risk. So now I was going to have to deprive myself of sleep.

"A fire. That wasn't in the plan, Max!"

"What plan? What are you doing? Why did you cut your hair Estelle? Why did you cut the children's hair? What in the heck were you doing to their faces? Estelle, I need to know if this is some kind of medical emergency."

"I want to call my analyst."

"Only he's not your analyst anymore. Remember? We talked about this. You became his. There is nothing left for you to say to that sicko."

"Sicko? I'm his best friend."

"Remember the sick lies he told you about me? He was obsessed with you, Estelle!"

"I want to call my sister."

"You can't." His hair was wet. He hadn't taken a shower here. That meant he had been with his wife. "Talk to me."

"The social worker is picking them up in the morning. They have an aunt. An aunt."

"Oh, Estelle!" His eyes seemed to darken. Happiness and the novelist.

"They're going to be so wired on caffeine and sugar," I said, my hands gesturing wildly in the heat.

"Mustaches," he said slowly. "You painted their lips with little mustaches. What about your hair? Why did you have to cut your hair too?"

"I'm tired, Max. I really want to sleep. No one cried, Max. They didn't speak or cry. They knew. They knew it was important for me to cut their hair. Will you clean up the hair?"

"Yes. Estelle, go to sleep. I'll watch the fire."

"Will you think of something else to make her not want them? No one cried."

He took me to my bed then left for the living room to make sure a spark didn't fly out of the burning log to set my house on fire.

In the morning the social worker came. She didn't even mention the haircuts. She told me that she was just taking Lucy, explaining that the aunt was a sister of Lucy's father. He had admitted that only Lucy was his. He was willing to pay for a paternity test. There were three different birth fathers, she explained, so the girls could be severed.

Later that afternoon Peri and Elena played mother and baby. The skin over their upper lips was bright pink. Peri slapped Elena's face hard enough to leave a mark.

"Is that how you're going to treat your babies?" I screamed as Max held me away from her. "Is that what kind of mommy you'll be?"

*Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*, ed. Efraim Sicher (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). 378 pages. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 0-252-06656-1. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 0-252-02280-7

American non-Jewish readers may neither appreciate the depth of trauma and suffering experienced by second generation survivors nor understand the extent to which the direct and indirect transmission of memories of the "Final Solution" has formed the character of those who experienced a transgenerational transference of the survivors' syndrome. Collective memory mirrors the fragmentation and rupture of history called "the Holocaust," a rupture which the persistence of this term attempts to recoup despite and perhaps because of the equally persistent "bearing of scars without the wound," scars that do not heal. "The Holocaust" would lead us to believe that Auschwitz is surmountable.

Of course and within the normalization of what is so fondly known as business-as-usual, we have unfortunately become accustomed to idiomatic remainders of those who conceived and prepared the ruination—"Get a life!" Linguistic remainders are, however, reminders for those who cannot just "get a life" in the simulation boutiques of the post/beyond-Auschwitz hyperreality. "Come on, you gotta get past it." The late bourgeois mind, and we will not consider whether there is still a matter of heart here, refuses limits. There is nothing it cannot understand, nothing it cannot conceive, nothing it cannot correct, nothing it cannot get past. This "mind" resides in the museal culture of remembrance where it remains fortified against the assaults of direct memory. For those securely within the museum which culture has become after Auschwitz, that which Yoram Kaniuk has called the "largest insane asylum on earth" [Israel] remains on the outside where the shell of amnesia cracks along with the illusions of family and national identities. The mind of the insiders is, once again, an apolitical simulacra of self-same subjects protected by a sky-God as jealous as ever.

Gore Vidal once remarked that artists and writers are valuable in spite of their neuroses, not because of them. What Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century told us about the history of the shaping of memory now, at the chronological end of the bloodiest of all centuries, requires an extensive supplement. And this is precisely what is being written by the "memorial candles" of the post-Holocaust generation. They can "of course" be snuffed-out, physically and/or psychologically and philosophically. Those who remember and relive in their own person and context threaten the repressions which make the late bourgeois mind possible. And the repressions which compose the well-constituted of museal culture are transnational. Thus the texts included in *Breaking Crystal* "are symptomatic of a new questioning of post-Holocaust identity, which challenges the inviolability of official representation of the Holocaust, and they represent the Holocaust victim not as an Other but as someone with whom to identify and whose experience could be internalized, a working-through of a psychological trauma by means of literature" [43].

*Breaking Crystal* is an academic book in that it is composed of texts about the writings, films, and works of art of others. But it is academic in the best sense of the word because it is an evocation to these works rather than setting itself forth as a substi-

tute for them. Efraim Sicher provides a superb general introduction as well as equally superb introductions to each of the book's four parts (Here and There; The View from Israel; The View from the Diaspora; Between Memory and History). Sicher does what is sadly becoming a rarity. He links the academic and non-academic by means of a metaphor for "a continuous crisis in the post-Holocaust generation" [3] and, I would add, for the crisis of all representation which feigns canonical status among the ruins. *Breaking Crystal*, "strictly speaking, is not 'about' the Holocaust or about Holocaust literature..." [3] but rather concerns "the contemporary situation of post-Holocaust writers grappling with memory and trying to imagine the past (which is not just past but also their present)" [5]. From *Crystal Night* to the metaphor "the breaking of crystal," there is a continuity of the discontinuity linking past and present and which "obscures any clear understanding of meaning of what has happened, so that meaning itself is not easily recoverable" [3]. No one, including the repressed, well-constituted late bourgeois mind, is apart from this connection. "As Blanchot puts it, 'The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact'" [298].

Alan Berger in his essay "Theological Implications of Second-Generation Literature" remarks a midrash (Babylonian Talmud, Menakhot 29b) that might not be well known by American non-Jewish readers. This midrash "relates that God told Moses that in the future Akiva ben Joseph, a great interpreter of the Law, will arise in the House of Israel. Expressing a desire to see his successor, Moses is given the opportunity to be an invisible auditor in Akiva's class. Hearing Akiva and his disciples argue, Moses, the midrash tells us, became despondent because he was unable to understand the discussion. At one point, the disciples challenged Akiva: 'Rabbi, whence do you know this?' 'This law', replied Akiva, 'is a tradition delivered by Moses on Sinai'" [256]. There will be a link, a tradition, of past, present, and future generations, but it will not be understood by those who today see themselves as well-constituted by and well-positioned within the official representations of the Holocaust. The wonderful thing about the tradition of this midrash is that it includes even those who would exclude whatever and whoever they do not understand as their inseparable companions.

Hopefully this academic review of Sicher's thought-provoking and "timely" book is evocative rather than provocative. Confrontation is necessary not because of a decline of civility or friendship but rather because we live within the legacy of Auschwitz—the absence of a tonal center. Dissonance is indeed a relative term. But today let us hope, between the lines and readings of *Breaking Crystal*, that not Wagner and his images for the nineteenth century but Schönberg and his specific philosophical-political-artistic integration (Moses *und* Aaron) will help in bringing back all our withered hearts.

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- Russell Banks. *Cloudsplitter*. New York: Harper Collins. 1998. 758 pp.  
 Kaye Gibbons. *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1998. 273 pp.  
 Jane Smiley. *The All True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1998. 452 pp.

Perhaps we will never stop fighting the Civil War, and certainly, with the recent publication of Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, there is renewed interest in that wound to the nation that still has not completely healed. In the first six months of 1998, there has been a cluster of books on events leading to the war and on the war itself. That cluster might support the idea of synchronicity, a serendipitous confluence of similar ideas, but it might also indicate that the deep divisions about race in America are as tormenting today as they were at the end of Reconstruction. It is a scab that we cannot stop picking at.

It is difficult to admit that our Civil War did not solve the problem of racial injustice. It is more difficult to look on the failure of Reconstruction because the attempt to bring Blacks into the civic life of the nation was so blatantly sold for an election. It is disheartening to admit that the enormously idealistic Civil Rights Movement and the legislation of the sixties did not end racial discrimination. And finally, it is morally numbing to watch Affirmative Action being undermined because we believe it is wrong to privilege one group over another and then continue to privilege groups that have always been privileged and persist in not privileging those groups that have never had equal opportunity.

Certainly Frazier's book, the National Book Award winner for 1997 and a first novel of amazing grace and power, refocused national attention on the human side of the conflict. It is Inman and Ada, not the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg that speak to us. The dual odyssey toward Cold Mountain and toward understanding echoes across the century, to remind us that the human spirit can heal itself, that we can survive war. For all its power, however, Frazier's book cannot be said to have generated Russell Banks' *Cloudsplitter*, Kaye Gibbons' *On the Morning of My Last Afternoon*, or Jane Smiley's *The All True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton*. All were in process when *Cold Mountain* came out, and Kaye Gibbons, a friend of Frazier's, was working on her book when she saw his manuscript and was instrumental in getting his novel published.

One can ask why, at the end of the twentieth century, do writers look back at the deeply divisive moral issues confronting Americans over one hundred and fifty years ago. Indeed, at the end of the nineteenth century, the war was still a fresh wound; many of the soldiers on both sides of the battle were still alive. Reconstruction had failed, and Jim Crow laws were in effect in the South. In many respects, the North simply wanted to get on with life and forget the conflict. Now, however, at the end of the next century, many writers are looking back at the events leading up to the war, to try to understand how we have fared as a nation with regard to issues of race and rights. Has the past anything to teach us that will help us move into the twenty-first century as

a fairer, more democratic nation?

Russell Banks' novel, *Cloudsplitter*, could certainly make a claim to being the most ambitious treatment of the Abolitionist Movement. The story of John Brown is told by his son, Owen, one of the few survivors of Harpers Ferry. The book chronicles the change from religious fervor to terrorism and illustrates how actions do beget moral responsibility. Owen did not start out to be a murderer, nor did his father. Had he not been goaded by his son, John Brown, "would have fallen back on his lifelong patterns of wait and see." Owen, not nearly so comfortable in his faith as his father, and certainly full of rage at the prospect of always having to follow the father, claims he made the infamous Pottawatomie Massacre happen.

Owen's analysis of the events of the Massacre that led to Harpers Ferry and the war reveal Banks' preoccupations with the hidden personal messages in the past. In fact, his preoccupations are similar to Gibbons' and Smiley's in that all focus on private lives to understand public conflict. It is Owen's obsession with his father that drives the book more than his opposition to slavery. His father's moral quest seems diminished in the light of Owen's anger. Events seem driven by "man's unconscious desires," and Owen is often hard pressed to understand his own. For all his insistence that "we were right. . . . The terror and the rage that we caused with those murders ignited the flames of war all across Kansas, to be sure, and all across the Southern states and in the North as well," Owen is finally trapped in the history he has made for himself. He has killed the Missourians who supported slavery in the Kansas Territory, and he can find no way to rationalize his deeds, except to say that he "had done it for the pleasure of it."

He has also killed his best friend, the Black man Lyman Epps, and made it look like an accident. The issue of race that was so central to his father's philosophy is blotted out with one gunshot. Lyman dead is no longer any race at all, and Owen argues that he had to kill his friend in order "to love him." With that murder, Owen comes to understand that his "nature was fully formed; and it was a killer's."

What Banks' novel concludes is that history is created by the discrete actions of people whose motivations are often far removed from the reasons for their public acts. Owen constantly hears Lyman Epps' words, "you ain't half the man your father is," and that accusation certainly accounts for the suppressed animosity that leads to Lyman's death; but that line also echoes in all of the deeds Owen commits thereafter. His confession that, "at my age, Father had become in all visible ways a man. And there I was still a boy. How was that possible? In what crucial ways was my nature so different from his that our lives and works would diverge by this much?" The answer to history lies in the secret hearts of individuals. Owen is, in a sense, all of us, knowing what is right and choosing what is wrong. He speaks to the guilt of the late twentieth century as much as he speaks to his own moral frailty.

The other two novels also view history not through sweeping public events, but through the individual experiences of two women. Both Gibbons and Smiley view abolition and the war through the lens of anti-racist sentiments, but Gibbons chooses a Southern woman cosseted by all the luxuries of Southern Plantation life, while Smiley creates a character who rejects the comforts of a domestic life and insists on creating a life in the Kansas Territory.

Gibbons' book is more traditional. *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon* chronicles six decades in the tormented life of a nineteenth century Southern woman named



Emma Garnet Tate Lowell. Her personal history follows the history of the nation from 1842-1900, and the story is told when Emma Garnet is old and waiting for death. All whom she has loved have died or gone north, and there is nothing left for her in a defeated and demoralized South.

Her earliest memory is of her father's shouted words: "I did not mean to kill the nigger! I did not mean to kill him!" Instinctively Emma knows that he did, indeed, mean to kill the slave, Jason. Emma's father, Samuel P. Tate, has killed Jason because the slave has dared suggest a better way of killing a hog: "try for a cleaner bleed," he recommends because Tate is "spoiling good meat." The next swipe of the knife slits Jason's throat.

Tate represents all that is worst in the South, and his daughter steels herself against his views on slavery, the war, and on women's education. A quietly studious girl when the book opens, Emma Garnet quickly learns to avoid her father. He has emerged from a shadowy past, much in the manner of Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, and the abuse he has suffered at the hands of his own father he passes on to his children. His son, Whatley, a bookish boy whose revulsion against his father's violence and vulgarity drives him out of the house, is most often the target of his father's rage. He is too much like his mother, a genteel Southern lady whom Tate both mocks and abuses.

It is in the domestic realm that the war against slavery is fought in Gibbons' novel. Emma Tate marries a Lowell, of the Massachusetts Lowells, and escapes, not the South, but at least her abusive home. She takes with her Clarice, a free Negro who has worked for her father ever since she found him in a clearing in the woods. Clarice understands better than anyone in his family the fury that drives Tate. He "carried on the most quotidian affairs of his days as though he were bracing himself, protecting his prosperity, against the hour that his past would rise up and jerk him back to the terror in the woods." Like Owen Brown, he has a guilty secret, but unlike Owen, he has no voice to confess, so his whole life is a howl against the world. Only Clarice knows his secret, and with it, she protects the family. Emma soon learns that it is Clarice, not her father, who really runs the Plantation and protects them all from the terror of a slave rebellion.

The years in Raleigh, after Emma Garnet has married and left Seven Oaks, are like a glimpse of paradise. "We had Eden," the narrator reveals. "Quincy [Lowell] and I turned inward on our household, making a joyful life." The retreat into domesticity is an escape from the growing unrest in the nation. It is also a way for Gibbons to look at the past and argue that individuals could create havens for themselves in the midst of turmoil. Emma Garnet and her family do just that. Emma educates poor girls and boys from the flats; Clarice trains free Negroes in the domestic arts; and Quincy Lowell, a doctor, creates a state-of-the-art hospital, one that, unfortunately, will later become the site of Emma's horrific experiences during the Civil War. For ten years Emma and her family retreat into a domestic cocoon; the marriage, a merger of the best in Northern and Southern values, is a bulwark against a world that is in the throes of coming apart. Finally, even the happy marriage cannot shut out the war.

With the war, Emma Garnet is introduced to the real horror of "a conflict perpetrated by rich men and fought by poor boys against hungry women and babies." No one escapes the ravages of Sherman's march, the defeat of the South, and

Reconstruction. Quincy dies of exhaustion treating boys who "no doubt died wishing [they were] home, thinking Yankees and Negroes might not be worth the exquisite pain." Emma's children retreat to Quincy's family in Massachusetts and marry Northerners. Clarice dies, and only Emma Garnet remains to tell the story of a domestic idyll turned to ruin.

Gibbons makes the war a case of domestic abuse on a national scale. Samuel P. Tate kills a slave; Jefferson Davis destroys the South. How, the book asks, are these men different? That is the central issue of the book: national abuse is domestic abuse run rampant. The prevention of the national abuse of slavery, the reckless disregard for human life, and destructive capitalism, must begin with the family. Children must be trained with love to be caring and responsible citizens in their community. If they understand that, the national fabric can possibly be restored.

*The All True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton* also uses a woman narrator to frame and focus the events that lead up to the Civil War. The action takes place in the Kansas Territory. Smiley focuses on the Free-State victims of the pre-war conflict, and finds in the community of Lawrence, Kansas a microcosm of the issues that led to the bloody war. Lidie Newton, an orphan and native of Illinois, "never a slave state, but also never an anti-slave state," marries Thomas Newton, a Massachusetts Abolitionist, and travels with him and a crate of illegal rifles to the Kansas Territory. Her marriage to Thomas and her journey to Kansas open her eyes to the most divisive political issues of the 1850's.

Like the Lowell marriage, the Newton union is, for a short time, an idyllic hiatus in the downward spiral toward war. Lidie knows very little of the conflict; she knows even less about domestic economies. Despite the fact that she carries Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home* with her to Kansas, it is clear from the beginning that she "would rather buy a horse than a stove, rather ride and hunt than cook and clean." Thomas is the perfect husband for her in that he values what she can do. He does not try to shape her into a domestic goddess or a drudge. The novel traverses the private landscape of Thomas and Lidie's love and then moves on to chronicle the terrifying public chaos of the border ruffians, the disease that assaults the Free State community, and finally the freezing winter that so savagely almost defeats everyone, Slaver and Free Stater alike.

Lidie begins to see that love cannot protect her from the marauders from Missouri who "preferred hurting us to not hurting us," and Thomas is the victim of just such an attitude. He is shot one evening as the two are riding to their cabin on the claim they have staked. With Thomas Newton's death Lidie Newton's dream of a happy life is destroyed. She begins to see that "the contrast between what men might be and what they are," is, in the Kansas Territory growing greater every day, and she fears that the same is true of the rest of the nation. The world is being taken over by the greedy and the violent. Lidie begins to see that men's intentions "were generally far from honorable, the main intention being always to make money, as much of it in as little time as possible." Part of that intention involves the buying and selling of slaves, the stealing of claims, and the selling of goods to desperate settlers at exorbitant prices. In the light of those atrocities, how can one focus on the moral issues behind the behavior?

As Lidie tries to come to terms with her husband's murder, she decides to avenge his death. Disguising herself as a boy, she goes off in search of the killers. In her quest

she finds a slave woman whom she tries to help escape. Instead, the two are captured and the slave, Lorna, is sold to a far worse fate than she had experienced at the Day's End Plantation. The irony, of course, is that Lorna has orchestrated the escape, and her master's analysis of her life is just a fiction: "No one could ever say that Lorna was ill-treated or uncared for. Lorna herself couldn't say it. In fact, she often expressed a wordless thanks to me for according her the privileges she exercised in my service. No one can ever convince me that Lorna doesn't love us and doesn't know the virtues of the position she held in our family." This assertion rings like a hypocritical rationalization for inexcusable behavior. The fantasy of the slave owner, that he is a good man and that his slaves love him, is almost as heinous as the peculiar institution itself.

Lidie Newton learns, over the course of the life-changing year, that "to say what was true, you had to look into the face of your interlocutor and see something there you recognized." Lidie can see nothing in the faces of slave owners that she recognizes. Their moral universe is so alien to her that she can only sit and watch the darkness descending upon the Nation.

Smiley prefaces each chapter of *The All True Adventures* with moral and domestic adages from Catherine Beecher, the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Beecher was a believer in the precept that women should not participate in the public struggle against slavery; rather, they should change the moral perceptions of the men and children in their care. Housekeeping was the vehicle for women's entry into the great moral dilemmas of the time. Of course, Lidie rejects that dictum out of hand and the quotations from Domestic Economies stand in stark contrast to her actual experience. Smiley, too, rejects the idea of retreat into domestic economies in the face of national chaos, and her book echoes the position that Smiley herself took in her 1996 *Harper's* magazine article. She claimed then, while she was working on *The All True Adventures*, that Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* did not deal seriously enough with the slavery issue. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Smiley claimed, had far greater moral force precisely because the novelist put the most important moral issue of the nation at the center of her work.

Banks, Gibbons, and Smiley also put the slavery issue at the center of their novels, while revealing the nation's moral ambivalence toward race; each book seeks to find in personal experience an answer for a collective guilt. Owen can only admit he is a killer after he has killed Lyman Epps because he knew and tried to love Lyman. He was actually a killer when he decided that some men, because they did not agree with him, deserved to die. He hides national guilt behind a confession of personal guilt. Emma Garnet, too, hides, first in the idyllic circle of her family, excusing herself for slavery because none of her servants is a slave. What she doesn't do is tell her servants they are free. She allows them to think they are slaves even while she pays them wages. Her justification is that she wants to protect her servants from ruffians and slavers in Raleigh, but she actually enslaves them in her definition of paradise; thus, she makes her moral universe very similar to Owen Brown's. Finally, it is only Jane Smiley's character, Lidie, who emerges from her year in Kansas with a deeply changed and enormously strengthened sense of what is right and wrong. She survives because she sees that her attempts to help Lorna were based on the most romantic notions of abolitionism. She has lost everything in the Kansas year, her husband, the baby she was carrying, Lorna, and her sense that she could change the world alone. She understands that "there could be no hope for Lorna individually, but her cause could be helped

through helping the cause of all those in bondage." She must never forget the voice of the slave child in the wagon calling out to her "Massa, Ablishinist! Save me! Take me 'long, Massa Ablishinist!"

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT FUTURE ISSUES OF *NEW ORLEANS REVIEW*

"The Other South," Volume 25, Number 1, Spring 1999, will be devoted to bringing together new non-traditional and experimental writing by southern writers. William Lavender will join Ralph Adamo in editing this issue. Deadline for submissions is February 15, 1999.

"Black Poetry in New Orleans," Volume 25, Number 2, Summer 1999, will feature the work of creole and black poets of New Orleans from the city's founding up to the present. Kalamu ya Salaam will join Ralph Adamo in editing this issue.